

Ice Age 851

Chapter 851: The Outbreak

On their way back, Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi walked together.

Su Nuanxi asked Zhu Yunque, "Senior Sister, those people in the lower deck are so pitiful. Have you thought of any way to help them?"

Zhu Yunque's mood turned irritable.

If she had a solution, wouldn't she have used it already?

"Let's discuss it with Mr. Zhang again later. If that doesn't work, I'll beg my uncle to intervene and talk to Mr. Zhang."

She had been reluctant to involve Zhu Zheng over this matter.

During her previous work report to Zhu Zheng, she had mentioned the situation.

But Zhu Zheng had shown complete indifference, even criticizing Zhu Yunque for acting on her own.

After all, this was the same man who had coldly denied over ten million people entry to Blizzard City with a single wave of his hand.

Human lives meant nothing to him.

But Zhu Yunque had no other options.

She lacked the capability to solve this herself and could only resort to pleading.

If both men ignored her, she'd probably end up crying a river of little pearls under her blanket.

At noon, meal distribution time arrived.

Everyone in the lower deck waited anxiously for this moment.

It was Sunday—today's meal included stewed meat.

During peaceful times, they would have scoffed at such fatty cuts, but now it had become their most coveted delicacy!

The crew member unlocked the chains, allowing a beam of light to pierce the dim lower deck.

Xie Changming emerged from the brightness, carrying bucket after bucket of food before placing them on the floor.

Since the Yamada Masami incident, he had lost his assistants and now had to handle everything personally.

The freshly cooked food steamed enticingly.

Newly steamed rice released billowing white vapor.

The aroma of stewed meat, enhanced by modern food technology, instantly permeated the damp, gloomy lower deck.

A chorus of hungry gulps echoed through the air.

Countless pairs of eyes fixated on the food, glowing green with starvation like feral dogs.

Yet no one dared rush forward—they seemed to be waiting for something.

Soon, the door to the last cabin opened.

Zagu, leader of the stowaway gang, emerged from his room, lured by the meaty fragrance.

Five underlings trailed behind him.

The prolonged submission of the lower deck residents and Lu Dahai's apparent weakness had made him complacent.

When a lion walks among sheep, does it ever consider the sheep might attack?

Even Zagu couldn't resist swallowing repeatedly at the sight of the stewed meat.

He quickened his pace, rushing to the food buckets. Without hesitation, his hairy hands grabbed a fistful of piping hot meat and shoved it into his mouth.

The sensation of warm fat coating his mouth nearly made him tremble with pleasure.

This blissful moment made him oblivious to the surrounding danger.

Lu Dahai and his men appeared at the cabin entrance.

He pulled the sharpened toothbrush from his sleeve and charged at Zagu without warning.

No shouts, no fanfare—just a straightforward lunge before driving the toothbrush tip toward Zagu's neck with all his strength.

Everything happened too fast. Both Zagu and his underlings were completely distracted by the meat.

"Thunk!"

The toothbrush pierced Zagu's neck, sending blood gushing forth.

Grease dripped from Zagu's mouth as sudden pain widened his eyes before he collapsed.

But a toothbrush wasn't a knife—it only penetrated a third of the way, not enough to kill instantly.

Without hesitation, Lu Dahai pinned Zagu down, yanked the toothbrush free, and stabbed again.

Mouth stuffed with fat, Zagu couldn't even scream. After feeble struggles, he fell still.

Even in death, his expression remained one of utter shock.

He never imagined these docile sheep would dare revolt, much less kill him!

Zagu wasn't the only one stunned. Everyone else was equally dumbfounded.

Even those who had agreed to overthrow the stowaway gang stared dumbly at Lu Dahai's blood-splattered face.

They would support whoever won.

Had Lu Dahai not eliminated Zagu so decisively, they might have lost their nerve when it mattered most.

As for Zagu's underlings, they fared no better.

Terrified out of their wits, their first instinct upon regaining senses was to flee screaming.

"Hahaha!! HAHAHA!!"

Lu Dahai's maniacal laughter abruptly transformed into a thunderous roar.

His vicious glare swept across the hesitant onlookers.

Only then did everyone realize Zagu was truly dead.

Though incapable of lending timely help, they excelled at adding beauty to the brocade.

The fishermen alliance members brandished their makeshift weapons—sharpened toothbrushes, dismantled toilet lids, even broken bed legs.

They had unleashed their darkest creativity to fashion the most lethal tools imaginable.

"KILL THEM ALL!!!!"

Rong Lei led the charge with a furious bellow.

Dozens swarmed forward, overwhelming the stowaway gang members who stood no chance. Soon they were all pinned down.

Then came the makeshift weapons.

Blood sprayed as freely as water.

The carnage awakened primal savagery.

The lackeys were beaten beyond recognition, their heads reduced to pulp.

Lu Dahai stepped forward, roaring: "Wipe out these bloodsuckers and reclaim our food!"

The fishermen alliance spearheaded the assault while red-eyed others followed.

Weeks of oppression erupted in an explosive release.

Some stowaway gang members sensed danger and barricaded their door.

"Boss Zagu's dead! They're coming for us! Block the door! BLOCK IT!"

They piled everything movable against the entrance.

But Zhang Yi had long removed most potential weapons from the lower deck to prevent uprisings.

Besides beds, there wasn't even a dismantleable table left.

A mere latch couldn't withstand the bloodthirsty mob.

Two collisions shattered the flimsy barrier.

Toothbrush dripping red, Lu Dahai scanned the cowering stowaways.

"KILL!!!"

No elaborate speech—just a single command.

The brutal free-for-all began.

Bloodlust consumed them—their only thought was exterminating every last enemy.

Two weeks of starvation and bottled hatred transformed them into creatures more terrifying than jackals.

The stowaways resisted desperately, but the fishermen alliance and other cabin residents had prepared thoroughly.

They wore padded clothing and wielded proper killing tools for this very moment.

Chapter 852: Panic

Inside the lower deck cabin, slaughter had begun.

Toothbrushes stabbed into one person's neck after another, into eyes; wooden sticks struck heads and bodies.

They didn't have proper weapons for killing, so their efficiency was extremely low.

Some could only resort to using their clothes as weapons to strangle others when entangled in close combat.

This chaotic brawl—people rolling and grappling fiercely on the floor—was soaked with the rawest bloodlust.

Those who had gone berserk were now deeply engulfed by the fear of death.

At this point, many couldn't even tell who was enemy and who was ally.

They weren't close to begin with, so accidental injuries among them happened frequently.

Moans and screams filled the entire lower ship cabin.

Above them, the Rockflow Group immediately sensed something was wrong.

Those horrifying screams, like hellish demons, kept echoing from below the floor.

The savage cries woke some who were still sleeping.

"What's going on? Where's that noise coming from?"

"Downstairs, it's coming from down there!"

"Is... is there a fight?"

Many hurriedly pressed themselves against the floor, trying to listen.

Soon, their eyes all widened.

“They’re killing people—down there, they’re killing people!”

The Rockflow Group members trembled in fear.

Compared to those in the lower cabin, their living conditions were far better.

Food and heating supplies were relatively sufficient every day.

After such a long time, they had long lost touch with the concept of death and chaos.

