

Golden 851

Chapter 851 Press Conference (Part Two)

Furthermore, the crystal skull is a controversial artifact internationally, with some claiming it's a modern forgery and others viewing it as a symbol of Mayan civilization. Even if it were released now, it probably wouldn't have the same sensational impact as Klaus's treasure.

The gold mask, however, is different. As an important part of ancient Egyptian civilization, it can be presented as part of the Krauss Treasure or exhibited as a national treasure, which will surely have a great impact on the world's archaeological community.

"What...what did you say? An ancient Egyptian golden mask?! Cough...cough cough..."

Huangfu Yun was drinking tea when Zhuang Rui's words startled him so much that he swallowed the hot tea in his mouth, choking and coughing repeatedly, his fair face turning red.

It's no wonder Huangfu Yun was surprised. The Egyptian gold mask is one of the most exquisite and precious ancient art treasures in the world, and to this day, it remains a major symbol of Egypt's ancient civilization.

The golden mask is no less significant to Egypt than the long-lost He Shi Bi jade is to China; both bear witness to the most important inheritance of a nation's civilization and represent a country's long and glorious history.

Moreover, to date, only this one gold mask has been unearthed from the Egyptian pyramids, and its artistic and market value is immeasurable.

Compared to the Golden Mask, Captain Klaus's Golden Anchor Treasure is far inferior.

Of course, the golden mask is also part of the treasure, further illustrating just how much wealth those great pirates who roamed the seas centuries ago left for future generations to discover.

"That's right, it's definitely a gold mask from ancient Egyptian civilization, and its exquisite craftsmanship surpasses even the gold mask unearthed from the tomb of Pharaoh Tutankhamun."

Brother Huangfu, you can start preparing now. How do you plan to announce this discovery to the world? I think this will definitely make our museum famous, right?

Huangfu Yun had great faith in Zhuang Rui's professional expertise. After listening to Zhuang Rui's words, he calmed down, pondered for a moment, and then raised his head and said, "Mr. Zhuang, the most important thing now is to strengthen the museum's security. I hope you can allocate more funds for the museum's security upgrades..."

"Brother Huangfu, our current security facilities are already top-notch in the country, so there's no need for further upgrades, right?"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback. He knew that nearly ten million yuan had been invested in security facilities when the museum was first built. Why would it need to be strengthened? Even if the golden mask was priceless, was it really necessary to make such a fuss?

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Huangfu Yun smiled wryly and said, "President Zhuang, you're right. Our museum's security facilities are indeed top-notch in China. Compared to the current exhibits, the security facilities are sufficient. However, with the golden mask, that won't do. We must upgrade them to be world-class!"

Furthermore, the staffing needs to be more optimized. Security personnel should be stationed on the roof of the museum, and the number of patrols outside must be doubled to ensure absolute security...

After listening to Huangfu Yun's explanation, Zhuang Rui realized that the value of the golden mask far exceeded his imagination. The Egyptian Museum in Cairo had invested nearly ten million US dollars in security to preserve the mask, and even so, it had narrowly escaped being stolen by international thieves twice.

In the international art world, there are some billionaires who enjoy collecting the most precious artifacts from major museums. As a result, some thieves specializing in stealing artifacts have emerged internationally, commonly known as international art thieves.

Rare cultural relics such as gold masks and precious oil paintings, which are renowned in the international art market, have always been targets of international art thieves. Zhuang Rui's museum has several Picasso sketches, which are attractive in themselves.

If you add the golden mask and Klaus's treasure to the mix, Zhuang Rui's Dingguang Museum will surely attract the attention of many international thieves.

"How much more money do we need?"

Zhuang Rui asked, "I have quite a few treasures now, but my funds are running low. The 2 billion invested in the uranium mine has almost drained all of my money. I only have a little over 3 million left, which still needs to be used for the daily expenses of the courtyard house and the manor."

"You should ask Yang Jian about that; he's the security director..." Huangfu Yun replied.

"Okay, then call Yang Jian over..." Zhuang Rui nodded and picked up the phone.

...

"Mr. Zhuang, you're back!"

