

Scholar's Advanced Technological System

Chapter 801: Welcome Home!

The Lunar Orbit Committee was preparing to begin construction on the Moon's surface. It had been a month since Starlight left Mars.

The last orbital change was complete, and Starlight had consumed most of its working medium. It had already turned off its ion thruster systems and was now relying on its inertia for the rest of the journey.

Travis had already gotten used to living on Starlight.

They had clean bedding, plenty of oxygen, and delicious food.

He spent more than a month in a small experimental room in New Virginia. Compared to that, life on Starlight was heaven.

The Chinese had a much better bathing system than NASA. Starlight had a one-person bathroom that simulated a gravitational environment by using centrifugal acceleration.

Simply speaking, after the device began to rotate, taking a bath on Starlight would feel exactly the same as taking a bath on Earth. Gone were the floating water drops.

After the person finished bathing, an air intake outlet would suck every drop of water out of the bathroom, and only then, would the cylinder stop rotating.

The bathroom was almost like a giant centrifuge.

The BFS spacecraft would never have such an extravagant way of bathing.

Of course, the moment they stepped onto Starlight, they had to carefully calculate every drop of their resources. However, Starlight had plenty of electricity...

The only thing that Travis was unhappy with was the lack of freedom.

He only had a single bed in a small room, with no furniture except a foldable table under his bed. He couldn't even leave his room outside of eating and bathing. He killed time by sleeping.

The depressing atmosphere made it impossible for Travis to feel comfortable. The round portholes showed nothing but the empty dark space. It gave off a deep-sea submarine vibe.

The Heart of Gold had luxurious furniture and an entertainment system. Starlight, on the other hand, was like a garbage truck.

It was almost like Travis was in jail.

Travis looked at Johnson, who was in his own room, and asked, "How long until we arrive on Earth?"

Johnson was sitting on his bed, reading through a book. He replied casually, "Maybe a month... maybe two months... Maybe longer."

The captain didn't seem to be interested in talking. Travis shrugged and couldn't help but say, "Why don't the Chinese allow us to walk around? Are they really afraid of us..."

"It's because we're not sure if you contracted any bacteria or viruses from living on Mars. We can't give you a full-body examination either," Liu Biao said as he floated over with a lunch box.

He placed the lunch box on the table outside their bedrooms and said, "I know the living conditions are harsh, but I hope you guys can power through. After all, this cabin was originally a cargo compartment. We never thought we would have to fly to Mars."

Travis looked at the Chinese astronaut and said, "Hey, buddy, can you give us a game console or something? Not everyone wants to read a damn book!"

Liu Biao smiled and said, "I'll relay your request to the ground command center. Maybe they'll give you a game console next time."

"Next time? I don't want to be here again!"

Liu Biao didn't reply. He turned around and left the guest cabin module.

After the cabin module door was locked, the bedroom doors unlocked. Travis muttered, "It feels like I'm in prison."

Johnson said, "We are asking them for a favor... At least they're bringing us back to Earth."

Travis thought about it and realized that Johnson was right.

He suddenly remembered something the Chinese astronaut said.

He gulped and spoke in a nervous tone.

"Captain..."

Johnson: "What..."

Travis: "If there are microorganisms and bacteria on Mars, does this mean we are..."

"Don't think too much." Johnson flipped through his book and casually said, "It is possible, but it's very unlikely."

Travis angrily slammed his fists on the heavy door.

"Sh*t, is that what the White House thinks of us? As laboratory mice?"

Julia was in her room, and she sat on her bed with her arms wrapped around her knees. She listened to the two guys as she quietly stared outside the porthole.

She had been using this time to reflect on her life, on her decisions, and her plans for the Ares program.

In the beginning, she didn't understand why her mission failed even though everyone tried their best.

But now, she finally realized that the outcome of the Ares program might not be an accident.

This hasty trip to Mars was an unwise decision from the beginning...

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Starlight's journey back to Earth was faster than expected.

On the 50th day of Starlight's journey, a blue planet appeared outside the porthole.

"This is Starlight, currently entering the space station orbit, requesting navigation support."

"This is Moon Palace, providing navigation."

"Received, thanks."

After the communication, Starlight slowly merged into the Moon Palace orbit.

A silver-white structure slowly appeared in the porthole, with the sun shining behind.

Johnson was lying on his bed. He looked at the Moon Palace and put down his book. His blue pupils enlarged.

"Jesus... Is this the Chinese space station?"

He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

The image in front of him was much more shocking than the concept image.

The spacecraft slowly inched forward.

They were getting closer and closer to the space station.

The rice-sized space station eventually turned into a dragon.

The thousands of solar panels were like the dragon's wings. The heat sinks were like its scales. The cylindrical space modules were its limbs.

It was like a fortress.

Or a piece of art...

Xu Zhenhong, who was sitting in the Starlight cockpit, smiled with a tired look on his face. He reached out his fist and made a fist bump with Liu Bio. He then pressed the button on his helmet and spoke in a clear voice.

“This is Starlight, we have successfully entered orbit, requesting docking!”

Two seconds went by.

The other side replied, “This is Moon Palace.

“Welcome back, our heroes!”

Chapter 802: A Little Trouble

Starlight was sailing in the deep dark space, and it slowly approached the silver “docking port”.

A pair of long “landing gears” slowly extended out of Starlight. With the landing gears pointed toward the space station docking port, Starlight slowly approached the space station.

Johnson was sitting inside the cabin, and he watched the space station through his porthole. His heart was beating a million miles a minute, and his palms began to sweat.

Spacecraft docking was one of the most difficult areas of aerospace technology.

It required accurate industrial cameras, strong spacecraft materials, and sophisticated engine control technology. It also required a series of software requirements such as computer imaging and vision measurement.

It had especially tough requirements for the orbital altitude and the speed of the spacecraft. The engine control had to be accurate to within a second, a one-second mistake could result in a docking failure.

When the United States Project Gemini first came out, they had the goal of docking Gemini 6 with Gemini 7. The two spacecrafts were able to maintain a distance of 30 centimeters for 20 minutes, but they failed to eventually dock. It wasn't until the following year when the United States finally conquered the technology by docking Gemini 8 with an unmanned spacecraft.

The docking of manned spacecraft didn't happen until the seventies. This was when the United States and the Soviet Union finally shook hands and made peace, putting their efforts into aerospace together.

One of the main reasons why the Apollo program didn't launch their components in stages and docked in space was because of the technical difficulties. It was much easier to use a high-thrust rocket and launch all of the components together.

Compared to Travis and Julia, Johnson had been in NASA for much longer, so he knew how difficult docking was.

However, in the blink of an eye, the Starlight landing gears were inserted into the Moon Palace docking bay.

Starlight successfully connected its landing with the space station. The landing gear contracted into Starlight, which pulled Starlight toward the space station.

Finally, the two aerospace spacecrafts were connected.

Then...

It was over.

The docking process wasn't intense at all. It was surprisingly smooth.

"WTF?"

When Johnson looked out the porthole, it was almost like he just saw a ghost.

As a NASA trained astronaut, he knew that spacecraft docking was supposed to be much more difficult!

The correct way of docking spacecraft was to fly the spacecraft in front of the space station, then decelerate the spacecraft, thus allowing the space station to catch up.

He had never seen a spacecraft using landing gears to "pull" itself into a space station!

The cabin signal light turned on.

All of their cabin doors were unlocked. Travis floated out of his room and stretched his limbs. He saw Johnson, who seemed a little fazed.

“Hey man, what’s wrong?”

Johnson looked at him.

“Did you see what happened? Did you see how the Chinese docked their spacecraft?”

Travis looked at his captain and scratched his head. He frowned and replied, “I have no idea what you are talking about.”

Johnson sighed.

“Never mind then...”

Johnson knew he shouldn’t have asked Travis this complex question.

The three Mars colonists floated around the cabin common area. The cabin main door slowly opened, and Liu Biao appeared in a spacesuit.

“Starlight has successfully docked with Moon Palace space station. We will examine your physical condition in half an hour and disinfect the entire spacecraft.”

When Liu Biao suddenly noticed that Johnson looked like he just saw a ghost, he asked, “Are you good?”

“I’m... great.” Johnson couldn’t help but ask, “How did you guys do it?”

Liu Biao was at a loss. “Do what?”

Johnson opened his mouth and didn’t know what to say.

Should I ask him how they were able to dock the spacecraft that way?

Maybe for them, spacecraft docking is a piece of cake.

However, Johnson didn’t want to believe how advanced China’s aerospace technology was.

Johnson smiled at the Chinese astronaut and replied, “Nothing... Pretend I didn’t say anything.”

However, deep down in his heart, he still wanted to find out...

After Starlight and Moon Palace successfully docked, Liu Biao led the three colonists to the airlock chamber.

When the spacecraft was undocked, this was a buffer zone for astronauts to enter in and out of the space station. This was where astronauts put on their spacesuits, checked their equipment, and adjusted to the air pressure...

However, now that the spacecraft was docked, the airlock chamber turned into a checkpoint.

“Wait here, a professional doctor will examine your body. After your examination, we might give you a tour of the Moon Palace.”

Johnson looked at Liu Biao and asked, “What do we do now?”

Liu Biao smiled and said, “Eat something, drink something, then... The medical team from the United Nations might need you to provide feces and urine samples.”

Julia turned red and asked, “Right here?”

“Not here.” Liu Biao pointed toward the metal alloy door and said, “There’s a toilet over there.”

The colonists didn’t have to wait for long.

With the help of two Moon Palace staff members, Johnson and the other two colonists quickly finished their physical examinations. Metabolite samples were also collected from the three people, which were then sent to a special experiment cabin.

Professor Leslie from the Institute of Microbiology at Health Center Clinique Lémana in Switzerland was responsible for the analysis of these samples. Researcher Zhao Shuxuan from the Institute of Biomedicine of the Chinese Academy of Sciences was also involved in the sample analysis.

Both of these scholars were big names in the field of biology, and they had published many theses. Even though they weren't the best scholars, they were still top-tier.

Most importantly, both of them were under 45 years old, which meant they were relatively young and in good health conditions. A lot of big names wanted the opportunity to work on the Moon Palace, but the weightlessness environment was too much for their old bodies.

Time quickly passed by.

Everyone inside and outside of the experiment cabin was waiting nervously for the test results.

Professor Leslie, who was sitting in front of an electron microscope, suddenly whispered to herself. Her eyes were filled with surprise.

“Jesus, f*ck...”

“What happened?” Zhao Shuxuan walked to the microscope and looked at the computer screen. He said, “What is this?”

“A strange anaerobic bacterium with thick cell walls and cell membranes... Wait, no, it's a spore! No wonder it was able to survive on Mars.” Professor Leslie adjusted the microscope magnification and said excitedly, “Jesus... This is incredible.”

As Zhao Shuxuan stared at the image on the screen, his eyes flashed with excitement as well, but he quickly became serious.

“We might be in trouble.”

Leslie looked at Zhao Shuxuan and adjusted her glasses.

“True, but this is still exciting, right?”

The colonists waited quietly in the airlock chamber.

Johnson and the others started to get a little impatient, but fortunately, the hatch opened shortly after. A man who they had never met before appeared at the door.

Johnson remembered that he saw this man before on Starlight. If he recalled correctly, this man was the captain of Starlight.

Before he could ask what happened, Travis spoke.

“What happened? Why is it taking so long? When can we go home?”

“Sorry, my friends.”

Xu Zhengong had a dignified look on his face as he spoke with a heavy voice.

“Our trip back home is going to be delayed.”

Chapter 803: “Life” From Mars

Earth, North America.

NASA headquarters.

Director Carson sat in front of his desk, flipping through documents.

Suddenly, his office door opened. A man in a suit quickly walked in.

Director Carson looked at his assistant and took off his glasses. He then asked in a tired voice, “What is the situation like? How are the three astronauts doing?”

The assistant replied, “They’re on the Moon Palace space station.”

Carson twisted the pen in his hand and gently tapped the pen against his desk.

“What’s their timetable like? When do the Chinese plan on giving us our people back?”

They spent at least US\$1 billion for this Mars Rescue mission.

Even though China publicly said they had to fork up US\$713 million themselves, who knew how much of that was true.

After all, Star Sky Technology was the only company that could travel to Mars in this time period. They could manipulate the numbers however they liked.

China estimated that at most China spent three to four hundred million dollars on this mission, which was way less than the claimed 1.7 billion.

The assistant looked at Director Carson and paused for a second. He then replied with an awkward expression, "Not sure..."

"Not sure?" Director Carson paused for a second and frowned. "What do you mean... Are they planning on holding them hostage?"

"Not quite, it's just that... There seems to be a problem with our astronauts."

Read more chapter on

"What problem?"

Director Carson looked at his assistant with a bitter face.

"They found Martian bacteria in the metabolites of the three colonists..."

...

After Moon Palace and Starlight successfully docked, the news that the three New Virginia colonists returned to the Earth-Moon orbit spread across the world.

However, before people could celebrate their return, the news that they found Martian bacteria on the three colonists spread like wildfire.

The international community was in an uproar.

Some people were curious about the tiny living beings on Mars, while the others said that they didn't care what the astronauts brought back from Mars.

However, the other people, the majority of people, were panicking...

Columbia TV.