Only now did they recall the terror on Rockflow Island.

Che Haicheng scrambled up from the floor and, eager to gain credit, rushed to the door first and then desperately hammered on the cabin’s main gate.

“Someone’s killing! They’re killing people downstairs!”

At this time, most crew members were still eating; only a few were patrolling.

They hadn't discovered the disaster in the lower cabin yet.

But Che Haicheng's shouting caught their attention.

One crew member, hearing the words "killing people," frowned and walked over.

Through the crack in the cabin door, he raised his gun and asked, "What's going on? Why are you yelling?"

Che Haicheng's eyes were wide with fear as he said, "Downstairs, in the lower cabin, people are killing each other!"

At that moment, the crew member listened carefully and indeed faintly heard desperate screams from below.

His expression turned grave, and he immediately returned to the control room.

In the control room, the crew member in charge of monitoring was eating, leisurely crossing his legs while watching everything happening inside the cabin.

"A fight broke out?"

The crew member who had come over asked.

As he spoke, he leaned in to watch the surveillance footage.

Yet, no panic or fear showed on his face.

Instead, a strange smile slowly appeared. He then sat down slowly, watching alongside the other crew member.

“Who’s fighting? The stowaways and those fishermen from before?”

“Exactly. I said before, they’d fight sooner or later. Just as expected!”

“Hey, looks like the fishermen have the upper hand. Solid and impressive!”

“No wonder they’re men from Ludong. At first, I worried they’d be killed by those stowaways.”

“Heh heh heh, this is really interesting!”

“That bunch of stowaway Southeast Asians—I thought they had some strength, but turns out they’re just frogs in a well, croak croak croak!”

“Should we tell Old Tian?”

“Old Tian’s eating. We’ll call him later. Looks like this will go on for a while, no need to rush!”

Neither showed any urgency; they just sat quietly in front of the surveillance screen, enjoying the scene.

On the middle deck cabin where the Rockflow Group was, only public areas like corridors had cameras installed out of respect for Li Zongyu and the others.

But the lower cabin had been a storage area before, so every space there was monitored.

In other words, recently, everything happening there was completely under the crew’s control.

Maybe the details of their night-time plotting weren’t very clear.

But every crew member on this ship was an experienced sailor and warrior.

They could sense from subtle details that a large-scale slaughter was inevitable.

No one cared about this fight.

Because everything was within their expectations.

One could even say,

Except for the purest souls who held no reverence for the apocalypse—Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi—the rest had long predicted what today would bring.

On the top deck, Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er, wearing pajamas, leisurely enjoyed breakfast while watching shows on the big screen TV.

Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi, awakened by children's noise, had already started their daily routine of calming the kids.

Old Tian and other sailors ate breakfast while chatting about trivial gossip, occasionally interrupted by a clown putting on a stand-up show.

Meanwhile, in the lower cabin, the heart-wrenching screams and shouts of fighting sent chills down anyone's spine.

Everyone had gone mad with bloodlust.

At first, they could still tell who was human and who was a stowaway.

But as the fight dragged on, everyone was covered in blood, and with no clear marks, accidental attacks happened frequently.

Some took advantage of the chaos to sneak attack people they disliked.

A man grabbed a found bed leg and smashed it hard against his boss's back of the head.

The boss never expected to die not at the hands of a stowaway but by his own trusted driver.

"Sorry, I've been with your wife for a long time."

The driver looked coldly at the body collapsing on the ground.

Not satisfied with killing him, he didn't forget to stab the boss's head more than a dozen extra times until the flesh was shredded before stopping.

Others simply made mistakes. Out of fear of being found out and punished later, they decided to eliminate their companions immediately.

As time passed, many's minds began to collapse—seeing anyone, they killed!

The Rockflow Group felt this tragedy most deeply.

Many pressed their ears to the floor, listening to the sounds below.

Some were so terrified they wrapped themselves in blankets, trembling violently.

“Please don't let the fight reach here!”

“Haven't the people on the ship suppressed this yet? They have guns; they should be able to stop the chaos, right?”

“But it's been so long, and we haven't heard any gunshots. Why haven't the upper levels intervened?”

In Li Zongyu and Zhang Weiwei's room lived them and some children they protected on the island—students Li Zongyu had brought on vacation to Rockflow Island.

Facing this hellish scene, Zhang Weiwei gently comforted the children, telling them to cover their ears and not listen.

She said to Li Zongyu, "They've been fighting for so long downstairs. I wonder how chaotic it is. Why hasn't Captain Zhang or the others acted yet?"

At this moment, the businessman Ma Wenzheng lying on the opposite bed moved his legs toward the window, calmly putting on his sneakers.

"Maybe... this is exactly what they want."

Chapter 853: That Secret

Li Zongyu and Zhang Weiwei turned to look at Ma Wenzheng when he spoke.

Li Zongyu lowered his gaze, deep in thought, completely agreeing with Ma Wenzheng's words.

But Zhang Weiwei asked in confusion, "Mr. Ma, what do you mean by that? Are they just going to stand by and let those below run wild?"

Ma Wenzheng closed his eyes, and when he opened them again, they were filled with compassion.

"This ship is like an isolated island with limited resources. If I'm not mistaken, that Mr. Zhang is a very rational man."

"He initially controlled the number of people boarding to maintain balance on the ship and prevent shortages of survival supplies."

"But he didn't expect that Ms. Zhu would take matters into her own hands and burden him with over twenty additional people."

He raised a finger. "That's roughly a 12% overcapacity. A significant proportion!"

"If we don't find a solution, perhaps none of us on this entire ship will survive."

Zhang Weiwei wasn't foolish; she immediately understood the implication of Ma Wenzheng's words.

"So, they're deliberately allowing the killings below to reduce the number of people on board?"

Ma Wenzheng smiled faintly. "To be precise, this is called personnel optimization."

Zhang Weiwei frowned, finding this approach somewhat cruel.

However, having survived the crisis on Rockflow Island, she wasn't naive enough to laugh it off.

In her heart, she understood there was no alternative.

Yet she couldn't help feeling a growing sense of panic.

"But... first it's the people in the lower deck being eliminated. If something else happens later, will it be our turn?"

She looked at Li Zongyu with deep concern.

This fear wasn't unfounded.

Zhang Yi gave off the impression of being ruthless enough to do such a thing!

Li Zongyu walked over and took her slightly cold, delicate hand in his, comforting her, "Don't worry, it won't come to that! We're still very valuable to him."

He paused slightly before continuing.

"Even if something happens, it won't be our turn."

Meaning that even if personnel optimization occurred, it would start with others from the Rockflow Group first.

Zhang Weiwei sighed, but the worry between her brows didn't completely fade.

Ma Wenzheng also lowered his head in thought before finally shaking it helplessly.

He didn't say more, as at this point, they could only resign themselves to fate.

Even as a business tycoon who had maneuvered skillfully in the commercial world, he couldn't predict what other accidents might occur during this voyage.

Peace would be best.

But who could truly fathom heaven's will?

The worst outcome would be none of them surviving.

They weren't the only ones with such concerns.

In other cabins of the Rockflow Group, people were equally terrified by the agonized screams from below.

Some cried out in fear, "It's over! They're conducting a purge! First the lower deck, and soon it'll be our turn!"