A few minutes later, Yang Jian arrived at the office and was a little surprised to see Zhuang Rui, who was tanned dark. However, he was not as surprised as Huangfu Yun, since he was not as close to Zhuang Rui as Huangfu Yun.

"Sit down, I have something to discuss with you..."

After Zhuang Rui asked Yang Jian to sit down, he explained the whole story and finally asked Yang Jian how much money would be needed to improve the museum's security and make it a world-class museum.

Although Zhuang Rui has no money on hand, as long as he spreads the word, he believes that the gold coins in Klaus's treasure alone will attract the interest of countless people. With hundreds of thousands of gold coins, he should be able to turn over hundreds of millions of funds.

What's more, Zhuang Rui's basement contains gold bars worth hundreds of millions of yuan. These are national reserve materials that can be exchanged for cash at a bank.

"Yang Jian, what do you think about how to strengthen the museum's security? Also, how much funding would be needed?"

In order to showcase the treasure of the great pirate Klaus and this golden mask, Zhuang Rui decided to renovate the museum regardless of cost.

From the very beginning of its construction, Zhuang Rui's goal was to build this museum into a world-class museum like the British Museum.

Picasso's sketches were the first step toward Zhuang Rui's grand goal, and now the Krause Treasure brings the Dingguang Museum one step closer to becoming a world-renowned museum.

Yang Jian had heard Zhuang Rui's words clearly. After pondering for a moment, he said, "Now, several unused exhibition halls need to be equipped with infrared alarm devices. In addition, special anti-theft systems need to be installed on the central air conditioning and exhaust ventilation ducts..."

In addition, the entire museum's electrical system must be completely overhauled to prevent criminals from having an opportunity during power outages..."

Although the museum has a backup generator, it only starts a short time after a power outage. This short time is enough for many clever international thieves to exploit.

Finally, Yang Jian estimated a rough price, which turned out to be nearly 30 million RMB. This only included the hardware facilities and did not include the salary expenses for recruiting security personnel, etc.

Moreover, the museum renovation will take up to half a month, which means that the museum cannot operate normally during this half month, resulting in a loss of several million RMB. However, for Zhuang Rui, this amount of money is nothing.

"Director Huangfu, how much has the museum's revenue been these past few months?" Zhuang Rui is broke now. He should have known better than to invest in African uranium mines. It would probably take at least another year or two for that stuff to turn a profit.

"After deducting employee salaries and routine maintenance costs, we now have 39 million RMB left in the account. Mr. Zhuang, you weren't here for the Chinese New Year this year, so we didn't give out a single penny of holiday bonus..."

Huangfu Yun said half-jokingly that his authority was limited to signing the payroll, while benefits and some other expenses required the boss's approval.

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and said, "How about this, take out three million as last year's year-end bonus, and another thirty million as renovation funds for the museum. Yang Jian, you will be fully responsible for the construction. Make sure it's so watertight that not even a fly can get in..."

"Yes, Mr. Zhuang, please rest assured..." Yang Jian stood up from the sofa.

"Sit down, sit down..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand, gesturing for Yang Jian to sit down, then looked at Huangfu Yun and said: "Director Huangfu, please inform the travel agencies in Beijing that we have business dealings with them that the museum will be undergoing expansion and renovation, and will be closed for half a month starting today..."

"I'll also allocate additional funds for publicity surrounding the unveiling of the golden mask and the Krause Treasure. I want everyone in the archaeological and antique circles of the world to know this news..."

When the Dingguang Museum opened, Zhuang Rui held a national industry conference and launched a professional website that included almost all the top experts in the country. The Dingguang Museum's reputation is now approaching that of some well-known state-owned museums.

This time, Zhuang Rui's ambitions are even greater. He plans to hold a world-class academic conference, inviting renowned experts from around the world to participate and verify the origin of the golden mask. In this way, the Dingguang Museum will surely become famous throughout the world!

"Mr. Zhuang, don't worry, I'll send letters to professional associations in various countries right away, and I'm sure this press conference will be a global sensation!"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's ambition, Huangfu Yun also became excited. Due to China's weakness over the past century, the country has closed its doors to the outside world and rarely communicated with foreign countries. As for some precious cultural relics, they have been exported but never imported.