A while back, when the Ares program was still trending, talk show host Jimmy enthusiastically invited the three colonists to his show. However, his stance

had completely changed. Not only did he become a firm disbeliever of the Ares program, but he also invited an ecologist to criticize NASA on his show.

The old professor stared into the camera lens and spoke with an angry voice.

“I told you all, the Ares program is an inhumane and stupid experiment! NASA knew that not only is the Martian climate dangerous, but it could also contain dangerous microbes and viruses! Even then, they still decided to send these poor colonists to Mars, making them think they were safe...

“But great, now they’re coming back to Earth, thanks to the Chinese. What are we going to do with the Martian bacteria? What if the bacteria is harmful to our fragile ecosystem?

“NASA must be held accountable for this!”

Columbia TV wasn’t the only one that changed its stance.

Almost all of the politically correct media outlets expressed their disagreement with the Ares program and NASA.

Just like Carson had expected, NASA and the Ares program were criticized due to the news regarding the colonists carrying Martian bacteria.

He felt like he was mistreated.

After all, there was no plan to bring these colonists back to Earth. If it weren’t for the global sandstorm, they wouldn’t be receiving all this hatred.

But it was too late for that now.

The moment the Martian bacteria were detected in the three colonists was the moment his political career ended...

Director Carson wasn’t the only person who was affected.

All those on Wall Street, New York as well as the aerospace companies listed on the stock exchanges were having a bad day.

Even Space-X and Blue Origin, which were at the top of the aerospace industry, were taking hits.

However, the academic community had a different reaction.

A thesis published by Leslie and Dr. Zhao Shuxuan caused a huge worldwide sensation.

The existence of life on Mars had always been a controversial topic.

Even though humans had sent countless space probes to Mars, as well as a life support system, so far no one had brought back a single gram of Martian soil.

The only sample that was available to astrobiologists were three Martian meteorites that hit Earth. They were numbered ALH840001, Yamato593, and Nakhla.

Even though there were signs of microorganisms on these meteorites, there was no direct evidence of these microorganisms.

Even though the bacteria on Starlight contained a huge amount of risk, it had immense research value.

The biology community believed that this was a gigantic discovery. Hopefully, by researching these bacteria, it would reveal more secrets of the Martian ecosystem.

The astronomy community said that the bacteria brought back from Mars by the three colonists could provide important research data for the study of Mars' historical and geomorphological changes, as well as the evolution of the Martian atmospheric environment.

Of course, scholars also expressed some concerns.

Martian bacteria that could survive in the harsh Mars climate meant that they were likely to survive on Earth, which could cause unpredictable effects on Earth's ecosystem.

European colonists once brought a series of infectious diseases to North America. This almost exterminated the American indigenous people. The number of Native Americans who were killed by those infectious diseases was far larger than those who died from guns.

These three colonists went to Mars and came back with Martian bacteria. Even though they seemed to be in good physical health, no one knew what could happen in the future.

In the midst of the world panic, the Chinese Lunar Orbit Committee issued a public statement.

“For the benefit of human civilization as a whole, we will not bring back the three colonists until we have either determined the possible effects of the bacteria on the Earth’s ecosystem or made sure that the bacteria are completely removed from the bodies of the three colonists.”

The Chinese Lunar Orbit Committee also announced that a lunar research facility would be built on the surface of the Moon to temporarily house the three colonists and to study their health conditions.

The research facility would be opened to the international community. China welcomed other countries to participate in the research.

However, due to various factors such as cost and limited space, other countries would have to pay to participate in the research...

Chapter 804: Urgent Mission

Martian bacteria were discovered in the bodies of the three Ares program. The fate of the entire Earth’s ecosystem seemed to be in the hands of the Chinese Lunar Orbit Committee.

Fortunately, China had a serious and responsible attitude toward this issue. Almost immediately, the Lunar Orbit Committee announced their response plan.

Honestly speaking, Lu Zhou didn’t think this was a big deal at all. After all, he had many other things to worry about.

That was until two days after the bacteria was discovered, a blue pop-up window suddenly appeared in front of his eyes.

[Urgent Mission: Biological Invasion (90 days limit)]

Lu Zhou thought he was still dreaming.

That was until he got out of his bed and stared at the blue window for a long time.

Lu Zhou closed the blue window and immediately lay back on his bed.

“System!”

That familiar feeling hit his cerebral cortex. He opened his eyes and saw nothing but pure white.

Without any hesitation, Lu Zhou walked to the center of the system space and placed his hands on the mission panel.

As expected, that urgent mission was in his mission panel.

The mission chain icon below it turned gray, and it also had a lock icon.

“It seems like if I don’t solve this urgent task, I can’t continue my other mission...”

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This was his first time seeing an urgent mission.

It seemed like as his influence increased, his research gradually started to affect the entire civilization.

Lu Zhou stared at the lock icon for a while and clicked the [Urgent Mission] icon.

Soon after, the mission details were displayed in front of him.

[Urgent Mission: Biological Invasion (Danger Level: 3)]

[Description: As a civilization’s technology advances, they are often faced with dangerous situations. Statistics show that more than 90% of civilization’s destruction originates from their own arrogance and not from the attacks of outsiders.

[Requirements: Remove the alien species invasion. Countermeasures can include but are not limited to:

1. Dispose of infection source: Whoever brings trouble should go to hell.

2. Natural selection: Survival of the fittest. The Earth's ecosystem is bound to be invaded. Those that cannot adapt are eliminated. It is only a matter of time. (materialism +3, Darwinism +5, risk: 70%)

3. Gift of the universe: Objectively speaking, this is both a threat and an opportunity. Find a way to coexist with the new species. (materialism +10, risk: 39%)

4. Pray: It might be a good idea to let God decide the fate. Put them in an isolated place for a while, maybe they will recover? (idealism +10, risk: 15%)

1...

]

[Rewards: Unknown.]

Lu Zhou: "..."

After Lu Zhou read the mission description, he didn't know what to think. He had no idea where to even begin complaining.

He had no idea what the hell idealism and materialism meant, nor did he know what the risk percentage represented. What made him speechless was that he wasn't even informed of the mission rewards.

Is the mission rewards related to which countermeasure I take? In other words, the rewards might reveal which countermeasure I should take?

The system should at least give me some hints!

Lu Zhou stared at the mission panel for a while and finally made the decision.

First of all, he couldn't just get rid of the colonists; that option was ruled out. Not only would it damage China's international image, but it would also bring serious international diplomatic issues.

The only one who would be happy was NASA.

If that were to happen, they wouldn't have to pay China the remaining balance. They could also put all of the blame on the Lunar Orbit Committee. No one else would remember the failures of the Ares program. They would

only think about the three colonists who died and how NASA tried their best to save them...

“I only have 90 days to complete the mission, but there are no criteria for completing the mission. Maybe the criteria depend on the choice I make?”

“The risk for option 2 is the greatest, I should remove it as well.”

“So...” Lu Zhou stared at option three and said, “This is the most suitable one then.”

Whether he wanted to completely remove the parasitic bacteria from the three colonists or to prove that it was harmless, he first had to research the bacteria and find out exactly what it was.

Without hesitating, Lu Zhou left the system space.

He only had ninety days to act. For a biological research task, this was quite a short time frame. Unfortunately, he couldn't do much to help. He could only support other scholars to do the research for him. This undoubtedly made this mission a lot more difficult.

Lu Zhou opened his eyes and sat up from his bed. Without hesitating, he called Beijing and reported to the chairman of the Lunar Orbit Committee.

After hearing Lu Zhou's report, the president replied in a stern manner, “How serious is the problem?”

“Pretty serious,” Lu Zhou said in a serious tone. “So far we know very little about the bacterium, there is not enough clinical evidence to prove it is harmless. We know it can survive in harsh environments, and it is difficult to kill. Even if it is harmless to the human body, it might damage our Earth's ecosystem in other ways.”

Even though Lu Zhou didn't know what level 3 danger meant, considering the fact that the system issued an urgent mission, the problem must be pretty serious.

The president immediately asked, “I understand, what do you need?”

Lu Zhou: “The return of the three Ares program colonists has to be delayed. We cannot trust the White House and NASA to handle this situation. Especially since they are under the public’s pressure.

1“In order to solve this, we will need help from international experts.

“I propose to cooperate with other countries on this issue. We should establish a special scientific research organization. This is a global crisis, but if we handle it correctly, this crisis can be avoided.”

After hearing Lu Zhou’s requests, the President nodded and spoke in a serious voice.

“Okay, I will try to meet your requirements as soon as possible. Also, before the Communist Party of China makes a decision, you have total decision-making power. I believe in you.”

Lu Zhou nodded.

“Okay, I’ll try my best.”

Lu Zhou hung up the phone and called the State Administration for National Defense. He explained the situation to Director Li and then put on a change of clothes. He then called Wang Peng.

“Come pick me up at Zhongshan International.

“Take me to the Jinling aerospace launch site.

“Hurry!”

Chapter 805: Unfavorable First Contact

It had been 24 hours since the Lunar Orbit Committee announced their response plan.

Once the plan was published on the Lunar Orbit Committee website, the world held the plan in high regard.

A United Nations emergency meeting was held in New York. Representatives, senior political figures, and big-name experts from various countries attended the conference.

Before the conference began, Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson stood up. He began reading his speech in a solemn voice. This marked the beginning of the conference.

“For a long time, we knew very little about life outside of Earth. We believe that we are not the only lucky planet in the galaxy. However, we have yet to receive any evidence that there is life outside of Earth.

“Clearly, that has changed. From what happened to the Ares program colonists, we know that we are not alone in the solar system.

“However, the first contact is not always optimal. I believe everyone sitting here has discussed this issue with relevant experts. The bacterium from Mars is tough. It can survive through hundreds of degrees of temperature change and is resistant to background radiation.

“It is foreseeable that their arrival will have an unpredictable impact on our ecosystem.

“Once again, I’d like to emphasize that this is a global crisis! Solving this problem should not be the responsibility of just one country, it should be the responsibility of humanity!

“Thank you.”

The crowd erupted in applause.

Deputy Secretary-General Eliasson nodded and slowly sat back down.

After the opening remarks, the emergency United Nations meeting officially kicked off.

Various representatives put forward their own opinions on how to deal with the crisis.

For example, the United States’ proposal was to establish a completely enclosed area in the Sonoran Desert. The astronauts would be placed there, and their physical conditions would be observed.

Others suggested asking the colonists for their own opinions on whether or not they would be willing to sacrifice themselves for the sake of humanity. Even though two of the astronauts were Americans, it would be a time-saving and cost-saving method.

After all, if the colonists were to die, all of the problems would be solved. They could slowly research the remaining bacteria samples.

However, everyone knew that this was not a realistic plan.

Other than the US, the one that received the most attention during the conference was China.

After all, the colonists were on the Moon Palace. Regardless of what the UN's decision was, it would still depend on China to execute it.

The Chinese representative stood up and spoke slowly and calmly.

“Our position is clear.

“Before confirming the bacteria is not a risk to the Earth's ecosystem, we will not allow the astronauts to return to Earth.

“Our proposal was announced by the Lunar Orbital Committee. We will build a research facility on the surface of the moon. The astronauts will be safe there.”

“How do you plan on ensuring the safety of the three colonists?” the US representative said. The US representative stood up and said aggressively, “Long-term exposure to low gravity will cause unpredictable effects on the human body! Don't you think this is a violation of human rights?”

Without missing a beat, the Chinese representative replied, “Did you think about their human rights before sending them to Mars?”

Whispers were heard in the venue.

The American representatives opened his mouth, but he couldn't say anything.

The Chinese were right.

The Americans had no right to take the moral high ground.

If they considered these factors in advance before hastily launching the BFS spacecraft to Mars, they wouldn't be in so much trouble.

The Chinese representative looked at the American representative and said, "Not to mention, we have solutions to your problems.

"In order to ensure that the lunar facility can operate with sufficient funds, we welcome all countries to contribute to the common interests of humanity. At the same time, we also welcome scholars from all countries to participate in the study of life on Mars!"

After some heated debates, the United Nations eventually decided to adopt the Chinese solution.

After all, the Chinese had the final say in the matter.

Even if the United Nations chose another solution, the Chinese could refuse to implement the solution "for the sake of the overall interests of the international community".

Moreover, looking at the votes, most of the countries agreed with China's solution.

This was mainly because of China's reputation in aerospace technology...

The second half of the conference was mainly focused on research funding, participating researchers, as well as participating research institutes.

The conference went from 10 am to 3 pm.

The emergency conference finally ended.

After Director Owens of the European Space Agency had a quick chat with NASA Director Carson, he left the UN building and walked toward the parking lot.

Deputy Director Ferrian of the European Space Agency was walking behind him. Ferrian suddenly said, "Sir."

Owens didn't stop talking. He asked casually, "What?"

Ferrian paused for a second and said, "1.2 billion euros... Do you think this is worth it?"

“It doesn’t matter if it is worth it. This crisis has to be addressed by the international community.” Owens paused for a moment before adding, “From a practical point of view, to be able to join in on China’s lunar development and participate in the life of Mars research is extremely meaningful.

“1.2 billion euros is definitely worth it.”

...

Hundreds of kilometers away, inside the Moon Palace.

The three colonists were inside their living capsules. Zhao Shuxuan gave them their routine physical examination.