White Mo buried himself under his blanket, trembling as he muttered:

"Oh my God! I knew this day would come."

"First it was Mr. Yamada, then the passengers below. Won't it be our turn soon?"

"Damn it, I never should have boarded this ship."

On the bunk above him, Xie Yunfan broke out in a cold sweat, murmuring:

"I knew this would happen! They weren't being kind by coming to rescue us."

"They must be afraid we'll reveal their secret, so they're killing us all midway!"

"Damn it, damn it, damn it!"

He pounded the bed furiously, gritting his teeth with a ferocious expression.

"I told you, you can't trust people from Huaxu Kingdom! If we'd just waited for a ship from Columbus Ocean to rescue us, we'd have been fine!"

Che Haicheng sat on his bed, his face equally grave with worry.

They had endured six months of apocalyptic crisis.

Though the situation on Rockflow Island hadn't been as dire as in Tianhai City, it had still left them with deep psychological scars.

Now, after more than ten days adrift at sea on this ship, their fears had only intensified.

On the island, they could have fled from danger.

But the Golden Edge could be their sanctuary one moment and an inescapable prison the next!

In this lawless world, Zhang Yi could annihilate them all with just a passing thought!

Yet upon hearing Xie Yunfan's words, Che Haicheng suddenly noticed something amiss.

He stood up and approached Xie Yunfan, looking up at him. "What were you just saying? What secret?"

Xie Yunfan was currently clutching his head in a frenzy.

Che Haicheng had to grab his sleeve and shout his question to snap him out of it.

Xie Yunfan gave a cold laugh. "I don't know. But think about it—Rockflow Island is thousands of kilometers from Huaxu Kingdom, and these are desperate times."

"Even Columbus Ocean with the world's strongest navy can't spare resources for rescue missions."

"So why would they go to such lengths to cross oceans and save us?"

"I know those Huaxu Kingdom people too well—they wouldn't do this unless there was something in it for them!"

Xie Yunfan spoke as if he weren't originally from Huaxu Kingdom himself.

Though the others present smirked mockingly, they weren't surprised.

After all, nearly everyone who left Huaxu Kingdom would go out of their way to slander it.

How else could they justify their choice?

Xie Yunfan's eyes bulged, bloodshot veins spreading across his pupils.

"So they must be after something. There's definitely a big secret among us, especially regarding Li Zongyu!"

His words made everyone in the cabin ponder.

"A secret—he's right! It must be connected to Li Zongyu and his wife! Otherwise, why would the captain treat them so well? Why would he agree to take even us foreigners back to their country for their sake?"

Che Haicheng's eyes gleamed with excitement.

"If we can uncover this secret, wouldn't we have bargaining chips to survive?"

"But what secret could it be? After six months on Rockflow Island, is there anything we don't know about Li Zongyu and his wife?"

"Think hard, really hard! This might be our lifeline!"

Che Haicheng looked at each person, urging them to search their memories for every detail from their time on Rockflow Island.

Back then, they had all been focused on survival, even facing life-or-death situations multiple times.

In such circumstances, no secret would have held value—they would have blurred everything out.

Yet what had seemed insignificant then might now be the key to their survival.

Chapter 854: Let Ms. Zhu Handle It

The killing spree in the lower deck lasted over two hours.

No one knew exactly how many died, but every cabin was drenched in blood, with corpses hanging from every corner of the compartment.

Only when the commotion finally subsided did the crew member monitoring the cameras report the incident to Old Tian.

After hearing the news, Old Tian knocked on Zhang Yi's door.

"Mr. Zhang, the situation below has..."

Old Tian whispered a few words into Zhang Yi's ear.

Zhang Yi's expression remained completely impassive. "I see."

His gaze shifted toward Zhu Yunque's adjacent cabin.

"Go inform Ms. Zhu. Let her deal with this."

Since she was the one who allowed the stowaways aboard, this mess naturally fell to her to clean up.

Zhang Yi had made this perfectly clear from the beginning.

In fact, if not for Zhu Yunque's intervention, Zhang Yi wouldn't have taken any of the lower deck passengers at all.

Old Tian nodded in understanding.

Returning to his room, Zhang Yi flashed Zhou Ke'er - who was wearing a silk nightgown - a peculiar smile.

"Get dressed. I'm taking you to see something interesting."

Zhou Ke'er widened her beautiful eyes. "Something interesting?"

Meanwhile, Old Tian had already knocked on Zhu Yunque's door.

Zhu Yunque looked exhausted.

She and Su Nuanxi had just managed to put Tommy to sleep in his makeshift crib.

Seeing Old Tian so early made Zhu Yunque suspicious.

"Old Tian, what brings you here at this hour?"

Old Tian's face was grave.

"Ms. Zhu, there's been trouble in the lower deck! The original passengers and the later stowaways started fighting!"

Zhu Yunque frowned. "Why would they fight over nothing? What a nuisance."

"Handle this yourself. Don't bother me with such trivial matters."

Old Tian continued, "But this has escalated badly. Many have died!"

Zhu Yunque paled. "What? People died? How could this happen!"

Old Tian said nonchalantly, "Seems it was over food shortages. The stowaways' identities being exposed also caused resentment."

"These things happen often at sea. Nothing unusual."

Zhu Yunque's face turned ashen, her already tired complexion from lack of sleep now looking even more haggard.

She staggered backward, nearly fainting on the spot.

"Ms. Zhu, are you alright?"

Zhu Yunque couldn't comprehend that people had died in the lower deck over food shortages.

How could anyone kill over something so trivial?

She couldn't process it.

Worst of all, this might have happened because of her.

If people died, wouldn't that make her responsible?

"No, that can't be right. Maybe they fought over something else entirely. Perhaps they had prior conflicts."

Zhu Yunque muttered to herself, unwilling to accept she might have made such a grave mistake.

Old Tian pressed on relentlessly, "The situation down there is chaotic. You need to come handle this!"

Zhu Yunque massaged her temples. "I can't go. Take this to Mr. Zhang instead. Let him deal with it."

She wanted no part of this gruesome affair.

Old Tian smiled slightly. "The captain said since you approved bringing those people aboard, their problems are yours to solve. He won't intervene."

Zhu Yunque couldn't believe her ears.

"He actually said that? He's... he's the captain! How can he shirk responsibility like this?"

Even the worldly Old Tian was taken aback by Zhu Yunque's words.

This level of obliviousness was beyond his decades of experience.

At that moment, Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er emerged from their cabin, dressed and ready.

They overheard Old Tian and Zhu Yunque's conversation.

Zhang Yi mocked, "What's wrong, Ms. Zhu? Forget what you did and now trying to shift blame onto others?"

Old Tian had to show Zhu Yunque some courtesy, but Zhang Yi felt no such restraint.

Stung by Zhang Yi's taunt, Zhu Yunque flushed with anger.

"I...I never said I wouldn't handle it. I've just been unwell lately from caring for the baby."

The last thing she wanted was to see blood.

Zhang Yi showed no mercy.

"Like that's my child you're caring for. Nobody asked you to do this."

"If all you can do is talk big but can't follow through, just admit it. I'll handle this - it's just cleaning up a mess."