Therefore, the collections in domestic museums now mainly carry China's five thousand years of history and civilization, and have little connection with international standards. Even the Palace Museum is far from being an international comprehensive museum.

If Zhuang Rui's statement is true, and he can indeed produce the golden anchor and the Egyptian golden mask, then the Dingguang Museum will definitely create an academic sensation in the international scientific research and military circles, and the Dingguang Museum will naturally become a comprehensive internationally renowned museum.

By then, the Dingguang Museum will no longer need to beg travel agencies; they will naturally include it as a key exhibit.

Fame has always been commensurate with income; otherwise, why would celebrities keep creating this or that scandal every now and then? It's just because they're afraid of being forgotten by the public!

Chapter 852 Press Conference (Part 3)

"King Kong, be careful, this has brakes, I've told you so many times..."

At Zhuang Rui's manor, Jin Gang was driving an electric scooter when he crashed head-on into a tree.

This guy got addicted to yachting, and since arriving at the estate, he's fallen in love with electric cars. He removed the roof and has been having a blast every day.

King Kong is a bit stubborn and doesn't know how to brake. Once he gets in, he can't get out. Several times, he's been wandering around the manor for most of the day. Only after the battery runs out does he finally saunter off the car with a smug look on his face.

However, it was clear that King Kong was having a bad day. He had wanted to show off in front of Zhuang Rui, but he ended up being knocked unconscious and his car was wrecked.

"Awooo!"

Jin Gang yelled at Zhuang Rui in dissatisfaction, then lifted the several-hundred-pound electric scooter with both hands and forcefully put it back in its original position. This was a good habit that Zhuang Rui had taught him: put things back where they came from.

"Alright, stop showing off. You're pretty good, okay? Go ahead and push my son and daughter around..."

Zhuang Rui laughed and cursed, then handed the cart to Jin Gang.

Upon seeing the two children, Fangfang and Yuanyuan, inside the twin stroller, Jin Gang's movements and facial expression immediately softened. He reached out and pushed the stroller cautiously, afraid of disturbing the two children.

Two little girls, Ya Ya and Nan Nan, followed closely beside Jin Gang, one on each side. Every weekend was the happiest time for the children, because Zhuang Rui would bring them to this place that was completely different from the city.

"How can you be such a father? You've got some nerve..."

Ouyang Wan glared at her son and followed after him. Zhuang Rui was relieved to see King Kong, but she was worried sick. No matter how intelligent King Kong was, it was still an animal. What if it hurt the child?

Zhuang Rui smiled and didn't refute him. King Kong had a special fondness for children; he would immediately become quiet around them. Zhuang Rui trusted King Kong completely.

More than a week has passed since the museum began renovations, and in just two or three days, the renovations will be completed. However, none of this concerns Zhuang Rui. During this time, Boss Zhuang has not even gone to school and has been spending all his time with his family.

Because Ya Ya was in school, the family spent their time in the courtyard house from Monday to Friday. Every weekend, the whole family would come to the manor to stay with King Kong for a few days.

However, according to the security guards, King Kong is not lonely. He spends his days either swimming in the pool or driving his electric scooter around. When he gets really bored, he goes to the security guards to show off his muscles.

After spending some time together, the manor's security guards and staff all grew fond of this docile big guy.

...

"Honey, after Fangfang and Yuanyuan turn 100 days old, I want to take them to Hong Kong to see Grandpa..."

Qin Xuanbing nestled beside Zhuang Rui, happily watching the two little girls playing around their children, and the golden eagle circling in the sky. This was a life she had never imagined before; it seemed like living in a fairy tale.

"Okay, let's go together then..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. Old Master Qin had always treated him well, and he couldn't refuse his wife's request.

When the topic of going to Hong Kong came up, Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered something: his compensation for the private plane crash had been processed, totaling more than 90 million RMB.

With this money, Zhuang Rui commissioned another luxury private jet worth 260 million yuan, but it will not be delivered until six months later.

The main reason Zhuang Rui purchased a luxury private jet that exceeded his budget was due to concerns about aircraft safety.