Travis finished his blood test and sat down on his bed. His wrists felt sore from the gravity-free blood collection device. He began talking to the Chinese researcher...

“Hey, what’s our situation like? Can you at least tell us... What did you find on our bodies? We have the right to know.”

Zhao Shuxuan filled in a form and said with a blank expression, “You are in good physical shape. Don’t overthink this. Because there are many uncertain factors, we need some time to double-check everything. I promise that when everything is over, you can go home.”

Travis made a helpless expression and said, “Okay then... Can you let me access the Internet then? Surely I’m allowed to go on a computer, right?”

“The bandwidth fee here is very expensive. I’m afraid I can’t allow you to do that. However, your game console will arrive soon.” Zhao Shuxuan flipped over the form and asked, “How are you feeling?”

Travis: “Everything is great, amazing. However, being in a weightless environment for a long time isn’t comfortable. I feel like my muscles are shrinking.”

Zhao Shuxuan: “That’s just an illusion. Your bones and muscles are in perfect condition. Also, there is a special cabin on the Moon Palace that can simulate the Earth’s gravitational environment. If you feel unwell, you can go take a bath or something.”

He paused for a second and continued, “By the way, how long did you sleep last night?”

Travis thought for a while and answered, “Eight hours. There isn’t much else to do other than sleep.”

“Eight hours, right?” Zhao Shuxuan said as he recorded the data. He frowned and asked, “Do you feel discomfort anywhere?”

“I told you, I’m feeling fine. It’s just weightlessness.” Travis stood up from his bed and said, “The inspection is over, right? Stop bothering me, I’m going to drink some coffee. Life here is so boring.”

Zhao Shuxuan: “We have unlimited coffee here, but it’s all the same kind... By the way, are you feeling sleepy?”

“I’m always a little sleepy,” Travis said. “Flying in space is so boring, there isn’t even a bar here. It feels like a jail here.”

He floated past the Chinese researcher and floated toward the hatch.

As Zhao Shuxuan watched Travis float away, he frowned.

His guesses were correct.

The little bacterium from Mars was more complex than he had imagined...

Chapter 806: Parasitic? Symbiosis?

“Yesterday, the United Nations held an emergency meeting in New York to determine the world’s response to this crisis. A research team composed of experts from multiple countries would be stationed on the Moon Palace within a week.

“On the other hand, the World Health Organization officially named the bacterium ‘X-0172’.

“Brought to you, by China Southern News.”

The Mars bacterium news segment was over.

Lu Zhou sat at his table, enjoying his breakfast. He looked at the calendar on his phone and muttered to himself, “87 days left.”

Time is running out...

Lu Zhou picked up the remote control and turned off the TV. He wiped his face with a paper towel and then stood up.

“Xiao Ai, straighten up the kitchen for me please.”

The quad-rotor drone flew into the kitchen.

[Okay Master, leave it to me! ٩ (•̀•́) ٥]

Lu Zhou put on a coat and called Wang Peng.

Soon after, a black sedan parked outside his mansion. The black sedan took him to the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study.

Strictly speaking, biological research wasn't a strong suit for the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study.

Especially when it came to the area of astrobiology. Not only were there few astrobiology experts at the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study, but there were also few astrobiology experts in the country.

However, sometimes research didn't have to be done by an expert. After all, when it came to cutting-edge newly-born research fields, the difference between professionals and normal researchers was small.

So far, the expert in microbiology was Professor Liu Zuobing, who was in charge of the frozen dormancy project.

Although his main research direction was cryobiology, he often studied cell samples collected in extreme environments.

After all, the X-0172 bacteria were also collected in extreme environments...

After Lu Zhou got off the car, he went straight to the Institute of Biology building.

When he arrived at the laboratory, Professor Liu Zuobing and several of his students were looking at something in front of an electron microscope.

Lu Zhou didn't want to interrupt their research. He quietly waited for them to finish, then decided to speak to Professor Liu.

"Has the sample arrived?"

"It has." Professor Liu Zuobing looked at the slide under the microscope and said, "I bet this is the world's most expensive feces."

Lu Zhou joked, "Also the world's most dangerous feces."

Professor Liu Zuobing waved his hands and said, "Don't worry, the samples that arrived on Earth have been carefully disinfected. If we follow safety procedures, there shouldn't be a problem."

Even though Professor Liu didn't sound convincing, Lu Zhou knew that Professor Liu wouldn't make any silly mistakes.

Lu Zhou paused for a second before asking an important question, "Is there any progress in the research?"

"There is a little progress." Professor Liu Zuobing took off his glasses and said, "According to the latest research published by Leslie and Professor Zhao Shuxuan, we can confirm that the Ares program colonists have sleepiness symptoms. This is likely caused by the amino acid-like derivatives secreted by the X-0172 bacteria."

"Amino acid-like derivatives?" Lu Zhou frowned and continued to ask, "Is the problem serious?"

"The problem is not serious, but this kind of amino acid derivative is very interesting... It might even benefit the host."

Lu Zhou: "Benefit? Can you elaborate?"

"Active dormancy," Professor Liu suddenly said. He explained, "Let's assume that Mars once had a rich atmosphere, a protective magnetic field, and a variety of ecosystems. When severe geological changes occur, the pheromones released by this bacteria when producing spores will most likely help the host. Similar to hibernation."

Helping the host survive through harsh weather conditions was a survival tactic for the bacteria. Therefore, the parasite formed a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship with its host.

Professor Liu Zuobing paused for a second and looked at Lu Zhou.

“So far, other than the drowsiness symptoms, we have not found any other health effects. We have reasons to believe that the secretion of the pheromones belongs to an active defense mechanism of the bacteria. In this state of bacterium-induced dormancy, the host’s tolerance to extreme environments might be greatly improved. The host could also require very little energy for basic survival functions.”

Lu Zhou said, “What is the pheromone-releasing mechanism?”

“That’s the problem, we haven’t fully figured out its mechanism yet.” Professor Liu Zuobing sighed and said, “There are currently two speculations. One is that when the host creates an immune response to foreign bacteria, the bacteria are forced to produce spores for their own protection, thus forcing the release of the active dormancy pheromone.

“The other possibility is that, under certain external physical conditions, the bacteria could determine that the host is in an extremely harsh environment, and they would then actively release dormancy pheromone spores to protect the host.”

Even though drowsiness wasn’t fatal, no one wanted to be chronically fatigued.

So far, one of the three colonists had experienced drowsiness.

If a third of the human population had chronic fatigue, the impact on society would be unimaginable.

Lu Zhou asked, “Which one are you more inclined to believe?”

Professor Liu Zuobing: “I’m leaning toward the first possibility.”

Lu Zhou said, “Which means there might be X-0172 antibodies inside the drowsy patient?”

Professor Liu Zuobing nodded cautiously.

“I don’t know, but I think so!”

Chapter 807: Lunar Project

Hundreds of thousands of kilometers, in lunar orbit.

Not far from the Moon Palace Space Station, a hexagonal silver-plated device was dropped from the Magpie Bridge, which landed on the surface of the Moon.

A few months ago, the Jinling Institute for Advanced Research collaborated with a number of research institutes within the United Nations to carry out research and development in regards to automatic lunar mining equipment.

The project had already made some progress. This 300 million yuan device called “Pioneer” was one of the research results of this project. It was mainly responsible for the preliminary mining of rich titanium ores.

If the device was successfully deployed and worked normally, the Lunar Orbit Committee would consider deploying an automated ore melting device on the moon surface, and this would be used to process the titanium ore into titanium ingots or even titanium alloys. The titanium would then be used for the second phase of the Moon Palace project, which was to establish a research facility on the Moon.

The silver hexagonal device slowly dropped toward the Moon.

The closer it got toward the Moon, the more nervous the Moon Palace and Magpie Bridge staff members were.

“Countdown to impact... 5,4,3,2,1... Landing is successful!”

“Opening mounting bracket!”

The moment the silver-white prism made contact with the lunar surface, a circle of gray moon dust swelled from underneath the equipment.

The device anchoring feet nailed into the moon rocks.

The two Moon Palace staff who were staring at their screens were relieved. They high-fived each other and celebrated for a second, before immediately returning to their mission.

“This is Moon Palace, the automatic mining equipment prototype has successfully landed on the Moon. Requesting further instructions.”

“This is the ground command center, congratulations on completing your mission. Please confirm the status of the automatic mining equipment. If everything is normal, begin the test in ten minutes.”

“Roger that.”

The Moon Palace staff member skillfully confirmed the status of the equipment. They then immediately turned on the device.

A signal light on the automatic mining device flickered. It was almost like a giant monster was awakened.

The bottom alloy plate slowly opened, and a huge drill was nailed into the lunar soil.

The drill began to spin, and the titanium-containing moonstone was quickly broken into numerous fragments. The moonstone was sucked in by an ore-processing pipe and ejected from the side of the device.

Once the smelting device was deployed, the material discharge port on the side of the automated mining device would be connected to the smelting device through special pipelines. The materials would then be transported into the smelting furnace. This was a fully automated mining production process.

But for now, the titanium-containing moonstone just sat there in a pile. Since the device was operating normally, there was no reason to keep it on.

“The machine is working normally.”

“Turn it off then.”

“Roger that.”

The drill bit slowly came to a pause and retracted itself into the mining machine. The discharge port no longer ejected any moonstone.

Due to the Moon's low gravitational environment, there was still flying moon dust everywhere.

Johnson was watching this through a porthole on the Moon Palace. He looked at the dusty Moon surface and opened his mouth.

“Jesus... What are the Chinese people doing to the Moon?”

No one answered him.

Julia was just as confused as him.

She only saw the Chinese throw something from the spacecraft, and the impact almost looked like a missile hitting the Moon.

“Are they... testing weapons on the Moon?”

Johnson went silent for a while. When the dust finally settled, he had a clear view of what was going on.

“Hopefully not...”

In theory, the United Nations signed a treaty for the peaceful development of outer space resources. Experts from all over the world were on this space station. Not to mention that there were countless astronomical observatories pointed toward the Moon.

The Chinese must be going crazy if they were actually testing weapons on the Moon.

Johnson believed that the Chinese were merely building something on the Moon, similar to the plant growth unit they deployed some time ago.

Julia looked at her captain and asked, “Speaking of which... When can we go home?”

Johnson shook his head and said, “I don't know.”

“Where is Travis? How come I haven't seen him lately?”

Johnson went silent for a while. He then said, “He might be in some trouble.”

“I heard that... He seemed to be infected with a Mars virus. Maybe we are...”
Julia said as her face turned white.

Even though Johnson was worried himself, he tried to comfort his teammate.

“Don’t worry, all of the world’s top biological experts are here. Travis, you, and I are all going to be safe.”

Johnson didn’t believe what he was saying at all.

When he first arrived at the Moon Palace, he was allowed a brief communication with NASA.

Fortunately, the Chinese didn’t prevent him from knowing the truth. The NASA director told him the whole story.

Simply put, they were the hosts for a type of extremely resistant Mars bacteria. This bacteria could impact Earth’s ecosystem. Therefore, they were temporarily isolated in the space station. After a while, they would be transferred to a lunar research facility.

Would they survive? What if the bacteria were invincible? These were questions Johnson didn’t want to think about.

Perhaps the best solution was for them to sacrifice themselves. Johnson even sensed that Director Carson was hinting at a sacrifice during their conversation.

However, one person was only given one life. No matter how heroic the sacrifice was, Johnson couldn’t just give up his life that easily.

Suddenly, the living module hatch opened.

The Chinese researcher who had previously examined them was accompanied by two astronauts. They floated into the living module and stood in front of them.

Johnson was nervous, and he tried to calm himself down.

“What happened? Is there any research progress?”

Johnson didn't have any hope. After all, the international experts had only arrived at the Moon Palace for a couple of days. It was impossible for them to find a solution in such a short time frame.

However, Zhao Shuxuan's words surprised him.

"A little bit."

Zhao Shuxuan looked at Johnson's surprised face and said in a serious manner, "In order to verify our hypothesis, we need you to cooperate with us for some experiments."

Chapter 808: Medicine With a "Taste"

Without hesitating, Johnson agreed to cooperate with the experiment.

The Chinese researcher named Zhao Shuxuan told him that the relevant clinical experiments had only been performed on mice twice, thus there was a huge amount of risk. However, for Johnson, this was the only way he could return to Earth.

If he couldn't get rid of the Martian bacteria on his body, he might have to stay at the Moon Palace for the rest of his life. He would be isolated or even abandoned from the Earth's ecosystem.

He still had a family on Earth, waiting for him to go home.

He sat on the medical bed and quietly waited for the two researchers to prepare his medicine. After a while, a Chinese researcher came over with three capsules and some water.

"Eat it."

Johnson took the three capsules from Zhao Shuxuan and didn't hesitate. He threw them in his mouth and downed it with the water.

Johnson quietly waited on the medical bed for five minutes. He looked around restlessly and saw that everyone in the laboratory was looking at him. He asked awkwardly, "So, that's it?"

“Not sure.” Zhao Shuxuan shook his head and said, “We’ll find out in an hour or two. I suggest you lie down and sleep for a while.”

Johnson: “Can I ask where the capsules came from? I’m just curious...”

Professor Leslie and Professor Zhao Shuxuan looked at each other. Zhao Shuxuan replied, “You don’t have to know too much.”