"But remember this - next time, keep your opinions to yourself."

Zhang Yi smiled meaningfully at Zhu Yunque, his eyes full of scorn and disdain.

Nothing infuriated Zhu Yunque more than this.

Her blood boiled with rage. "Who says I won't go? Fine, let's go! I'm not afraid!"

She slammed the door shut and dragged Su Nuanxi along, making her change clothes to accompany her.

Su Nuanxi, who'd overheard most of it, asked fearfully, "Did...did many people die?"

Zhu Yunque said, "It's nothing serious. Probably just a minor scuffle over food. Who would kill over something so trivial? They must have had prior conflicts."

"That Zhang just wants to laugh at me. Well, I won't give him the satisfaction!"

Zhu Yunque remained completely unaware of the situation's severity.

Unlike her, Su Nuanxi had witnessed darker realities on Rockflow Island.

But with Zhu Yunque insisting, she had no choice but to comply as her current follower.

After changing, the two women emerged.

Zhang Yi, Zhou Ke'er and Old Tian were already waiting outside the cabin, chatting leisurely.

Seeing Zhang Yi and Zhou Ke'er, Zhu Yunque's expression soured.

She was convinced Zhang Yi was there to mock her.

Which, in fact, he was.

Old Tian led the way, soon encountering armed crew members standing guard.

Old Tian deliberately asked one, "How's the situation below?"

The crew member glanced at Zhang Yi and Zhu Yunque before answering, "Lots of deaths. It's a bloodbath down there - too gruesome to look at."

Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi's hearts sank.

Could it really be that bad?

Zhu Yunque unconsciously rubbed her arms. Things had spiraled far beyond her expectations.

She'd been so preoccupied with Tommy lately, assuming nothing major could happen below deck.

How had things deteriorated so badly in just a few days?

Chapter 855: You Wouldn't Want Your Uncle to Know About This, Would You?

Zhang Yi said, "Take us to see it! And have everyone ready their weapons. If the situation turns bad, we'll clear the place immediately!"

Those who have been starving for so long might unleash their inner demons once they start, potentially being consumed by darkness.

Like wolf cubs that have tasted blood, once they go berserk, they'll recognize no one.

Zhang Yi wasn't afraid, but dealing with those ordinary people wasn't worth his personal intervention.

Zhu Yunque's face turned deathly pale, while Su Nuanxi shrank back timidly, hesitant to move forward.

But Zhang Yi urged them from behind.

"Keep walking! Don't like walking? Need a break before going over?"

With no way out, Zhu Yunque steeled herself and said, "Fine, let's go! What's there to be afraid of?"

The group passed the Rockflow Group's deck level and headed toward the lower ship cabins fully armed.

Seeing this, the Rockflow Group members couldn't help but gossip again.

"So many people came, all carrying guns!"

"God, who knows how many died down there? I can already smell the heavy stench of blood!"

"How brutal!"

White Mo and the others worried in their rooms, each desperately trying to recall past events.

They hoped to uncover that secret.

The secret that made Zhang Yi and his crew cross oceans to retrieve them.

...

When Zhang Yi's group reached the lower cabins, the compartment door remained tightly locked with chains, yet the thick metallic scent of blood was detectable from afar.

Zhang Yi's crew was long accustomed to such scenes, showing no reaction.

But Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi nearly vomited.

Approaching the locked iron door, they saw ominous blackish blood seeping through the cracks, flowing straight toward Zhu Yunque's feet.

"Ah!"

Zhu Yunque's already pale face whitened further as she shrieked and jumped back.

Her body began trembling uncontrollably—she now realized things had spiraled far beyond her expectations.

Zhang Yi coldly ordered, "Open it!"

A crew member took the keys, unlocked the heavy chains, and slowly unwound them.

All crew members emotionlessly raised their guns, aiming at the doorway.

"Creak—"

Two crew members cautiously pushed the iron door open, releasing an even thicker wave of blood stench.

Zhou Ke'er had prepared by covering her nose with a damp handkerchief.

Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi tightly shut their eyes, lacking the courage to face the cabin's interior.

But Zhang Yi wouldn't let them off so easily.

Weren't you so righteous before?

Didn't you insist on saving people despite being incompetent?

Come, take a good look at your masterpiece!

Burn this sight into your eyes—this is the tragedy born from your naive, incompetent compassion!

"Don't hide back there, Ms. Zhu! You're the person in charge here. I think you should appreciate this properly."

"You need to make decisions—open your eyes!"

Zhang Yi's sharp command forced Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi to open their eyes.

What they witnessed would haunt them forever.

The narrow corridor was drenched in blood, littered with refugee corpses. Blood splattered across walls and ceilings like shattered snowflakes.

Some bodies were so mutilated their faces became unrecognizable.

A few still twitched on the ground, barely clinging to life with shallow breaths.

Amid this hellscape, several blood-soaked individuals mindlessly shoveled rice and stew into their mouths from food buckets, uncaring of the blood on their hands.

Nearly half the lower cabin's occupants were dead—no one remained to fight for food.

Now they could eat their fill at every meal.

Noticing Zhu Yunque's group, they only glanced over blankly before smiling knowingly.

These people's minds had already shattered.

Even if ordered to die now, they'd feel nothing.

"AHHHHH!!!"

Zhu Yunque clutched her head, completely breaking down as she screamed hysterically.

Just days ago, these people were alive, meeting together in the upper storage area.

Now, so many had become cold corpses on the ground!

Was it because of her?

The more Zhu Yunque thought, the more she unraveled.

If... if she hadn't stubbornly opposed Zhang Yi and secretly brought extra people aboard, perhaps none of this would've happened.

If she'd shown more concern for those below and tried resolving their conflicts...

Could she blame Zhang Yi?

She desperately wanted to shift all responsibility onto him to ease her guilt.

But while deceiving others is easy, deceiving oneself is hardest.

She knew—what did this have to do with Zhang Yi?

He was merely indifferent, but every decision had been hers.

Her stubbornness and arrogance killed these people.

"Ugh... ugh..."

Zhu Yunque doubled over, vomiting violently. She felt utterly revolted—so much that she despised herself.

Soon collapsing to her knees, she kept retching until morning meals became stomach acid.

Su Nuanxi fared worse—she fainted instantly upon seeing the hellish scene.

Zhang Yi remained unfazed, while crew members just complained: "Damn it, what a mess. More cleaning work."

"I ain't doing it. Let the survivors clean up themselves."

Zhou Ke'er, having witnessed worse, only frowned briefly before calming down.

She knelt to gently pat Zhu Yunque's back.

Thus only two appeared thoroughly disgraced.

Zhang Yi watched the vomiting Zhu Yunque without pity.

Clasping his hands behind his back, he sighed, "Ah, how did it come to this! So many dead!"

"Ms. Zhu, don't blame yourself too much. It's not your fault—they could've just starved quietly! Why fight over food?"

"Rest assured, I'll explain to Commander Zhu. I won't let him blame you for this."

His words twisted Zhu Yunque's guilt deeper.

Hearing Zhang Yi would report to Zhu Zheng truly terrified her.

Given Zhu Zheng's temperament, learning of her foolishness would shatter his expectations of her.

Losing her uncle's favor would plummet her status in the Zhu family, destroying any central promotion hopes.