He planned to hire a flight safety expert to conduct a comprehensive safety inspection of the aircraft every time it was used. Having learned his lesson, Zhuang Rui never wanted a bomb to be planted on a plane again.

As for funding, it shouldn't be a problem in six months. The Myanmar jade mine distributed over 100 million in dividends in one go, and although the *** jade mine is nearing completion, there are still nearly 200 million in remaining funds. Buying an airplane is still an easy matter for Zhuang Rui.

Tom from American Hawker Company made another trip to ***, and Zhuang Rui's large order finally solidified American Hawker Company's decision to establish a branch in China.

After returning, Zhuang Rui contacted the crew and treated them to a meal, since they had gone through thick and thin together.

Whether it was He Shuang, Ding Hao, or the two flight attendants, they were all extremely grateful to Zhuang Rui. If it weren't for Zhuang Rui's extraordinary senses, they would probably have perished in the plane crash by now.

Zhuang Rui originally intended to continue paying their salaries for the next six months, but the group decided to wait until the new plane was purchased before calculating their salaries. The money they had earned was enough to live on in *** for several years.

Zhuang Rui didn't force them. They treated him with sincerity, and he would naturally repay them in the future. Having gone through hardships together, Zhuang Rui felt more at ease using them.

...

Hello, who is this?

Zhuang Rui was chatting and basking in the sun with Qin Xuanbing when his phone suddenly rang.

"Zhuang, this is Ezkener, old friend. I heard you had some trouble recently?"

A voice with a thick London accent came through the microphone.

"Oh, it's an old friend. What made you think of calling me?"

Zhuang Rui was puzzled. Because of Muta, he hadn't publicized the plane crash, so how did Ezkener know? Zhuang Rui didn't want that madman in Africa to connect his son's disappearance with him.

"Hey, old friend, you're being dishonest. Your museum got Klaus's treasure, which you probably obtained through your own exploration, right?"

For some time now, the entire world's scientific and technological community has been completely shocked by a piece of news from China: the Krauss Treasure, dating back six centuries, will be displayed in a Chinese museum.

What's even more astonishing is that among these treasures is a gold mask from ancient Egyptian civilization. According to faxed images received by various countries, this gold mask is even more impressive than the gold mask in the Cairo Museum.

These two bombshell announcements sent the global scientific community into a frenzy, with countless archaeologists and scientists flocking to China.

According to Zhuang Rui's plan, the first step is to hold a press conference, followed by inviting scientific experts from all over the world to conduct an on-site scientific expedition to the Golden Mask and the Klaus Treasure, and finally, to hold a world-class academic symposium. All of this is organized by the Dingguang Museum.

As soon as the news was released, the museum's phone lines were immediately overwhelmed with calls. Experts and scholars from all over the world were asking the museum to send them invitations. Now, it wasn't Zhuang Rui inviting people; instead, those people were shamelessly asking to come on their own.

In addition, those who did not receive an invitation were also scrambling to get one to participate in the academic exchange, because the people invited by the museum were all experts with huge reputations in the scientific research field and billionaires. Being able to participate in this seminar was a symbol of status in itself.

Although Ezkener is a top British ceramics expert, his expertise lies in Chinese ceramics, and he has not invested in museums. Therefore, he was not included in the invitation list when the preparatory group, headed by Huangfuyun, was compiling the list.

However, all of these things were handled by Huangfu Yun, and Zhuang Rui didn't know much about them. Moreover, he had changed his phone number, and Ezkener was the first person to call him because of the announcement of the Klaus Treasure.

"Old friend, I did indeed discover that batch of Klaus's treasure. Are you interested in it too?"

Zhuang Rui breathed a sigh of relief when he heard Ezkener mention the treasure. In this world, every day some people become rich and become billionaires, and every day some people go bankrupt and become penniless.

Although he had acquired a large sum of money, it wasn't exactly sensational news; at most, it would only attract attention within certain circles.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Ezkener half-jokingly replied, "Of course, Zhuang, you know I'm a connoisseur, and Klaus was captured by the British, so of course I'm interested in his treasure..."