Johnson said, “Is it a secret?”

“Not quite.” Leslie shrugged and said, “It’s just that... Only one person has an immune response to the bacteria.”

Johnson frowned and said, “So what?”

Professor Leslie coughed and said, “The bacteria are mainly lodged in the large intestine...”

Johnson’s face went white.

“Sh*t... Is it...”

“That’s right, it’s sh*t... Or rather, sh*t extract, so not quite sh*t.”

Johnson could feel his stomach turn. He resisted the urge to vomit and asked, “You think this thing... will work?”

“I’m... not sure.” Professor Leslie smiled awkwardly and said, “Sometimes you have to try before you know, right?”

Johnson wanted to say something when suddenly, an intense feeling of drowsiness hit his brain. He began squeezing his forehead.

Professor Leslie noticed his reaction, and she suddenly looked ecstatic.

Johnson was on the verge of passing out, and he could faintly hear the conversation between the two.

“Jesus... Our hypothesis was correct!”

“Antibodies that can kill X-0172 can be extracted from the metabolites of colonizer 3!”

“Let’s report our research to the world.”

“ ... ”

...

While the Moon Palace researchers were completing their experiment...

All the way on Earth, at the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study.

Lu Zhou had been monitoring the experiment closely. After he heard that the experiment was a success, he quickly went to the newly established X-0172 laboratory. He asked Professor Liu Zuobing, the person in charge, about the research on the Moon Palace.

“How are the other two colonists doing?”

“Their sleep is stable, and we tried various methods to wake them up; cold temperatures, hot temperatures, electric shock, etc. They wouldn’t wake up no matter what,” Professor Liu said. “Overall, the experiment was quite successful. At the very least, it confirmed our hypothesis. From the metabolite samples, traces of spores were seen in both colonists.”

Lu Zhou immediately said, “Which meant that Travis’ body did indeed produce X-0172 antibodies.”

“Theoretically, that is true.” Professor Liu nodded and sighed. He then said, “However, the cumbersome thing is that even if we have the antibodies, we can only remove some of the X-0172 in the colonizers. It is difficult to kill the rest of the bacterial spores.”

Spores, also known as endospores, were a kind of dormant, non-reproductive structure produced by some bacteria. They were also known as the most resistant living organisms in the world. They had outstanding heat resistance, chemical resistance, and radiation resistance properties.

Take the *Clostridium Botulinum* as an example. It would take 5 to 9.5 hours for its spores to be killed in boiling water. On the other hand, the anti-radiation ability of *Bacillus Megaterium* was 36 times stronger than that of *E. coli* cells. Even under direct radiation of ultraviolet rays and high-energy rays, the *Bacillus Megaterium* could still survive for a long time.

Spores had no significant metabolic effects. They contained the threat of potential germination. They were called a type of hidden life form because once the environmental conditions were optimal, the spores could germinate into vegetative cells at any time.

It was almost like the dried vegetable packets that came with instant noodles. The dried vegetables would be rejuvenated when it came into contact with water.

Therefore, if they couldn't kill the spores, something bad could happen sooner or later.

The laboratory went quiet.

Professor Liu Zuobing stared at the thesis that came from the Moon Palace. He began to contemplate.

Lu Zhou could sense from the dignified look of the old professor that this problem wasn't going to be easy to solve. Even if they combined the world's top biomedical research and development forces, it would still be difficult to find a solution.

Lu Zhou: "Is there anything we can do about the spores?"

"If there is, we have already tried it." Professor Liu shook his head and said, "International experts have held several meetings. The most reliable method is probably intermittent sterilization, by constantly activating the spores before killing them. However, there's one problem. We might be able to reduce the number of X-0172 bacteria in these colonists, but it is very difficult to remove all of them."

Lu Zhou: "Is it kind of like cancer cells that have spread across the body?"

Professor Liu: "Not quite, but kind of."

Lu Zhou thought for a second and suddenly asked, "What about the antibody extracts? Do we have them in our laboratory?"

Professor Liu pointed at a sealed glass bottle on the table.

"It's right here... Why?"

Lu Zhou: "Can I take a copy to do some research on my own?"

Professor Liu looked at Lu Zhou weirdly and said, “You can... But I don’t think there is a point.”

He believed in Lu Zhou’s research abilities, but this just didn’t make sense.

This was only a metabolite extract; it didn’t contain any X-0172.

Why does he want to research the metabolite extract?

Lu Zhou casually smiled and replied, “I guess we’ll find out. You never know.”

Chapter 809: Professor Z?

The ability to eliminate spores had always been the most important indicator for measuring various disinfection and sterilization methods.

The world leader in this area was probably the German company Oxytech. Their vaccine bactericidal disinfectant used in vaccine production was the world’s most powerful spores disinfectant. Its main component was hydrogen peroxide.

After the X-0172 bacterial invasion was discovered, a batch of a customized version of this type of antiseptic was imported to the Moon Palace. However, this antiseptic was only for sterilizing surfaces; it couldn’t be used on human beings.

The Moon Palace didn’t know what to do with the parasitic spores.

So far, it seemed like the research was in a hiatus.

Lu Zhou felt like if he didn’t do something now, nothing would get done.

With the metabolite extract from Professor Liu, Lu Zhou went to the third level underground laboratory at the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study.

Lu Zhou sat at his desk and placed the glass test tube containing the metabolite extract on the corner of his desk. He found the research paper published by the Moon Palace research team and read it for a while. He finally sighed.

“Unfortunately, biology is not my area of expertise. I can’t help even if I want to.

“Does that mean I have to ask the system for help?”

Lu Zhou looked at the reagent on the table and pondered for a moment. He then closed his eyes.

“System, is there any way to kill the X-0172 spores.”

He opened his eyes and saw a shining blue dialog box in front of his eyes.

[Solution for removing X-0172 parasitic bacteria from the human body.

[Required general points: 10,000 points]

“Ten thousand points?”

Lu Zhou nearly fell off his chair.

If he recalled correctly, he only had 4,835 general points.

He started to have doubts about his life.

Is this bacterium that hard to deal with?

I’ve saved up so many general points over the years, but it’s still not enough...

Wait a minute...

Lu Zhou suddenly remembered something, and he patted his head.

“Jesus Christ, how did I forget?”

The system’s pricing of “questions” were based on the content of questions. If he asked for the solution to the entire problem, the system would obviously require a lot of general points. However, if he divided the problem into many parts and only asked for the solution to one of the parts, the required general points would be much lesser.

So far, the international research team was bottlenecked on how to kill X-0172 spores.

Therefore, he had to modify his question...

“System, is there a way to prevent X-0172 bacteria from producing spores?”

The reason why the X-0172 bacteria were difficult to kill was that when they were attacked, they would actively produce spores to protect themselves. Even physical countermeasures such as high temperature, high pressure, ultraviolet light, and even radiation couldn't kill the spores, let alone the antibodies produced by the host itself.

Therefore, the key to removing the X-0172 bacteria was to prevent them from producing spores!

As long as the bacterium's active defense mechanism was removed, it would only be a matter of time before the research team found the appropriate antibodies.

After a while, another blue dialog box appeared in Lu Zhou's sight.

This time, the price was much more reasonable.

[Prevent X-0172 bacteria from producing spores.

[Required general points: 2,500]

2,500.

It was roughly equivalent to half of his general points.

Even though he didn't want to, he had to save the future of humanity and complete his urgent mission. Lu Zhou clenched his teeth and pressed the redeem button on the dialog box.

“Redeem!”

The moment his index finger touched the button, a huge stream of information hit his brain like a tidal wave.

Lu Zhou hadn't experienced this sensation in a long time.

It was almost like his brain was being written with memories that did not belong to him.

After half a minute, that strange sensation disappeared.

Lu Zhou sat in his chair for half an hour and finally finished digesting the information in his brain. He opened his eyes and felt enlightened.

“I see...”

Although it might not be possible for him to design the solution, with his level 6 biochemical and Nobel Prize-level chemistry abilities, he could easily understand the solution provided by the system.

Simply put, in order to prevent the X-0172 bacteria from producing actively dormant spores, the system proposed a special pheromone.

This pheromone could deceive the X-0172 bacteria, and it would make them think that they were in a comfortable environment. Thus, the bacteria would no longer produce spores when they were attacked by antibodies.

“We just have to inject the infected person with the special pheromone before taking the antibody. This will make the X-0172 bacteria give up.”

Without hesitating, Lu Zhou immediately opened his laptop and began writing a thesis.

The preparation method for the pheromone that blocked the spores was already provided to him by the system, so there was no need for him to modify anything.

As for the clinical effects of the X-0172 antibodies and metabolite extracts... Lu Zhou cited several papers published by Professor Leslie and Professor Zhao Shuxuan.

Time slowly passed by...

The time on the clock went from morning to afternoon.

Lu Zhou looked at the completed thesis and couldn't help but smile with satisfaction.

He hadn't written a thesis for a long time.

The more influence he obtained, the less he had to personally complete scientific research tasks. Most of the time, his work was focused on high-level planning rather than participating in specific research tasks.

“When this space race is over, I’m going to take a long-deserved break.”

Lu Zhou converted his thesis into PDF format. He was about to submit the thesis when he suddenly remembered something.

Do you think it is suspicious that a mathematician produced such an advanced biology thesis?

Even though this research came from his own brain, he wasn’t the one that came up with the solution. He bought the solution from the system using general points.

If he won a Nobel Prize for this thesis, he would feel a little embarrassed.

Lu Zhou contemplated for a second and had an idea. He removed the author’s name and replaced it with a “Z”.

“Perfect.”

Lu Zhou smiled at the thesis and opened arXiv. He created a new account and uploaded the thesis.

Explaining this would be too cumbersome.

I’ll just post it anonymously.

Chapter 810: Useless International Experts

Moon Palace.

Inside the experiment cabin.

Ian Crawford, a British professor of planetary science and astrobiology at Birkbeck, University of London, sat in a chair and looked outside the porthole. He suddenly smiled and spoke.

“About six years ago, I wrote an evaluation report regarding the economic viability of lunar mining.”

Stephen Parubi sat across from him. Stephen snorted and replied, “Then?”

“Then I published that paper in Natural Geography and sent a copy to UKSA.” Ian Crawford shrugged and continued, “But the UKSA people thought it was a waste.”

Professor Stephen: “Is that not true?”

“Of course not.” Professor Ian looked down the porthole and smiled as he said, “The Chinese are making my thesis a reality.”

“One day, sooner or later, they will find that instead of creating a production line on the Moon, it is cheaper to produce it on Earth, then send it to space,” Professor Stephen muttered. He then said, “I mean, the Chinese aren’t doing anything special, we have similar plans ourselves.”

Professor Stephen was from Stanford University, and as an American, he didn’t like to hear news about China winning the space race. Especially since the Ares program had now become a mess.

Stephen didn’t feel so good. He reached into his pocket and subconsciously tried to grab a cigarette. However, he realized his spacesuit didn’t have cigarettes in his pocket.

“Damn it, can’t a man just smoke a cigarette out here?”

Professor Stephen was about to get up from his chair when he heard someone speak.

“Smoking on the space station will insert at least two million smoke particles into the ventilation system. Smoke when you get back to Earth.”

Professor Zhao Shuxuan said as he floated into the cabin. He grabbed the handrails on the wall while holding the latest experimental report. He said, “Okay, everyone, the break is over. Time is running out, and there are three poor colonists waiting for us to rescue them.”

Professor Stephen didn’t like to hear the Chinese talk about the Ares program’s misfortune, but he didn’t say anything.

The Ares program was indeed a mistake. Ever since the beginning of the sandstorm, the Ares program had brought nothing but trouble. Top astrobology, microbiology, and clinical biology experts were now in the Moon Palace. They were here to do one thing—clean up the mess from the Ares program.

Zhao Shuxuan distributed the copies of the test results and gave a brief explanation of the situation to other researchers.

“The latest test results have come out. The level of antibodies and hypnotic pheromones in colonists No. 1 and No. 2 have decreased. Looking at their heart rates, we can see that their metabolism is gradually returning to normal levels, and they should soon wake up... Do you need some time to look over the test results?”

“No need, I’ve finished reading them.” Professor Stephen put down the test results and adjusted his glasses. He said, “Right now, the problem is not the antibodies or the X-0172 bacteria.”

Professor Ian: “Spores.”

“That’s right, spores.” Professor Stephen nodded and looked around at the other scholars. He said, “We have to get rid of the spores first.”

Professor Leslie asked, “Do you have a good idea then?”

“We have two options.

“First is to find a way to prevent the X-0172 bacteria from forming spores. The second is to find a way to kill all of the spores directly.”

Professor Leslie thought for a second and said, “The second method will be difficult.”

“That’s right. So, for the time being, the most realistic solution is option 1.” Professor Stephen looked around the experiment cabin and said, “In my opinion, the research facility here is simply too poor. I don’t know if our experiments will work in a gravity-free environment. If we want to prevent the X-0172 bacteria from forming spores as soon as possible, we should send the samples to Earth.”

Professor Stephen looked at Professor Zhao Shuxuan when he spoke.

Zhao Shuxuan was the leader of the Chinese researchers. He was also the person in charge of the entire X-0172 bacteria project, and he was the only one who had the right to send the inactivated bacterial samples to Earth.