"Zhang Yi... *retch*... please don't tell my uncle!"

In panic, she forgot their agreement, grabbing Zhang Yi's pant leg with pleading eyes.

Zhang Yi smirked coldly.

"Ah, this matter... you're putting me in a tough spot. Commander Zhu is technically my superior."

"I'm executing his mission overseas. How could I hide something this major from him?"

Chapter 856: Best Friends Forever

Everything that happened in the lower decks completely shattered Zhu Yunque's fragile self-confidence. Just as Zhu Zheng had warned, Zhang Yi helped Zhu Yunque understand the true brutality of the apocalypse.

Looking at the blood-soaked cabin before him, even Zhang Yi felt somewhat surprised. He had anticipated violent conflict, but not to this horrific extent.

"Don't worry," he said with a smile, bending down to meet Zhu Yunque's eyes. "I'm not petty enough to tattle to our superiors. This will remain our little secret."

Zhu Yunque's heart skipped a beat. The unspoken threat in his words was clear - he now held this over her indefinitely. But she had no choice; these consequences were entirely of her own making.

Zhang Yi didn't bother inspecting the interior - the floors were slick with blood, and he preferred not to get messy.

"Ms. Zhu can handle the cleanup herself," he said lazily before leaving with Zhou Ke'er, washing his hands of the matter entirely. Let Zhu Yunque see firsthand what human nature looked like in the apocalypse - maybe then she'd stop with her worthless pity and compassion.

Old Tian thought to himself: So this was why Mr. Zhang had us prepare cleaning supplies in advance. He glanced at Zhu Yunque, who remained kneeling on the floor, too weak to stand.

"Ms. Zhu, would you like to inspect the scene?" he asked.

Zhu Yunque shook her head violently. "N-no, I... I don't need to see."

"But Mr. Zhang said this matter requires your decision," Old Tian pressed, lowering his voice. "There are still many survivors inside - they may be victims, but they certainly participated in the violence. How should we deal with them? Should we..." He drew a finger across his throat.

If Zhu Yunque gave the order, he would immediately - report to Zhang Yi. After all, these were valuable labor resources destined for Tianhai City. Wasting them would be a shame.

Old Tian only asked because he knew Zhu Yunque lacked the nerve, enjoying watching her squirm.

"NO!" Zhu Yunque cried. "Don't kill them! They... they must have had no choice!" Her words dissolved into loud sobs as she covered her face, tears streaming between her fingers.

The onlookers exchanged disgusted glances. She'd made her bed, and now that she had to lie in it, all she could do was cry and play the victim. Every Tianhai survivor had faced life-and-death trials - their hearts were harder than steel. They had no patience for such weakness.

Old Tian tried questioning Zhu Yunque twice more, but only succeeded in making her cry louder. This arrogant woman who thought she knew everything now hid behind tears to avoid responsibility. Were it not for her status, Old Tian would have cursed her out already.

Seeing no other option, Old Tian went to consult Zhang Yi.

Hearing about Zhu Yunque's breakdown, Zhang Yi rubbed his temples. "Even more fragile than I expected. I'd hoped this experience might mature her somewhat."

Zhou Ke'er chuckled beside him. "I'm sure she's grown from this. For a sheltered girl facing such trauma for the first time, not losing her mind is impressive enough. You might have overstimulated her."

Zhang Yi raised an eyebrow. "Overstimulated? I think she got off light." Zhou Ke'er's own initiation had been far more gruesome than what Zhu Yunque witnessed.

Zhou Ke'er sighed. "You forget - I'm a clinician. Corpses don't bother me."

"Ah, right," Zhang Yi nodded.

They couldn't leave the situation unresolved indefinitely. The stench of corpses would soon permeate the entire ship.

"Take a headcount of survivors," Zhang Yi ordered Old Tian. "Huaxu Kingdom citizens stay - we'll take them to Tianhai. Foreigners go overboard. And make sure Zhu Yunque stays put - let her take a good long look as a lesson."

Old Tian hesitated. "Those people have tasted blood now. They might be dangerous."

Zhang Yi countered, "People make hard choices to survive. How many lives have your crew taken?"

Old Tian laughed awkwardly. Every sailor aboard had double-digit body counts.

"Keep them under surveillance. We'll eliminate any troublemakers later. In the apocalypse, human resources are precious - conserve what we can."

In truth, the entire ship was under Zhang Yi's surveillance. He knew exactly what had transpired below decks - and rather admired Lu Dahai's group for their ruthlessness and courage. They might prove useful in Tianhai.

Old Tian's crew descended to the lower decks - though naturally they wouldn't do the dirty work themselves. The stench was unbearable - not just blood, but the excrement and bodily fluids of dying men. They donned masks and rubber suits before entering, first extracting the survivors.

Zhu Yunque wanted nothing more than to flee this humiliation, but Old Tian blocked her path. "You're in charge here, ma'am. Without your guidance, we wouldn't know what to do." He practically forced her into a chair before she could refuse.

Leaving now would destroy whatever dignity she had left. Her only recourse was to wake Su Nuanxi - not to send the unconscious girl away, but to drag her into this nightmare.

Best friends share everything - if not the joys, then certainly the suffering.

A simple solution: press a freezing gun barrel against Su Nuanxi's neck. She awoke with a start.

"W-where am I?"

Zhu Yunque ignored her confusion, pulling her close for moral support. Su Nuanxi turned pale as the situation registered - and silently cursed Zhu Yunque for involving her. But escape was impossible now; Zhu Yunque wasn't about to suffer alone.

Chapter 857: Restless Hearts

Old Tian ordered everyone who was still alive to be gathered out. According to Zhang Yi's instructions, all Huaxu Kingdom citizens were to remain, while the stowaways would naturally be sent to their deaths. After the battle, countless casualties filled the entire lower deck cabin. There were seventy-five survivors, twenty-eight of whom were seriously injured, while the rest had minor wounds. Old Tian remembered Zhang Yi's orders and had the wounded gathered into a dry storage room, waiting for Zhang Yi's further instructions. Whether to discard them or treat them would be decided later. As for the stowaways, those already dead were left as is, and the living ones were finished off.

Then, the lightly injured Huaxu Kingdom people were called over to serve as laborers, tasked with throwing the corpses into the sea and thoroughly cleaning the entire cabin. Even though these people were already exhausted, they still had to perform heavy labor. Yet, in their hearts, an unprecedented sense of relief settled. Because many had died inside the cabin, from now on, they would no longer have to worry about food shortages.

Thus, the lower deck cabin began bustling with clattering sounds. People carried the wounded, transported corpses, cleaned the cabin, and trafficked back and forth nonstop. All had to pass through the middle deck, where the Rockflow Group members resided. The Rockflow Group's treatment was comparatively better. Unlike those in the lower deck cabin, they enjoyed a certain degree of freedom. For example, the main door was open during the day, and with permission, they could go out to the deck for fresh air. This was a backdoor Zhang Yi had opened for Li Zongyu to show his goodwill.