But old friend, why didn't you send me an invitation? Is it possible that someone of my status is incapable of attending this grand event?

"Hey, old friend, you must have misread it. If you're already in ***, the invitation will be delivered to your hotel right away..."

Zhuang Rui's ceramics museum was able to open smoothly thanks to Ezkena's help. Without the hundreds of Ming and Qing dynasty porcelain pieces he donated, Zhuang Rui's ceramics museum would not have been able to reach this scale.

Moreover, in the period that followed, the price of Chinese ceramics soared, but Ezkena didn't say anything and maintained a good relationship with Zhuang Rui. In fact, Zhuang Rui owed Ezkena a great favor.

"Zhuang, thank you so much. I think we can meet at this time tomorrow..."

Ezkenar was pleased to hear Zhuang Rui's courtesy, but just as he was about to hang up, he suddenly remembered something and quickly said, "By the way, old friend, there's something I need to tell you. Some people might be unfriendly about the ownership of your treasure..."

"What? I understand. Thank you, old friend..."

Zhuang Rui was taken aback when he heard this. He hadn't expected that someone would actually try to take advantage of the treasure he had obtained from the deserted island.

"Damn it, this isn't the time of the Eight-Nation Alliance anymore. Don't try to take advantage of us and risk getting hurt!"

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui cursed under his breath.

Chapter 853 Ownership (Part 1)

In early April, the spring sunshine was bright and beautiful. The magnolias along the museum's main road were in full bloom, their snow-white blossoms exceptionally beautiful, filling the air with their fragrance.

Early in the morning, the area outside the Dingguang Museum was packed with people, with cameras and microphones everywhere, creating a lively and bustling atmosphere.

These people included journalists stationed in China from various countries and regions around the world, experts and scholars who came from all corners of the world to attend the conference, and even some notorious thieves from international theft organizations who came to scout the location. Their identities were diverse and varied.

The Dingguang Museum has reported to the Ministry of Culture regarding this press conference and the subsequent academic conference. Due to China's weakness over the past few centuries, cultural relics have always been exported but not imported. The fact that the Dingguang Museum now possesses world-class precious cultural relics is of great importance to the country.

This is something worth publicizing. Just a few days ago, the Palace Museum contacted Zhuang Rui, proposing to acquire the two precious cultural relics, the gold anchor and the gold mask, but Zhuang Rui refused.

Are you kidding me? Zhuang Rui risked his life to obtain these few items, and the state wants to take them back with just a word? Zhuang Rui doesn't have such noble awareness. Rather than keeping these treasures in the imperial treasury, he'd rather keep them in his own museum for tourists to admire.

Even when the Palace Museum later conceded and offered to hold a special exhibition for the pirate treasure for a month, Zhuang Rui still refused. He wasn't entirely confident in the Palace Museum's security measures, as the museum's artifacts had been stolen at least five times since the founding of the People's Republic of China.

The leader who had initially approached Zhuang Rui for talks had intended to criticize him and put him in a bad light, but after learning about Zhuang Rui's background, he immediately backed down and began to lavish praise on Zhuang Rui for the profound significance of the academic conference.

For this reason, this press conference was designated as the highest-level event, with a grand scale and involving numerous countries and regions, comparable to a press conference held by the General Office of the State Council.

Outside the museum, more than a dozen police cars and military vehicles were parked, and police officers in uniform and armed police officers with live ammunition were maintaining order.

It's important to understand that with two priceless treasures to be unveiled at the press conference, security is naturally the top priority.

"Mr. Zhuang, there are media reporters from ninety-three countries here today, what a grand occasion..."

Inside the museum's conference room, watching the staff making the final arrangements, Huangfu Yun was somewhat excited. He had organized today's press conference, and there was no doubt that after this conference, the reputation of Dingguang Museum would resound throughout the world.

As the actual manager of the Dingguang Museum, Huangfu Yun later secured a place in the world of museums. With its golden mask and Picasso works, the Dingguang Museum could certainly be considered a world-class museum.

"Brother Huangfu, you're just reading from a prepared statement, but I still have to answer questions from the reporters..."