Of course, Stephen wanted to send more than just inactivated samples. He wanted to find a way to convince the Lunar Orbit Committee to send live X-0172 bacterial spores to his laboratory at Stanford University.

He was certain that this would increase their chances of eliminating the bacteria once and for all.

However, the Chinese researcher didn't grant him his wish.

Zhao Shuxuan shook his head and rejected his proposal.

"That is too risky, we shouldn't even send inactivated samples."

"Nothing is perfectly safe, but we can try our best," Professor Stephen said. "We have live smallpox samples as well, how is this different?"

Zhao Shuxuan paused for a second. He then shook his head.

"I have to think about this."

Professor Stephen sighed.

"We've already thought about this."

...

The research team meeting was over, and they didn't arrive at any constructive conclusions.

It was starting to get late. The experts from various countries finished their dinner and went into their cabin rooms.

Professor Stephen lay in his bed and connected his laptop to the Moon Palace data interface. This way, he could communicate with Earth.

Even though the speed was slow and the delay was high, the bandwidth was enough for him to exchange opinions with expert researchers on Earth.

Professor Stephen logged into the instant messaging software. He was about to contact his assistant, but his assistant happened to call him.

“I’m sorry to disturb you, Professor Stephen, but I have to report something to you.”

Stephen frowned and asked, “Yeah what?”

“Per your request, we searched the database for research on parasitic bacteria spores. We found a paper on arXiv.”

The assistant paused for a second before continuing, “The author claims that... he found a way to inhibit X-0172 bacteria from producing spores.”

“That’s impossible, there are only seven people in the world that can write a thesis like that, and I’m one of them.” Professor Stephen smiled and shook his head. “Send it to my email.”

His assistant nodded.

“Okay, Professor.”

Stephen had no hope for the thesis on arXiv at all.

The only X-0172 samples were on the Moon Palace. If other scholars wanted to do research on the bacteria, they would first have to get their hands on the bacterial sample.

Even though there were twelve inactivated X-0172 samples that were sent to Earth, these were all in the hands of large research institutes. There was no way a large research institute would anonymously publish a paper on arXiv.

Of course, even though he knew the value of the arXiv thesis was zero, he still wanted to see what the author wrote.

After all, it might give him inspiration.

Professor Stephen opened the thesis and began reading it. After a couple of pages, he gasped.

His expression became more and more serious, and he went back to the front page of the thesis and began reading it more carefully.

“What is this... Who wrote this?”

The more he read, the more astonished he was.

His eyes were filled with suspicion, surprise, and disbelief.

Professor Stephen only wanted to know one thing; who wrote this thesis?!

However, when he saw the author’s name, he was stunned.

“Z...?”

Who the hell is Z?

Chapter 811: Amino Acid Derivatives

The next day.

Inside the Moon Palace experiment cabin.

Professor Stephen stood in front of a group of researchers. He had dark circles around his eyes. He raised the thesis in his hand and spoke without energy.

“I’m sure you have read this thesis... I will not repeat what was written in the thesis. Just out of curiosity, I want to know who is Dr. Z?”

The six people in front of him were muddled. Professor Stephen spoke again.

“I’m sorry, but Dr. Z has to be among the seven of us... No, six, because I know I didn’t write it. Ian, was it you?”

Ian looked at the thesis and shook his head. He said, “No, it’s not me, why would I publish an anonymous thesis? This might be a Nobel Prize-level discovery, who wouldn’t want their name attached to this?”

The X-0172 bacterial invasion was considered a global ecosystem crisis. Anyone that solved this problem would undoubtedly be regarded as a hero to all of humankind. They might not win a Nobel Prize, but they would definitely be nominated.

Professor Leslie glanced at Professor Zhao Shuxuan and made eye contact.

“Z... Isn't that the first letter of your name?”

“Forget about it.” Professor Zhao shook his head and said, “It's not me... Why would I stay anonymous?”

Most people would gladly put their name on this thesis. The seven researchers had no idea why this person decided to stay anonymous.

All of the seven researchers in the experiment cabin looked at each other.

Finally, Professor Ian shrugged and looked impatient.

“Okay... It looks like Dr. Z is not with us. Anyone with a sane mind would want their name attached to this thesis.”

“This is ridiculous,” Professor Leslie said in disbelief. “Without having access to the X-0172 bacteria, how the hell did they find out the bacterial spores mechanism?”

The experiment cabin went quiet.

Obviously, Professor Leslie wasn't the only one perplexed by the problem.

“This sounds ridiculous, but I think we can try Dr. Z's method... Our research idea is to find a way to prevent X-0172 bacteria from producing spores, right?” Professor Ian looked at the thesis and shrugged. He then looked at the other researchers in the cabin and said, “It seems like Dr. Z has the same idea as us.”

Zhao Shuxuan nodded and said, “I think it's worth a shot.”

Professor Leslie nodded. “I'm fine with it.”

Professor Stephen leaned against the porthole and said, “I was planning on doing that anyway.”

Professor Ian snapped his fingers.

“Four people agree, more than half the votes... Okay, it's settled.”

...

Normally speaking, repeating an experiment was more difficult than doing the experiment the first time.

A lot of important research results in the field of modern biology came from coincidences. Even if someone ordered the same set of reagents, the same equipment from the same manufacturer, the experiment could still yield different results.

Not to mention that photoshop technology had become more and more powerful. If an undergraduate student couldn't repeat an experiment, they would often just photoshop the experiment images.

Therefore, repeatable experiments had become one of the most important indicators of a valuable experiment.

Professor Stephen believed that Dr. Z's proposal was going to work.

Because the words in this arXiv thesis resonated with his academic mind.

"The X-0172 bacteria can survive in the harsh environment of Mars. It is difficult to kill it using ordinary methods. We have to find its weakness."

"What is its weakness?"

"Being able to survive on Mars gives it an advantage for facing extreme environments, but at the same time, it is also a disadvantage.

"It hasn't fought with other microorganisms for survival, so it must be weak against other microorganisms.

"So the key to solving the problem is to find a bio-pheromone that can deceive the X-0172 bacteria... Jesus, why didn't I think of that?"

Professor Stephen muttered to himself. He stared at the ceiling, lost in his own thoughts.

Actually, this was only a research idea.

If Stephen had more time, he might have come up with the research idea.

But that wasn't the main point.

What was puzzling was that even though Dr. Z thought of this research idea, how did Dr. Z calculate the molecular formula of the amino acid derivative that blocked the formation of the X-0172 spores?

Can this stuff even be calculated?

I thought this had to be deduced from thousands of trial and error experiments?

This was something beyond his understanding of biochemistry.

Professor Stephen looked at the amino acid derivative molecules on the computer screen as he scratched his beard. He had no idea how Dr. Z did it.

Suddenly, the experiment cabin door opened. Zhao Shuxuan floated in.

Professor Stephen looked at Professor Zhao and asked, "What's the result like?"

Zhao Shuxuan: "The three patients have been injected with the synthetic amino acid-like derivatives. We are still observing the effects."

Professor Stephen sighed.

"Looks like we just have to wait now."

Time quickly passed by.

There was no sunrise or sunset in the space station, and time passed by quickly.

Professor Stephen kept yawning. He was starting to get a bit bored when the experimental cabin door suddenly opened.

Before he could say anything, Professor Leslie floated in with an excited look on her face. Leslie spoke.

"We observed an increase in metabolic levels in colonists 1 and 2! The spore content in the metabolites was significantly reduced! No allergic reactions occurred either!"

She took a deep breath, and her voice trembled as she spoke with excitement.

“The amino-acid derivatives work!

“We did it!”

Chapter 812: 27-Day Coma

“Ah...”

His first reaction was pain.

Johnson then felt a cold sensation going from his feet to his spine. He opened his eyes and woke up.

“Sh*t, I’m so cold...”

Johnson felt like his entire body was freezing. He tried to curl into a ball, but he found out that he was tied to the bed.

He used his finger to unlock the nylon straps. He then slowly floated up and sat on his bed.

He noticed the Chinese researcher who injected him with the antibodies was sitting on a bench while watching him.

“Your metabolic level is still at a very low level. It’s normal to feel cold.”

“How long... did I sleep for?”

Zhao Shuxuan looked at the watch on his wrist.

“Around 27 days.”

“27 days?!” Johnson was astonished, and he muttered, “That’s unbelievable.”

Zhao Shuxuan: “Why?”

“When I was in the Marine Corps, I went unconscious for a week due to injuries. I had to lay on my bed for a whole month. I remember when I was finally allowed to get out of bed, all of my muscles felt weak. It took the medical team half a month to help me walk normally.”

Johnson raised his arm and looked at his hands in disbelief as he said, "But right now, I feel like I just had a... nap?"

"It is really weird. Prolonged inactivity should lead to muscle atrophy, but the pheromone secreted by X-0172 bacteria prevents that. The pheromones protect the dormant cells." Professor Zhao Shuxuan looked at Johnson sitting on the bed and said, "We are still researching the specific physiochemical process. If you are interested, you can pay attention to the follow-up research progress."

When Johnson heard about the X-0172 bacteria, he suddenly became tense. He nervously asked Zhao Shuxuan.

"How're the Martian bacteria in my body doing?"

Zhao Shuxuan: "It's been removed."

Johnson sighed in relief.

That knot in his heart was finally untied.

He no longer had Martian bacteria in his body.

He could finally go home.

He realized that his two teammates were still at risk.

After a while, he casually asked.

"What about Julia and Travis? How are my two teammates doing?"

Zhao Shuxuan looked at the watch on his wrist again and said, "Julia woke up 15 minutes ago. She's probably doing personal business in the bathroom right now. As for Travis, his situation is more complex."

Johnson asked, "What's wrong with Travis?"

Zhao Shuxuan had a serious look on his face. After a moment of silence, he spoke.

"The way we remove the X-0172 bacteria is to prevent it from forming spores and then kill the bacteria with antibodies. However, his situation is a bit special because he has a built-in immune response to the X-0172 bacteria. This

means that the spores in his body are always under attack. Even if we injected him with the blocking pheromone, the spores in his body wouldn't become vegetative cells."

Johnson gulped and said, "Which means..."

"He is still in a coma, staying dormant." Zhao Shuxuan patted him on the shoulder and stood up. He said, "Don't worry too much, we will take care of him."

"Thanks."

Johnson smiled weakly.

He wasn't actually worried.

He never liked how rebellious Travis was. He only pretended to care about him because he was the captain. To be honest, he didn't give a rat's a*s on whether or not Travis would wake up.

The Ares program had completely failed anyway.

The medicinal cabin door opened, and a researcher with a beard floated in.

After Professor Stephen saw Johnson on his bed, he immediately floated next to Johnson.

"Oh, I'm so sorry! How are you feeling right now? Is there any discomfort?"

Johnson was bewildered at how enthusiastic Professor Stephen was. He looked at Zhao Shuxuan.

Zhao Shuxuan coughed and said, "This is Professor Stephen from Stanford University, a microbiologist appointed by the US government."

He looked at his watch for the third time.

"I'll leave the room to you guys."

Zhao Shuxuan floated toward the door and left the two people alone.

Johnson watched the cabin door close. He hesitated for a bit before saying, "I'm doing fine... When can we go home?"

Professor Stephen patted him on the shoulder and said, “Soon. The Magpie Bridge is transporting supplies to the Moon Palace. The Chinese promised us that we can use the Magpie Bridge to return to the ISS. Then our own spacecraft will pick us up from the ISS.”

I can finally go home.

This was music to Johnson’s ears.

Professor Stephen looked at how happy Johnson was, and he said, “Speaking of which, what do you think about Mars? Do you want to talk about it?”

Johnson: “Is this part of the medical examination?”

“No, I’m just curious.” Professor Stephen shook his head and asked with a smile, “You are a hero. No one has ever stepped foot on that red desert planet, but you did! I’m curious, how was life on Mars? I heard that you planted potatoes there? Did you use Martian soil? How does it taste, is it delicious?”

Am I a... hero?

Faced with Professor Stephen’s questions, Johnson smiled bitterly.

Correct, they were the first to step foot on Mars, but the Chinese were the ones who brought them back.

This didn’t count as a successful trip.

The New Virginia life support system was being destroyed by the sandstorm. After surviving for a month, they were finally rescued by the Chinese.

Johnson looked outside the window, at the silver-white Moon. He took a deep breath and spoke.

“I wouldn’t want to go there again.

“It was horrible.”

Chapter 813: Dr. Z Saved the World?

[After 27 days in a coma, the two Ares program colonists have recovered!]

[Breaking news! Martian bacteria was defeated by the Moon Palace expert team! Dr. Z provided important clues!]

[...]

The day after Johnson woke up, the Lunar Orbit Committee announced the latest progress on the X-0172 bacterial research to the world.

The world heard that out of the three colonists who fell into a comatose state, two of them had successfully woken up with the infected bacteria removed from their bodies. This caused a huge sensation in the international community.

After Everyone Daily reported the news, the Washington Post immediately covered the news and interviewed the Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, Mr. Eliasson.

A month ago, at the UN emergency meeting, Eliasson read out an initiative calling all countries in the world to deal with this global crisis.

Even though his speech wasn't the main reason why various nations cooperated in this crisis, his speech was still undeniably iconic.