At this time, so many people began carrying out a massive operation to move the wounded and corpses. Blood dripped continuously along the way. Many Rockflow Group members watched this scene anxiously. They were already uneasy, fearing that this incident would implicate them. Seeing the numerous corpses in the lower deck cabin, combined with crew members wearing rubber coats and carrying guns, some trembled with fear, suspecting Zhang Yi had ordered a purge of the lower deck cabin. Once the seed of suspicion was planted, it quickly took root and sprouted. With people embellishing and speculating wildly, it rapidly escalated out of control.

Soon, tense and fearful discussions began in multiple rooms throughout the Rockflow Group. "So many people died, at least seventy or eighty! Maybe everyone in the lower deck cabin is dead!" "Oh my god, why did this happen?" "Maybe it was because of food fights! They've had this conflict for a long time, starving every day. Who could stand that?" "But there shouldn't be that many deaths, right?" "Could it be... a purge from the higher-ups? They never planned to bring that many back!" "Will we end up the same way as them?" Panic began to spread through the air.

White Mo crouched in the corner, trembling so hard his lips quivered. "I'm a foreigner. I will definitely die. He won't spare me!" He was already thoroughly scared out of his wits. Xie Yunfan furrowed his brows and quietly spoke, "Actually, I'm a Huaxu Kingdom citizen. I think we should try to talk with him." Che Haicheng sneered and cursed, "Hey~ Old bastard Zhang, now you're a Huaxu citizen again! Didn't you mock the Huaxu Kingdom before, saying it's a terrible place everywhere?" "If you dare leave us behind, I'll make sure to tell them everything you said during this time! Then I'll throw you into the sea to feed the sharks!" Xie Yunfan's expression changed drastically. Angry, he jumped off the bed and fiercely grabbed Che Haicheng's collar. "You damn scoundrel! If you dare report me, I'll say you're always cursing that Zhang guy! If we die, we die together!"

The burly pickpocket Rudolf laughed heartily and applauded them. "Report? Let's all report each other, no one survives!" In the cabin, Eisenmann, the engineer who had been the calmest and most silent until now, could no longer hold back. "What good will this do? It's meaningless! The most important thing now is to figure out how to survive successfully."

White Mo looked at Eisenmann. "Eisenmann, do you have a plan?" Eisenmann's expression was hesitant as he fell silent. Seeing this, everyone looked at him. They all thought this engineer was extraordinary. He was extremely intelligent, a genius in the computer field. It was said that at twenty-one, he joined the largest enterprise in Columbus Ocean, the Apple Corporation, as a software engineer.

Che Haicheng and Xie Yunfan, who had been fighting breathlessly, suddenly and tacitly released each other's hands. Xie Yunfan adjusted his tie and asked, "Eisenmann, what exactly did you think of? Please tell us! Everyone wants to live. We're a group, right?" Eisenmann glanced at him slowly and asked, "Aren't you a Huaxu Kingdom citizen now?" Xie Yunfan laughed dismissively. "My nationality is like Schrödinger's cat. It can change whenever needed." Those around immediately looked at him with disdain, but Che Haicheng laughed out loud, "I wasn't wrong about you. You really are a polished scoundrel!" Xie Yunfan sneered back, "Right back at you." Eisenmann remained silent.

Others kept pressing. "If you have something to say, just say it first. We swear we won't leak it!" Eisenmann sneered. He trusted no one, especially not Che Haicheng, the two-faced scoundrel who often reported those around him. He was the one Eisenmann feared most. Che Haicheng was aware of Eisenmann's suspicion. He walked over, scanned everyone in the room, and then cleared his throat. "I think it's best we don't fight among ourselves. After all, that Zhang guy never treated us as his own." "Whenever he needs to, he can take our lives at any time." "Right now, we can only rely on ourselves."

Che Haicheng had originally wanted to be Zhang Yi's sycophant, even an undercover agent. As long as he could survive, he was willing to give everything. Whether it was reporting Rockflow Group members around him or offering his still somewhat attractive wife, he would do anything to stay alive. However, Zhang Yi had given him no response, which made Che Haicheng uneasy inside.

“How about this? To show unity, each of us insults Zhang Yi here. That way, no one has a way out. What do you think?” Che Haicheng still had ideas. In times like these, anyone who dared insult the ship’s captain would definitely be severely punished, even executed! This was a blood oath to prevent betrayal among them.

Everyone thought the proposal was feasible. Moreover, they were not Huaxu Kingdom citizens. Most had opposed going to Huaxu Kingdom with Li Zongyu initially. After discussion, they held an immediate ceremony to harshly curse Zhang Yi, expressing their determination.

Chapter 858: The Suspicious Ones

Everyone had handed in their loyalty pledges, indicating they would not betray Zhang Yi by leaking information.

Che Haicheng asked Eisenmann, “Mr. Eisenmann, now that it’s come to this, can you tell us what you’ve discovered?”

Eisenmann crossed his arms, speaking very coldly, “Actually, it’s not anything too complicated. Back then, you were all starving, so none of you had the energy to care about anything else.”

“When we were on the island during the third month, there was a period when we couldn’t find any food. Everyone just huddled in the camp, waiting to die.”

“As a result, many people started revealing their secrets, sharing interesting stories.”

“At that time, Li Zongyu told us about how he obtained that special power.”

Those words immediately plunged everyone into deep reflection.

But back then, most people didn’t have the spirit to truly listen to Li Zongyu’s forced enthusiasm in telling those stories.

Not everyone remembered clearly.

"He once obtained a yellow stone somewhere on Star Island. That very stone was what gave him that special power."

"Think carefully—what is the biggest difference between Li Zongyu and the rest of us? It's the power he possesses!"

"So, I suspect that power is the true objective of the faction that owns this ship."

Those words hit everyone like a sudden enlightenment, making them sharply realize the crux of the problem.

"So that means, aside from Li Zongyu, none of the rest of us hold any value to them, right?"

"The captain doesn't care whether we live or die. Maybe when the ship reaches the middle of the ocean, if he gets upset, he'll just throw us all overboard."

Everyone had already realized this was the closest explanation to the truth.

But even after understanding the truth, they had no way to leave this ship.

Surrounded by the vast frozen sea, leaving here meant certain death; they had nowhere to escape.

"So, are we just waiting to die?"

"Who knows when that guy will go mad and kill us all!"

White Mo clutched his head, speaking painfully.

Che Haicheng and the others wore grim expressions; after learning the truth, their hearts fell into deeper despair.

Because they had spent half a year with Li Zongyu, Zhang Yi definitely wouldn't let them go.

Even if they reached the Huaxu Kingdom, they would surely be placed under house arrest.

At that time, as foreigners, they would inevitably become slaves.

Whether they lived or died would truly depend on their owner's mood.

Just thinking about this ending sent chills down their spines.

"What exactly should we do? Do we have to face such a tragic fate?"

Che Haicheng said with difficulty.

Xie Yunfan felt some regret now; he shouldn't have gotten mixed up with this group just now.

He could have relied on his Huaxu Kingdom bloodline to curry favor with Zhang Yi, becoming his lapdog.

Even after disembarking, life would have been somewhat better.

Now, there was no going back.

Rudolf, the pickpocket, was surprisingly carefree, laughing loudly on his bed.

"Since we're all going to die anyway, hey, old man, why not send your wife over here to keep me company!"

Che Haicheng didn't have the mood to respond to him.

White Mo muttered fearfully to himself, his face full of panic.

Only Eisenmann remained expressionless as usual.

He was like that—a man who seemed uninterested in anything.

Perhaps because the apocalypse had come, he had long realized that surviving as a human meant inevitably facing such hardships.

"Mr. Eisenmann, since you had already thought of this, there must be a way to solve the problem, right?"

Eisenmann glanced at him. "There is no way."

"There must be! There has to be a way, Mr. Eisenmann!"

Che Haicheng suddenly grabbed Eisenmann's arm and shook it hard, his eyes glowing red.

"No matter how slim the hope, as long as there is a possible way, we have to try!"

Eisenmann was somewhat annoyed by Che Haicheng, or maybe he really didn't want to become a dog in a foreign land.

He stared at Che Haicheng impatiently and said, "If you can get me a communication device, then maybe we still have a chance to leave here."

He briefly explained his idea.

From Rockflow Island to the Huaxu Kingdom, the route passes through the sea territory of the Neon Pirate.

Nearby, the Columbus Ocean fleet is stationed on patrol.

So if they could obtain a communication device and have Eisenmann modify it, there might be a chance to contact them.

“You mean... we send this information to the ocean fleet and have them come rescue us?”

Xie Yunfan’s eyes gradually lit up.

White Mo, however, said sadly, “It’s useless. Those guys are just a bunch of trash. I’ve sent them countless distress signals, and they completely ignored our existence!”

Eisenmann calmly replied, “But the situation is different now.”

“I believe whatever can make the Huaxu Kingdom act will also catch the interest of the ocean fleet.”

White Mo was stunned for a moment, then slowly lifted his head to look at him.

The others in the room exchanged glances, and excitement began to sparkle in their eyes.

This was indeed a method worth trying!

“This is all I can tell you. But our communication devices were confiscated long ago. Where will you get one?”

“Even if you manage to steal one, if you’re caught, I believe the punishment would be death.”

After saying this, Eisenmann lay back on the bed and stopped talking.

He was very smart—he could think of solutions but was not the type to take action.

Still, his idea at least gave everyone a glimmer of hope.

“There will be a way. There definitely will be a way!”

Che Haicheng muttered repeatedly.

Meanwhile, on the Rockflow Group’s side, in another room—the one where Li Zongyu, Zhang Weiwei, and Ma Wenzheng were staying—

They were equally shocked by the slaughter in the lower deck.

Bodies were being carried out one after another.

The disposal method was very simple and crude: they were just thrown overboard from the deck.

From inside the cabin, the sound of bodies hitting the water, “plop, plop,” could be heard repeatedly.

It was enough to make anyone’s heart race.

Because the sound started right away and continued almost nonstop later on.

One could only imagine how many had died.

There were also some students in the cabin, all junior high age, very young, on a school trip to Rockflow Island with Li Zongyu.

Seeing this scene, they shrank together in fear, their faces pale.

Zhang Weiwei was also full of worry, whispering softly, "This is too terrifying. All of this is just too terrifying!"

Ma Wenzheng, lying on the bed opposite, smiled faintly upon hearing this. Though shocked by the view outside, he did not show much agitation.

"This kind of situation is something that could happen."

"Although I didn't expect," he took a deep breath, "so many would die!"

"I originally thought that Mr. Zhang would try to manage the situation."

Chapter 859: Doubts

Li Zongyu leaned against the iron frame of the bed, arms crossed, his face full of worry. Everything that had happened on the ship left him deeply unsettled.

"I must go speak with Mr. Zhang," he said.

Zhang Weiwei grabbed his arm, her eyes filled with concern. "Don't anger him! Stay calm. We still need to rely on him to survive." She feared Li Zongyu might do something reckless—after all, her husband was a man of strong moral principles.

Li Zongyu reassured her, "Don't worry, I know my limits. At the very least, I need to confirm whether he's killing innocent people."

Ma Wenzheng looked at him and said, "Actually, I don't think you need to worry too much about that."

Li Zongyu and Zhang Weiwei turned to Ma Wenzheng. They held great respect for this businessman, whose character and wisdom had earned everyone's recognition back on Rockflow Island.

"Mr. Ma, what are your thoughts on this matter?" Li Zongyu asked.

Ma Wenzheng replied calmly, "As the saying goes, desperate times call for desperate measures. The biggest conflict on the ship right now is concentrated in the lower deck cabins. I find Mr. Zhang's approach understandable—though brutal—letting them resolve their issues internally. But... he's not a bloodthirsty man."

Ma Wenzheng recalled the events of that day. From Zhu Yunque's conversation with Zhang Yi, he had pieced together some understanding of the situation. "Perhaps it's related to internal conflicts among them."

Li Zongyu considered this and found some truth in Ma Wenzheng's words. Still, he needed to verify things himself to feel at ease—after all, all their lives depended on Zhang Yi.

So Li Zongyu decided to go upstairs and speak with Zhang Yi.

The crew treated Li Zongyu politely—this was Zhang Yi's order, granting him certain privileges. When Li Zongyu told the patrolling sailors he wanted to see Zhang Yi, the message was relayed immediately.

Zhang Yi wasn't surprised by the request. He knew the Rockflow Group must be terrified. While he had no ill intentions toward them, he understood the need to reassure them to prevent unnecessary trouble.

So he had Li Zongyu brought to him.

Li Zongyu was cautious and polite when he met Zhang Yi. After some formal pleasantries, he carefully asked, "It seems something happened in the lower deck cabins today. May I ask what occurred? Please don't misunderstand—it's just that everyone is frightened after seeing so many deaths. Let me be clear: I personally trust you completely and firmly support the organization's decisions! I just want to understand what happened so I can reassure everyone."

His careful demeanor reminded Zhang Yi of someone familiar—but this was exactly why he respected Li Zongyu. If not for his prudence, this man likely wouldn't have kept the Rockflow Group alive on Rockflow Island for six months.

Zhang Yi explained calmly, "It's nothing major. Food shortages led to infighting among them."

He raised an eyebrow slightly and asked with a faint smile, "Did you think I ordered a purge in the lower deck cabins?"

Li Zongyu looked embarrassed and waved his hands hastily. "No, no, no! How could we think that?"

Still, Zhang Yi's explanation eased his mind somewhat. Combined with past events, Li Zongyu believed Zhang Yi was telling the truth—if they'd wanted to eliminate those people, they could have done so long ago.

Zhang Yi walked over and patted his shoulder. "Don't overthink things. I'll get you all home safely—as long as you cooperate fully." He wagged a finger in front of Li Zongyu. "Go reassure your people. I don't want unnecessary panic spreading on this ship."

Li Zongyu swallowed hard and nodded repeatedly.

As they spoke, crew members carried a corpse past them. Suddenly, Li Zongyu heard a weak plea: "Help... me..."

He instinctively turned and saw two lower-deck survivors carrying a bloodied man toward the railing. Seeing he was still alive, the carriers looked disgusted.

"Damn, he's still breathing!"

"Alright, one, two, three—go!"

They ignored his pleas and, right in front of Zhang Yi and Li Zongyu, tossed him into the icy sea after a few preparatory swings.