When someone asked him to evaluate the crisis response performance of various countries, Eliasson responded without hesitation.

"This was one of the greatest threats to humanity. We stayed together as a team and didn't give up!"

Reporter: "What do you think about the unsuccessful rescue of the African American colonist Travis?"

Eliasson: "I think there is still hope. I trust our international expert team. They just need a little more time!"

Out of the three patients infected with the X-0172 bacteria, two of them were successfully cured. This was a considerable breakthrough.

According to the Chinese announcement, in a week's time, Johnson and Julia would be transferred from the Moon Palace to the ISS by the Magpie Bridge

spacecraft. The experts from the United Nations would give them a final examination on the ISS before sending them back to Earth.

The Earth's ecological crisis caused by the Mars bacteria had finally come to an end.

During the 27 days, countless people had expressed concerns about the future of the Earth's ecosystem. Finally, all those concerns were gone.

Humans were no longer defenseless against the spores of X-0172 bacteria. Everyone was confident that it wouldn't take long for the last colonist to recover.

All they needed was a bit of time.

In addition to the two colonists who were about to return to Earth, the media also paid attention to "Dr. Z", who played an important role in the entire crisis.

According to Professor Stephen from Stanford University, if it weren't for the pheromone molecular formula and synthesis method provided by this person, they would still be stuck on the X-0172 spore formation bottleneck.

"The results of his research made a huge contribution to the elimination of the Martian bacteria!

"Although I don't know why he chose to remain anonymous, I hope he can stand up and accept his honor!"

Speculations about the identity of Dr. Z were formed.

The media outlets weren't the only ones curious about the identity of this scholar. The general public had also developed a considerable amount of interest in this anonymous scholar.

Interesting enough, if his name were written in the thesis, the general public wouldn't be interested in the thesis author at all. Everyone would forget his name after the media reports.

It was like how everyone knew that a Nobel Prize winner was nutty, but no one would remember every Nobel Prize winner.

But now, even people who weren't in the field of biology were curious about the identity of this author. They wanted to know which country this scholar came from, and why they chose to be anonymous...

Jinling Institute for Advanced Study.

Institute of Biology.

Professor Liu Zuobing handed a report to Lu Zhou and spoke emotionally.

"I can't believe the slow release agent with no side effects is on Mars."

He was referring to the discovery that the pheromone secreted by the X-0172 bacteria when forming spores promoted active dormancy of the host.

Lu Zhou began reading through the report.

According to the experiment data, mice implanted with the X-0172 bacteria would begin to form spores when exposed to a temperature of minus 12-15 degrees. This released dormant pheromones, which placed the host into a dormant state.

When the host had slept for 24 hours, the host would enter a full sleep state. During this state, the host's metabolic levels would drop to extremely low levels. This ensured that the host would retain normal cell structure. The host's vegetative cells could then be rejuvenated at a later date.

Lu Zhou raised his eyebrows. He was intrigued.

Professor Liu noticed Lu Zhou's expression. He smiled and spoke.

"Remember the nematode cell we got a while ago? We plan on inserting the 18S-rDNA gene fragment into the X-0172 bacteria. The X-0172 bacteria will synthesize special proteins that might maintain the morphology of dormant biological cells."

Lu Zhou flipped through the page and casually asked, "Is it fine to add the DNA to the X-0172 bacteria?"

Professor Liu Zuobing: "It is within our risk tolerance range."

"Then we'll go with your plan." Lu Zhou gave the report back to Professor Liu and nodded. He said, "Remember, safety is always the highest priority."

Professor Liu Zuobing solemnly said, “Don’t worry, I’ll be extra careful.”

So far the only place with activated X-0172 bacteria was the Moon Palace. The bacterial samples sent to Earth were inactivated. However, despite this, as the chief designer of the Lunar Orbit Committee, Lu Zhou had some research privileges.

The moment the crisis happened, a live sample of the X-0172 bacteria was sent to the Institute for Advanced Research. The highest level of security was assigned to this sample.

However, they obviously didn’t disclose this to the public.

Professor Liu was about to leave when he suddenly remembered something.

“Oh yeah, that metabolite extract... Did you run out of it yet?”

“I have a little bit left. I put it in my office. If you need it, I can get someone to fetch it for you...” Lu Zhou looked at Professor Liu and asked casually, “What?”

Professor Liu shook his head and spoke.

“There’s a question I don’t know if I should ask.”

Lu Zhou said, “What question?”

Professor Liu Zuobing said, “Do you know who Dr. Z is?”

Lu Zhou: “No, why?”

“I’m just asking.” Professor Liu smiled awkwardly and said, “That Dr. Z who posted the thesis on arXiv, is it you...”

Lu Zhou asked, “Do you really think it’s me?”

Professor Liu nodded honestly.

“Generally speaking, very few biology theses are posted to BioRxiv. I rarely hear my colleagues uploading their theses to arXiv... If I recall correctly, arXiv is mainly for physics, mathematics, and computer science theses.”

Not to mention there were only a few people who had contact with the X-0172 bacterial sample. The experts on the Moon Palace said that they did not write the thesis themselves. The Jinling Institute for Advanced Study was the only place on Earth that had access to the samples.

If Dr. Z weren't Lu Zhou, then it would have to be people in Professor Liu's research team...

Obviously, his research team wasn't that nutty. He knew there was no way anyone in his team could write a thesis of this level.

However, he wasn't totally confident in his assumption. After all, Lu Zhou had never published a biology thesis before, and he had never heard of Professor Lu doing any kind of biology research...

Liu Zuobing was a little confused.

Professor Lu stayed awkwardly silent.

Biologists have their own preprint upload site?

They don't post it on arXiv?

*Sh*t, this is my first time hearing about this.*

I should have done more research, this is quite embarrassing.

"Whatever, stop talking about this useless stuff."

Lu Zhou changed the conversation topic and said, "Regardless of who Dr. Z is, we will remember his contribution. If he wants to stay anonymous, we should respect his decision... Also, the X-0172 research team can be disbanded. Merge the research data with the dormancy project team."

Professor Liu immediately said, "There's still one colonizer who hasn't woken up yet."

Lu Zhou: "We've already solved the difficult part. The rest will be handled by the international experts. As for you, you should continue research on human cryonics dormancy."

Chapter 814: Reward for the Urgent Mission?

Even though there was still a colonizer in a coma, the crisis of the X-0172 bacteria was undoubtedly over.

Because they had the pheromone that could remove the bacteria's defense system, the tough spores were no longer an issue.

Two days after the good news traveled from the Moon Palace to Earth, which was the 33rd day of Lu Zhou's mission, Lu Zhou received a pop-up window while he was working at the Jinling Institute for Advanced Study.

[Congratulations, user, urgent mission completed!

[Mission completion details: Recently, humanity has faced its greatest threat. Fortunately, the crisis was avoided. Congratulations on finding a way to eliminate the bacteria. The decisions you make will change civilization...

[Mission evaluation: A+

[Rewards: Experience pack (1-??? experience points), civilization rescuer medal (materialism +10)]

Lu Zhou: "...?"

Maybe because he asked the system for help, or because there was one more infected person, his evaluation was only an A+.

But that wasn't the main part, he didn't care about the S+ evaluation rewards anyway.

What he didn't understand was what the hell was the "civilization rescuer medal"?

He had won many awards over the years, but this was his first time winning an award from the system.

What does this thing do? Can I exchange it for general points or experience points?

Lu Zhou was muddled. He opened his inventory and saw the medal quietly lying there.

A circle of golden stars wrapped around the medal. It floated above an inverted triangle metal base, as if there was some kind of magnetic force.

The medal also had a red and blue ribbon attached to it. Even though Lu Zhou didn't know what material the ribbon was made of, it looked extravagant.

“Magnetic levitation? Or some other kind of force?”

Lu Zhou was curious. He took out the medal from his inventory and played around with it. He then opened the medal instructions.

[The medal is issued by (REDACTED), according to the (REDACTED) convention signed in (REDACTED), this medal is among the highest honors for individuals from low-level civilizations. If immigration channels are open, individuals from low-level civilizations can use this medal to obtain full citizenship from higher-level civilizations...

[Note; This medal has a built-in anti-counterfeit detector. Do not disassemble. Do not scan.]

“I feel like this medal just revealed an extraordinary secret.”

Lu Zhou looked at the medal instructions on his inventory, and he began to contemplate it.

By looking at the sentence, the (REDACTED) words were a subject, an adverbial, and an attributive. He originally thought that this system was probably created by a high-level civilization or institution called “Future”. But now, it seemed like things were more complicated than he had thought.

After pondering for a while, Lu Zhou gave up and shook his head.

Even though he wanted to know what was redacted, the system clearly had a reason for keeping this a secret from him.

So far, it seemed like the system didn't have malicious intentions. The system even wanted to protect him and benefit Earth's civilization.

Maybe the system is waiting for an opportunity?

Lu Zhou believed that once he upgraded all of his subjects to level 10 and unlocked the [Future Era] and [Giant Engineering Structure] missions, more secrets of the system would be revealed to him...

After placing the medal back into his inventory, Lu Zhou reached out and selected another object in his inventory.

After he pressed the “activate button”, a bunch of mysterious stars popped out of the gift bag. Some tiny stars landed on his face, so he took a step back.

However, Lu Zhou soon found out that the stars weren’t made out of anything; it was similar to a holographic projection.

Then, a light blue dialog box appeared on the screen.

[Congratulations, user, 300,000 physics experience points awarded!]

“I completed a biological mission, but I received physics experience points? Is the system hinting at me to study physics?”

Lu Zhou smiled and shook his head. He reached out and tapped the screen.

His new characteristic panel was displayed in front of him.

[

A. Mathematics: Level 8 (774,000/3 million)

B. Physics: Level 7 (313,215/1.2 million)

C. Biochemistry: Level 6 (10,000/600,000)

D. Engineering: Level 5 (10/300,000)

E. Materials science: Level 6 (63,000/600,000)

F. Energy science: Level 3 (50,000/100,000)

G. Information science: Level 3 (3,000/100,000)

General points: 2,335

]

“Mathematics level 8, physics level 7... The next level up requires millions of experience points. It will be a while before I level up again.”

Lu Zhou closed his characteristic panel and looked at his mission panel.

His mission chain was lit up again. He closed his eyes and exited the system.

When he opened his eyes again, he was back in the dean's office.

Lu Zhou leaned back in his chair and rested for a while. He was about to continue working when he suddenly heard a knock at his door.

"Come in."

Professor Liu Zuobing opened the door.

He cheerfully walked into the office while holding an experimental report. He walked toward Lu Zhou's desk and spoke.

"The experiment was successful!

"The 18S-rDNA gene fragment is compatible with the X-0172 bacteria. So far, we have successfully transcribed the special proteins and amino acid derivatives that we need!

"If everything goes well, we should finish this research project in one month!"

Lu Zhou took the experimental report and briefly glanced at it. He nodded with satisfaction.

"Nicely done... You must have worked very hard."

"Not hard at all. This is my research direction anyway. I have to thank you for providing me the opportunity." Professor Liu Zuobing smiled and suddenly remembered something. He said, "Oh yeah, when I analyzed the X-0172 genome, I found something interesting."

Lu Zhou said, "What?"

"How do I put it? Maybe I'm wrong..." Professor Liu said, "This genome gives me a feeling that it didn't come from natural evolution. I'm not sure if it's a coincidence or what."

Not from natural evolution?

Lu Zhou paused for a second. He began to frown.

“Not from evolution? Could it be...”

He suddenly stopped talking.

He instantly realized what could be happening.

Liu Zuobing looked at Lu Zhou and nodded.

“Yeah, it’s almost like it was created manually.”

Chapter 815: Elected for Both

Generally speaking, in order for a species to adapt to changes in their environment, the species would often evolve through reproduction and natural selection.

Because of this, it seemed reasonable that the X-0172 bacteria released spores and pheromones that made the host dormant.

However...

The fact that these two characteristics were contained in the tiny X-0172 bacteria was quite strange.

If it weren’t for Professor Liu, Lu Zhou would have never noticed this.

This was indeed quite a coincidence.

It was almost like...

This bacteria was created to help a certain type of species to survive in harsh climates?

Of course, Professor Liu and Lu Zhou were both just speculating. There was no direct evidence that the genome of this bacteria was artificially modified.

If their hypothesis was correct, then it would mean that millions of years ago, there was a technologically advanced civilization on the fiery red planet.

This would undoubtedly be a huge discovery.

Of course, Professor Liu's hypothesis was merely a guess. There was no way to verify his hypothesis. Lu Zhou wrote the hypothesis down and left it aside.

Verifying one's hypothesis was one of the most important processes in scientific research. He wouldn't discredit Professor Liu's idea, nor would he rush to believe Professor Liu's idea before collecting sufficient evidence.

So far, his "crawler" all-terrain survey vehicle deployed on Mars was investigating the geological environment around New Virginia. If there was a space-age civilization on Mars, there should be some clues...

He set the Mars bacteria matter aside.

The days quickly passed by. The red autumn leaves began to fall off the trees. It was October.

After nearly a year of selection, the 2021 academicians election finally came to an end in October.

After the second round of evaluations was finished, the final selections would be decided by the academicians election committee.

The list of the elected academicians was announced on the official Chinese Academy of Sciences and Academy of Engineering website.