Zhang Yi glanced at Li Zongyu's stunned expression and explained coolly, "He was the instigator of this chaos. Deserved it, don't you think?"

Li Zongyu nodded frantically. "Yes, yes! He deserved it!"

But how could Zhang Yi, who hadn't even looked at the bloodied man, determine he was the instigator? Perhaps it didn't matter anymore—what mattered was that he was dead.

Returning to the cabin, Li Zongyu gathered the Rockflow Group as instructed. Anxiety was written on every face—everyone feared becoming the next victim.

Someone immediately asked, "Professor Li, was there really a massacre below? Why did so many die?"

"I can still smell the blood—it's terrifying!"

"I won't sleep well knowing there are so many dead beneath us..."

"Shut up! Stop talking!"

Che Haicheng stepped forward and stared at Li Zongyu. "Professor Li, you're the one who brought us here. Now that this has happened, shouldn't you explain?"

Li Zongyu replied, "I've spoken with Mr. Zhang. What happened below wasn't their doing—it was due to stowaways causing food shortages, leading to violence. We saw similar situations on Rockflow Island. Don't worry too much. Mr. Zhang has promised to get us safely ashore."

"Stop overthinking things, and watch your words. If the wrong people hear careless talk, it'll cause trouble for everyone."

At this point, the pale-faced White Mo, wrapped in a blanket, trembled as he questioned, "Of course he'd say that! But who can prove it's true?"

Amid the murmurs of doubt, Li Zongyu took a deep breath. "Right now, we have no choice but to trust him! Rather than tormenting ourselves with doubts, we should trust first and question later."

Chapter 860: The Rockflow Group's Self-Rescue Plan

Li Zongyu's speech didn't completely dispel everyone's doubts.

However, it did alleviate some of their tension.

The group dispersed back to their respective rooms.

As soon as White Mo returned to his room, he curled up on his bed, muttering to himself:

"Lies, all lies! They'll definitely kill us, they absolutely will!"

Xie Yunfan sat on White Mo's lower bunk, his gold-rimmed glasses with a cracked lens reflecting a sinister glint.

"We must find a way to save ourselves!"

"I refuse to live day by day in constant fear."

"Li Zongyu has probably already become that Zhang guy's accomplice. He has value to Zhang, but we don't."

"I won't bet my life on someone else's mercy!"

"Shut up!"

Che Haicheng suddenly shouted angrily, glaring sternly at Xie Yunfan.

He cautiously checked outside the door before locking it from inside, then sternly warned everyone:

"If anyone overhears this, you'll get us all killed!"

Xie Yunfan realized he'd spoken too emotionally and didn't argue back.

"So what do you suggest we do then?"

Che Haicheng lowered his voice, scanning each person present.

"Everyone here is exceptionally talented in their respective fields. If we work together, we can definitely find a solution."

"Now, clear your minds and focus on this problem!"

His voice dropped even lower: "We'll discuss more tonight."

At night when the middle deck lights went out, and Eisenmann had confirmed their room wasn't bugged—that would be the safest time for detailed discussion.

Everyone acknowledged Che Haicheng's experience and returned to their rooms to silently ponder how they might contact the Columbus Ocean fleet thousands of nautical miles away across the vast sea.

...

On Zhang Yi's end, he felt little about the numerous deaths in the lower deck cabins.

Fewer people actually made management easier.

Out of basic camaraderie, he at least ensured everyone's living supplies would be guaranteed from now on.

Truthfully, he'd witnessed the entire chaotic event from the beginning.

He understood everything happening in the lower decks better than anyone.

Nor did he plan to hold Lu Dahai, Rong Lei, Yu Gang and others accountable for instigating the chaos.

Within a day, the lower deck was largely cleaned up.

Though the bloodstains proved impossible to completely remove—even after dozens of scrubbings, faint traces and the metallic scent remained.

Yet to the lower deck survivors, the space no longer felt dark and damp but bright and warm.

As for Zhu Yunque and Su Nuanxi?

One was left nearly incoherent with terror, repeatedly fainting and completely limp;

The other suffered profound psychological shock and, now that Zhang Yi had seized her weakness, would likely never dare oppose him again.

Zhang Yi found this quite satisfactory.

Barring unexpected events, the Golden Edge should stabilize and return smoothly to the Jiangnan Region.

Even if minor troubles arose during the voyage, they wouldn't pose serious issues.

Yet ideals are plump while reality is bony indeed.

Zhang Yi believed everyone remaining aboard now lived comfortably with ample food and clothing.

Especially the Rockflow Group members—they'd suffered no hardships, with guaranteed food and warmth.

They were far better off than those who'd fought to the death in the lower decks.

Thus, they should logically remain docile with no reason to oppose him.

But human hearts are inscrutable.

Pure rational analysis doesn't always yield accurate predictions.

Take Che Haicheng, White Mo and their ilk—

When they'd appealed to the Columbus Ocean navy earlier, they'd received no response.

Yet despite Zhang Yi taking them aboard and providing food and shelter, they remained perpetually fearful and distrustful, never believing in him.

That night,

Thunder rumbled unusually outside—a harbinger of approaching blizzards.

Aside from Zhang Yi's quarters and the crew's working areas, nearly all other lights were extinguished.

In the Rockflow Group's section, Che Haicheng and the others quietly opened their eyes and rose from their bunks.

They gathered at Eisenmann's bed, with the cautious Che Haicheng even stuffing blankets around the door cracks to prevent eavesdropping.

Preparations complete, the group huddled together to discuss their escape plan from the Golden Edge.

"Friends, after a day's thought, has anyone conceived any brilliant strategies?"

Che Haicheng initiated the discussion.

Eisenmann crossed his arms, remaining silent as usual.

He'd already shared his technical suggestions—actual implementation wasn't his expertise as a software engineer.

The pickpocket Rudolf proposed:

"If we want communication devices, our only option is stealing from the crew. That's no problem for me."

"I can definitely swipe their comms without detection."

"But we're on a ship."

He shrugged helplessly.

"They'll quickly notice missing devices, and I can't vanish like on the Champs-Élysées."

Eisenmann rubbed his fingers, adding:

"To contact the Columbus Ocean fleet, I'd need at least thirty minutes uninterrupted with the equipment. You'd have to buy me that time."

Xie Yunfan adjusted his glasses.

"So we not only need to steal the communicator but prevent them from noticing for half an hour."

Eisenmann reminded:

"And we must return it undetected! Any suspicion would be disastrous."

Che Haicheng frowned.

"Meaning we need to distract them for forty-plus minutes, correct?"

Eisenmann nodded.

"Theoretically, yes."

White Mo shook his head.

"That's impossible!"

"Our only crew interactions are during meal deliveries."

"But they never linger or engage with us."

"Even if we stole a communicator, returning it would be equally problematic."

The group frowned in intense thought.

While hope existed, practical execution seemed unfeasible.

Everyone knew incapacitating a Golden Edge crewmember for forty minutes would be harder than ascending to heaven!

The crew were extremely cautious and held particular disdain for these foreign Rockflow members.

BOOM!!

Lightning suddenly split the night sky outside, striking the sea and illuminating the vast, terrifying ocean.

Yet Che Haicheng abruptly looked up, declaring with conviction:

"I've got a plan!"