Just like people had expected, the Nobel Prize winner, Fields Medal winner, national scientific research project leader, Lu Zhou, was elected into both academies.

Not only was his elections displayed on the official academy websites, but it was also posted at the Jin Ling University entrances, as well as the front page of the campus news forum. This was great news for the school!

[Congratulations to Professor Lu Zhou for being elected as a member of the 2021 Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Academy of Engineering academicians!]

Ever since the 2000s, Jin Ling University hadn't had any new academicians professors.

But now, Professor Lu from the mathematics department suddenly won two academician titles. This meant it was double the happiness. Many mathematics professors even lectured with smiles on their faces.

After all, Lu Zhou had always been popular at the university. Many professors watched him grow as a student, especially Professor Liu Xiangping who helped Lu Zhou in the mathematical modeling competition. Back then, during the mathematical modeling competition, he could see that Lu Zhou was an extraordinary person.

Now that Jin Ling University had another academician under its belt, its ranking in the Chinese academic community was much higher than before.

For those who wanted to further their academic career at Jin Ling University, Lu Zhou's election was obviously good news.

The professors and scholars weren't the only ones happy for them, even the students were happy as well.

Even though they had heard countless legends of the great Professor Lu before, being selected into two academies... People couldn't help but feel impressed.

There had never been someone who had been elected into two academies at once...

There probably would never be another one.

A female student stood in front of the news bulletin board. She was carrying a stack of books, and she couldn't help but exclaim, "Amazing, Professor Lu is on both academician lists."

"Yeah..." Another female student with bangs nodded and asked curiously, "Oh yeah, what is above academician?"

"Above academician? I don't think that exists... If I recall correctly, academician is the highest academic title in the country. The elections happen every two years, and every academician has to be approved by more than two-thirds of the current academicians. It is one of the hardest titles to gain!"

Normally speaking, it was extremely impressive to gain the title of an academician in your sixties or fifties.

Being able to gain this life-long title in your twenties was never heard of before.

“Life-long title...” The girl with bangs looked at the bulletin board and said, “He won two titles at once. Which meant two-thirds of the Academy of Engineering and Academy of Science academicians voted for him... That is crazy.”

“Of course, it’s insane!” The girl with glasses remembered something. She looked at another girl and quickly said, “Oh yeah, Meng Qi, Professor Lu was your teacher, right? Tell me, what kind of person is he?”

“Oh...” Han Mengqi stared at the bulletin board and said, “What kind of person? He’s always busy, he rarely comes to his office... I’m not sure.”

Obviously, her roommate wasn’t satisfied with this answer. The girl in glasses said, “... But he has taught you before?”

“He did...” Han Mengqi was a little embarrassed, and she said, “He’s an easy-going person?”

Her roommate looked a little disappointed, and she muttered to herself, “Easy going? I thought he would be the cool and calm type... I saw him eating barbecued meat at the cafeteria, but I was too scared to ask for his WeChat.”

Han Mengqi sighed. She twirled her hair and didn’t know what to say.

2021 was nearly over.

She already completed her graduation thesis.

She should be graduating by next summer.

What should I do after I graduate?

Should I continue with academia, or work at my mom’s company?

I don’t want to think about this...

Chapter 816: Class of Youth

Compared to Jin Ling University’s reaction, Lu Zhou himself had a much smaller reaction to his academician elections.

After all, compared to those scholars who had been trying their entire lives to obtain an academician title, this title didn't bring him anything special.

Therefore, when Lu Zhou found out he was elected, he didn't feel anything. He stayed rather calm.

The support and resource he had access to were far beyond what a normal academician had.

Jin Ling University.

Mathematics building office.

Lu Zhou had to deal with his students' theses, so he took time out of his busy schedule and came to Jin Ling University. When he first entered his office, he was shocked by the mess.

He was only gone for a week, he didn't know why his office turned into a storage room.

When Lin Yuxiang saw Lu Zhou, her eyes lit up and she immediately stood up from her desk.

"Professor, you're finally back. There have been countless people looking for you."

Lu Zhou looked at the meter-tall cactus near the wall and couldn't help but ask, "Where did this thing come from?"

Lin Yuxiang looked at the meter-tall cactus and suddenly said, "Oh, Professor Zhang from the physics department sent this here. He told me to say hi to you, and he wished your academic journey would continue to develop further."

There was nothing wrong with this blessing, but it sounded kind of weird to Lu Zhou.

"... Thank Professor Zhang next time you see him." Lu Zhou noticed the vacuum flask on his table and said, "Where did this come from?"

He felt like he had seen this before, but he couldn't remember where. Lin Yuxiang stood up and spoke with a smile.

“Professor Tang gave it to you!”

Lu Zhou finally remembered where he saw this type of cup before.

“He didn’t give me his own flask, right?”

That would be a pretty crappy gift, right?

“Why would you say that, what kind of person gives away a used cup? I think this cup is the same model as the one he uses.” Lin Yuxiang smiled and said, “When he gave you the cup, he told me to tell you to watch out for your health. He told you to stop drinking coffee and drink more hot water.”

Lu Zhou felt pretty warm inside.

He knew a lot of professors at Jin Ling University, but Professor Tang cared about him the most.

Lu Zhou had always been very grateful to the professor who taught him the ropes of mathematics. Even though Professor Tang didn’t help him a lot academically, Professor Tang taught him many lessons outside of academics.

Therefore, every new year Lu Zhou would visit the old man’s home.

Since Lu Zhou didn’t say anything, Lin Yuxiang blinked and asked, “Do you want some hot water?”

Lu Zhou smiled and shook his head. He picked up the vacuum flask and spoke.

“No, thanks. Record the gifts in an Excel spreadsheet, then send it to my email. For the gifts over 500 yuan, send it back to them. For the rest, keep it somewhere else. It is taking up too much space.”

“Ok!” Assistant Lin raised her hand and did a salute as she said, “I got it.”

Lu Zhou sat down at his desk and opened the drawer. He took out a stack of theses and began reading the first one carefully. Even though it was only a master’s thesis, he still had high standards for his students.

After all, he wouldn’t allow a student to graduate with a crappy thesis.

They at least had to have produced a half-decent thesis.

This was beneficial both to Lu Zhou and to the students.

Suddenly, he heard knocking sounds at his door.

Lu Zhou put down his pen and spoke.

“Come in.”

The office door opened, the principal of Jin Ling University, Academician Xu, walked in with a smile.

“Congratulations, Academician Lu! From now on, you are the youngest elected academician in Jin Ling University. I’m sure it will take a long time for someone to break your record.”

“Who knows, we have so many talented young men. Maybe someone will be a better scholar than me in the future.” Lu Zhou smiled and stood up. He made an inviting gesture and said, “Come, sit down.”

“Yeah, thanks.”

The two sat down on the office sofa.

Lin Yuxiang came over with a pot of freshly boiled tea, and she poured both of them a cup.

Principal Xu looked at the rising water vapor and smiled.

“I came here to congratulate you on your two academician elections. I also have something else I need your opinion on.”

Lu Zhou smiled and said, “You’re too polite. If I can help you with anything, just ask me.”

“It’s not something troublesome, but your work impacts our country’s future. I don’t want Jin Ling University to delay any of your work, or else I will have to apologize to the country!”

Principal Xu smiled at Lu Zhou and continued, “Here’s the thing. A while ago, the Ministry of Education came to visit Jin Ling University. I talked with the Ministry of Education director, and we think there is still a lot of room for improvement in the current education system. Therefore, we plan on adding

an accelerated class for majors such as physics and mathematics. This way, we can focus our training on talented students!”

Lu Zhou nodded toward Principal Xu and said, “We should take undergraduate education more seriously. A scholar often comes into contact with the academic world in their undergraduate years. However, we shouldn’t overdo it. Otherwise, the students would be disinterested because of the extra burden.”

Principal Xu nodded and said, “I understand, that’s why we are starting a trial class. If the trial isn’t successful, we will reevaluate our plans!”

“I think it’s a good plan.” Lu Zhou smiled and said, “But I don’t know how I can help.”

Principal Xu smiled and said, “Of course you can help. You are the role model for our mathematics students! I heard that there are people who worship the library seat you used to sit at!”

Lu Zhou coughed and said, “You’re too kind, the students are just exaggerating.”

“They’re not, I’m being serious.” Principal Xu waved his hand and said solemnly to Lu Zhou, “Undergraduate studies are something us old folks aren’t familiar with anymore. We grew up in different times.”

“I hope you can be the chief consultant for the pilot class. It won’t take up too much time, and you just have to provide us with your valuable opinions.”

If it were before, Lu Zhou wouldn’t have realized what was going on.

But now, he realized what Principal Xu was asking. The Ministry of Education probably wanted Lu Zhou to put his name on this program as this would make it easier for the Communist Party of China to approve this program.

However, despite knowing this, Lu Zhou didn’t say anything.

This favor was a piece of cake for him. Jin Ling University, as his alma mater, had helped him both in academia and outside of academia. He should do something in return.

Not to mention this would benefit Jin Ling University students.

Lu Zhou smiled and said, "Piece of cake, I'll gladly be the chief consultant."

Principal Xu smiled brightly.

"The Jin Ling University students will be grateful, God Lu."

Lu Zhou nearly choked on his tea, and he said, "Haha, please don't say that, it's weird enough that students call me that."

Principal Xu smiled and said, "Haha, okay... Oh yeah, speaking of this pilot class thing, we plan on naming it the Nobel Class. What do you think?"

Lu Zhou thought for a second and shook his head.

"I don't think it's appropriate."

"Why?" Principal Xu frowned and said, "Why?"

"The Nobel Prize is a worthy goal young scholars should fight for, but it's not the end of academia. We plan on using this pilot class to train academic talents, so I don't think the students should be brainwashed to think of the Nobel Prize as the ultimate end goal." Lu Zhou paused for a second and said, "After all, I didn't choose to become a scholar because of the Nobel Prize or the Fields Medal. There are other things that are more important."

Principal Xu: "Then what do you think we should call it?"

Lu Zhou thought for a bit and spoke.

"Young scholars are the future of our country. They will be the leaders of the next decades.

"I think that we should cultivate these young scholars by planting a seed in each of their hearts. After that seed grows, they will grow into useful people in academia, civilization, and society!

"Therefore, I think the class should be called the Class of Youth!"

After hearing Lu Zhou's words, Principal Xu went silent for a second.

After a while, he spoke emotionally.

"This is why I needed your help."

He slapped his thigh and nodded.

“We’ll call it the Class of Youth then!”

Chapter 817: Things to Do Before Resigning

Lu Zhou actually didn’t have any extremely high ambitions.

He realized this about himself recently.

In the face of the universe, his influence was ultimately tiny.

He could spend months locking himself in his tiny room, trying to solve an equation or a conjecture by himself. However, for giant system engineering missions, he needed a team of scholars from many disciplines. It was no longer a solo-mission.

Even though he could design the ion thruster propulsion system perfectly, he couldn’t build the propulsion system himself. He needed other people to help him.

If he wanted to have an impact on this world, he needed other people’s help.

As an academic leader, his responsibilities went far beyond exploration and discovery. He was also responsible for guiding the next generation of scholars.

The more he pushed the boundaries of human knowledge, the more he realized how important it was to push human boundaries.

Just like Lu Zhou had expected, a week after he joined the Class of Youth program, the Ministry of Education approved the program.

The Class of Youth was a class that specialized in training academic talents. Second-year undergraduate students would be allowed to apply, and only 30 of the top students would be chosen.

As the chief consultant, Lu Zhou gave a lot of valuable opinions with regard to the training of the Class of Youth program.

He hoped that he could use his experience to guide these young students onto the correct path...

Even though this took up a bit of Lu Zhou's time, it didn't affect his work at the Lunar Orbit Committee.

As October came to an end, good news came from the China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation.

After countless days and months of design and practice, the second component of the Lunar Mining Program, the automated smelting unit, finally went from a concept to reality.

The Long March 5 vehicle sent the automated smelting unit to the cargo bay of the International Space Station. It was then sent to the Moon through the Magpie Bridge.

After a week of hard work, with the help from the Moon Palace staff members, the automated smelting unit finally landed on the Moon's surface. The automated smelting unit was then connected with the already deployed automated mining unit.

Once the automated mining unit was activated, the sharp drill bit began to crush into the titanium ore deposits in the lunar soil. The titanium ores were then sent to the automated smelting unit.

Even though this production line didn't have high efficiency, the high-quality titanium alloy materials were still being produced at a slow and steady rate.

When Lu Zhou looked at the progress of his system mission, he felt quite good. This meant that the system recognized his automated lunar mining facility.

If this trend continued, he should be able to complete this branch mission within a month.

While the branch mission was progressing steadily, the main Control of Earth and Moon mission was also progressing.

In order to cure the colonist who was still in a coma, and to properly preserve and research the X-0172 bacterial samples, the lunar research facility had received fundings from various countries and was about to begin construction.

If everything went according to plan, it should be finished by the middle of next year.

On the other hand, with the installation of several experimental modules and multifunction cabins, the second phase of the Moon Palace came to an end.

China's Moon Palace project was nearly complete, whereas the American's "Lunar Gateway" project had barely begun. Waves of criticism were directed at the Ares program and NASA.

The public was so supportive of the New Virginia colonists, but it became such a disappointment. Even though NASA had accomplished a lot over the past two decades, all of that accomplishment was overshadowed by the failure of the Ares program.

American public figures said that the past 20 years was a complete waste of time.

Ever since the Cold War, they had been slowly losing their advantage in the space race...

The Chinese, on the other hand, didn't care too much about the space race. They were just happy to see their space station orbiting the Moon.

The entire aerospace industry was changing.

It was almost like there was a rocket, pushing the entire industry forward...

It felt like the entire world was evolving...

...

Only three days remained until the Ares program astronauts would return to Earth.

Lu Zhou took a high-speed rail train to Beijing and participated in the final Mars Rescue conference.

After the conference ended, Lu Zhou didn't immediately return to his hotel. Instead, he went to the State Administration for National Defense and handed Director Li a proposal.

“... Plan for the restructuring of the Lunar Orbit Committee?” Director Li saw the proposal Lu Zhou brought over and adjusted his glasses. He asked, “You’re not going to... ditch us, right?”

This happened with the controllable fusion project as well.

After the project was successful, Lu Zhou began working on his next project. Not long after they achieved fusion ignition, Lu Zhou quit his chief designer position.

Lu Zhou looked at Director Li and smiled.

“Not quite. After the lunar research facility is built, I have something important to do. I won’t leave my chief designer position until that important thing is done.”

Director Li sighed in relief and replied, “Sometimes, I’m quite impressed that you’re able to give up power so easily.”

“Yeah...” Lu Zhou smiled and casually said, “At least for me, anything outside of research is mostly a waste of time.”

Director Li: “Then what? After the lunar stuff is over, what do you plan on doing next? The second generation of nuclear fusion? Mars?”

“Neither...” Lu Zhou shook his head and said, “I’ve done enough for the aerospace industry, after that... I think I’ll set some time aside for myself to explore the things that interest me.”

“Oh, I see...”

Even though Director Li didn’t know specifically what Lu Zhou meant, he knew what Lu Zhou was feeling.

He spoke solemnly.

“When you step down from your Lunar Orbit Committee position, if I haven’t retired yet, you can call me if you ever need anything. I’ll do my best to help you.”

Lu Zhou gently smiled.

“I definitely will.”

Director Li: “Oh yeah, can I ask, before you resign... What ‘important thing’ do you plan on doing?”

Lu Zhou smirked and replied, “Remember the lunar engineering conference a year ago?”

“Of course I do.” Director Li smiled and said, “Time really flies by. Before this, we were talking about how to land on the Moon, and now, we’re talking about building houses on the Moon.”

“We can do more than just build houses there. We can also bring lunar resources back to Earth.” Lu Zhou took out a pen and drew two lines on a piece of white paper.

Director Li stared at the two straight lines and squinted his eyes. He was puzzled.

“What is this?”

“This is the last phase of the entire Earth-Moon transport system.” Lu Zhou paused for a second and said, “Remember the mass driver I talked about?”

“It will be difficult to build the mass driver on Earth.

“But we can try building it on the Moon!”

Chapter 818: Local Specialties

The third Monday in October.

This was an extraordinary day for the two space race super countries.

According to the Mars Rescue plan announced in the previous press conference, today was the day the two astronauts would return to their respective countries.

The greatest human rescue in history would finally come to an end.

The two astronauts had suffered greatly over the past couple of months, and they were both mentally and physically exhausted.

After asking the astronauts for their own opinions, Julia, a Dutch citizen, would return to Amsterdam directly on a flight provided by the Dutch government, while Johnson, as an American, would return to his home country on a flight arranged by the White House.

Beijing International Airport.

The Chinese government arranged a grand handover ceremony.

When Johnson stood at the special security entrance, he saw the person who established the rescue plan, the chief designer of the Lunar Orbit Committee—Lu Zhou.

“Thank you.” Johnson trembled as he shook Lu Zhou’s hand. He said, “Thank you for bringing us back from Mars!”

Even though Lu Zhou was probably the biggest competitor to NASA, this didn’t prevent Johnson from giving Lu Zhou the utmost respect and gratitude.

“You’re welcome.” Lu Zhou smiled as he shook this astronaut’s hand. He said, “Come visit China again some time.”

“I will.” Johnson let go of Lu Zhou’s hand and looked at the American diplomat next to him. He took a deep breath and said, “Ok then... It’s time for me to go.”

“Ok, go on.” Lu Zhou waved his hand and said, “Tell Carson I said hi.”

“I definitely will!”

Johnson picked up his carry-on luggage and boarded the plane.

After a while, the hatch was closed, and the flight took off.

The engine roared as the plane disappeared into the skyline.

Lu Zhou looked at the plane fly away and squinted his eyes. He then turned around and was about to leave.

The American diplomat standing next to him smiled.

“Thank you for everything you did for the Americans. This moment will be remembered in history.”

“No need to thank me. Even though we are from different countries, we are all humans.” Lu Zhou shook the diplomat’s hand and said, “We should work as one nation.”

The diplomat smiled.

“We should!”

There was a banquet scheduled after the handover ceremony.

Lu Zhou didn’t like this kind of occasion, so he decided not to attend the Mars Rescue banquet.

As for himself, he returned to his hotel.

In the hotel lobby, Lu Zhou asked to borrow the hotel printer. He told the staff members to send the printer to his room. He then went into his room and took out an unfinished mass driver thesis from his suitcase. He sat at his desk and contemplated it for a while before he began to improve the thesis.

Actually, he had thought about this lunar mass driver idea for a while.

All the way back in 2012, NASA had a similar idea. They even did a technical demonstration, and the relevant theses could be found online.

In theory, the acceleration technology used in this device was similar to maglev trains.

By using a long and narrow track with electromagnetic acceleration, the ore or spacecraft could be accelerated to orbital velocity speeds, then directly “shot” into orbit.

Of course, even though this sounded easy in principle, it was very difficult to execute.

As the chief designer of the Lunar Orbit Committee, Lu Zhou didn’t need to create a detailed drawing of the entire project. Instead, he just needed to conduct an overview assessment of the entire project.

For example, how long should the track be? What was the cost per meter of track length? Would it be technically feasible? What were the risks? More importantly, which crater should they build it on?

Lu Zhou already asked the researchers on the Moon Palace to collect all of the relevant resources.

Because he had a level 5 in engineering, and he was the chief designer of the Lunar Orbit Committee, it wasn't very difficult for him to complete the entire thesis.

Lu Zhou clicked his mouse and pressed the printing option.

Soon after, the printer in his room began to hum and spit out freshly printed pages.

Lu Zhou looked at the newly-printed pages and began double-checking the thesis. He felt a little hungry. Suddenly, he heard knocking sounds at his door. Wang Peng came in while carrying a plastic bag.

"You're still working?"

"Yeah." Lu Zhou put down the thesis, and when he noticed the plastic bag, he asked, "What are you holding?"

"I went to the headquarters in the afternoon, and I brought you back some local specialties."

Wang Peng placed the plastic bag on Lu Zhou's desk.

"Is it Peking duck?" Lu Zhou's eyes lit up, and he said, "Delicious, where is it from?"

"Oh, I bought it from this local shop." Wang Peng smiled and said, "It's not very famous, but I think the flavor is authentic."

"It does smell nice." Lu Zhou opened the plastic bag and took a whiff. He looked at the delicious crispy roast duck and said, "If only there were some beer as well."

Wang Peng, who had just sat down on the sofa, stood up.

"What do you want to drink, I'll buy it for you."

"No, it's fine, I can just call the hotel for room service." Lu Zhou opened the drawer and took out a folder. He placed the freshly printed thesis into the

folder and said, "Rather than buying beer, there is something I need you to deliver."

Wang Peng immediately asked, "Deliver to where?"

Lu Zhou gave Wang Peng the folder.

"Chang'an Avenue.

"You should know who to give it to."

Chapter 819: Who Can Stop Them?

The last part of a journey was always the most difficult.

After more than ten hours of flying, the direct flight from Beijing to America finally landed on the Los Angeles International Airport runway.

The airport had been preparing for this arrival since last night.

China and United States flags were displayed along the airport VIP runway.

Local state legislators, representatives of citizen groups, and White House and NASA officials from Washington stood around the airstair. With media cameras pointed at them, they welcomed their astronaut's return.

"Welcome home, my hero." The vice president shook Johnson's hand and said, "You must have gone through a lot."

"Thanks," Johnson said to the vice president. He spoke in an exhausted voice, "Where is my wife?"

"She is here, your kids are here as well."

The vice president moved to the side.

A beautiful blond-haired child ran into Johnson's arms.

"Daddy!"

“Oh, my pumpkin... Did you miss Daddy?” Johnson said as he rubbed his daughter’s head. A smile appeared on his tired face.

His daughter’s angel-like smile made all of his fatigue disappear.

His wife walked toward him with tears in her eyes. His two other sons were there as well. He gave all of them a hug.

Julia spoke with her husband’s arms wrapped around her.

“You finally came back.”

Johnson’s nose was buried in his wife’s hair. He took a deep breath before speaking with a trembling voice.

“I’m sorry...”

Not far away, the reporters’ cameras captured this touching moment, displaying it on national television.

However, for Johnson, this didn’t matter.

What mattered was that his suffering was finally worth it.

Because he was finally home...

After Johnson let go of his wife, he shook hands with everyone who came to welcome him home.

Even though the Ares program failed, no one blamed the hero who risked his life for the Ares program.

Being able to return from tens of millions of kilometers away was a remarkable thing in itself.

As Johnson sat in the VIP car near the runway, he leaned back in his seat and began to relax. He was waiting for his family to join him, but instead, Director Carson and the vice president got in the car.

The car door closed.

Johnson looked at the vice president sitting across from him and asked, “You plan on sending me and my family back to Arizona in this car?”

“Not quite, we will arrange a hotel in Los Angeles for you first. You will fly home a week after that,” the vice president said. He looked at Director Carson. He then said, “I’m sorry to interrupt your reunion with your family, but Director Carson and I... want to talk about some things with you.”

“Regarding the Moon Palace and Starlight... and everything else you saw.” Carson forced a smile and said, “You know, the things that you couldn’t say using the Chinese communication channels.”

Johnson said, “I don’t think the Chinese would have cared. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have let me come back.”

Director Carson and the vice president looked at each other. They then looked at Johnson.

“Maybe you need some rest? If you do, we can talk about this tomorrow...”

“No need.” Johnson shook his head and said, “Let’s talk about this now, it won’t take long. I don’t want to waste tomorrow discussing this issue.”

“Ok, thanks for your cooperation.” Director Carson gave him an encouraging look and said, “Then... Let’s start with Starlight.”

Johnson nodded and said, “No problem, I can only tell you what I saw... Also, I hope you won’t be too surprised.”

He closed his eyes and began to tap into his memory. With NASA Director Carson and the vice president sitting across from him, he began to speak about his journey back to Earth.

“The Chinese spacecraft is large, and it had two wings and a blue flame at the back of the spacecraft... I think not fire, it might be plasma? When I looked at the spacecraft in my return capsule, it felt like the return capsule was a tiny sailboat sailing next to the giant ship. They easily took in the rescue capsule and provided us with food and water... They even gave us private bathrooms.

“Our Starlight’s cabins were probably intended to be used as storage, but the facilities were quite complete. The most shocking thing was their attitude toward electricity. It felt like there was an unlimited amount of energy on Starlight. No one told us how much electricity or water we could use. Other than restricting us to our rooms during certain hours of the day, there was much more freedom on Starlight. It was almost like a cruise ship.

“The Moon Palace was even more surprising.”

Johnson’s face lit up as he continued, “It’s like a fortress... A castle floating in the sky. The solar panels and heat sinks were like a garden. Any spacecraft seemed tiny compared to the Moon Palace.”

The Moon Palace was obviously more surprising for Johnson.

Over the next ten minutes or so, he described his life on the Moon Palace.

The two people sitting across from him stayed completely silent.

After Johnson finished talking, the inside of the car went silent for a while.

The vice president took a deep breath and took out his glasses. He wiped his glasses with a cloth and spoke with a trembling voice.

“Jesus... That’s incredible.”

If our astronaut is telling the truth...

Then China’s aerospace technology is unimaginably strong!

Johnson had a smirk on his face as he replied sarcastically, “It is indeed incredible...”

He looked outside the car window. When he saw a dome-shaped building nearby, he squinted and asked out of curiosity, “What is that?”

It had been five years since he last visited Los Angeles.

He didn’t remember seeing this strange looking building near the airport.

“That? That is our National Ignition Facility, the Californian ‘artificial sun’.” The vice president smiled and looked at Director Carson as he said, “It’s ok, my friend, there’s no need to be frustrated. Even though the Ares program failed, the federal government’s determination for the space race remains the same.”

“Californian sun... Is that right?” Johnson smiled and said, “By the time we finish building it, they would have built a nuclear fusion device on the moon.”

Even though Johnson didn’t specify who he meant by “they”, it was obvious what he meant.

The vice president was stunned, and he replied, "They are not allowed to conduct nuclear activities on the Moon."

"Maybe..." Johnson said casually, "But if they do, who is going to stop them? Director Carson? The president? The Congressional Budget Office?"

I don't think anyone...

Can stop the Chinese...