Zhuang Rui glanced at Huangfu Yun with displeasure, feeling somewhat nervous. He hadn't wanted to appear in public for the press conference, but as the discoverer of the treasure, he was the only one who could answer the reporters' questions; no one else could.

Zhuang Rui was dressed very formally today, not only in a suit and tie, but also with a little makeup done on his face. His originally tanned face became much fairer. Zhuang Rui was worried that if he sweated in his nervousness, his foundation might show through.

Security Director Yang Jian rushed over from outside the conference room and whispered in Zhuang Rui's ear, "Mr. Zhuang, everything is arranged perfectly, ensuring absolute safety..."

"At 9:50, let the media in, and invite the experts attending the academic conference to sit in the main conference room..."

Zhuang Rui glanced at his watch; there were still 20 minutes until 10 o'clock. Holding a press conference and academic meeting inside the museum would pose a significant challenge to the museum's security.

Zhuang Rui originally wanted to arrange the meeting in a conference room of a five-star hotel, but the golden anchor and the Egyptian gold mask were too valuable, and he was worried that something might happen during the transportation. So in the end, he decided to hold the meeting on his own territory.

At 10:00 a.m., the conference room, which could accommodate 300 people, was already packed. The photographers had already set up their cameras and were pointing them at the podium of the press conference.

The two areas covered by red silk and guarded by armed police were particularly noteworthy, as everyone knew they would be the focus of the entire press conference.

Zhuang Rui and Huangfu Yun entered the conference room through the side door. As soon as they sat on the stage, the flashes from the cameras below started going off in a flash, and the blinding light forced Zhuang Rui to squint.

Zhuang Rui was very uncomfortable in this kind of setting, and looked at Huangfu Yun, saying softly, "Let's begin..."

Huangfu Yun, on the other hand, seemed very natural. As a lawyer, he was used to engaging in heated debates, and his previous nervousness had long since disappeared. After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, he first tested the microphone and then began his speech.

"Ladies and gentlemen, friends from the media around the world, it is a pleasure to have you all here at the press conference for the unveiling of the Klaus Treasure."

Now, I will introduce the location of the treasure and how it was discovered. After that, you can ask Mr. Zhuang Rui any questions...

This treasure, belonging to the 13th-century pirate Krauss, was discovered accidentally by our museum's founder, Mr. Zhuang Rui, during an adventure. The treasure includes...

Huangfu Yun recounted Zhuang Rui's experiences on the nameless desert island, based on Zhuang Rui's account. Of course, the existence of King Kong was omitted, and Zhuang Rui's discovery of the treasure was attributed to the two sheepskin scroll treasure maps.

As for the specific sea coordinates of the deserted island, Huangfu Yun was rather vague and did not disclose them. This is because the deserted island is close to the U.S. Virgin Islands, and if it were revealed, it might cause some trouble regarding its ownership.

This decision was made after Zhuang Rui received a hint from Ezkena; he didn't want to get entangled in this issue.

"Alright, I'm afraid everyone here has been waiting impatiently. Now let's take a look at the treasure of the 14th-century pirate king, Klaus!"

After explaining the process of discovering the treasure, Huangfu Yun brought the press conference to a climax. He and Zhuang Rui went to the glass case covered by a red cloth and together lifted the cloth.

There are three display cases in total. All of them are movable display cases with bulletproof sides and alloy bases. The first one contains the Golden Anchor and is also the largest display case.

The gold mask in the second display case was illuminated by spotlights from different angles within the glass case. Under the white, incandescent spotlights, the gold mask appeared even more noble and mysterious.

The third display case contains gold coins and jewelry from the Klaus Treasure Trove. All of these gold coins and jewelry have been professionally cleaned by Zhuang Rui.

The gold coins and jewelry, which were originally dull in color, now shone brightly under the light, displaying a luster that conveyed both the vicissitudes of history and the unique preciousness of gold and pearls.

"Wow!"

"My God, is that all made of gold?"

"How heavy will this thing be? God, tell me..."

"What do you know? Don't be fooled by the size of that golden anchor; in terms of value, it's far inferior to that golden mask..."

"Those gold coins are from before the 14th century, and they must be quite valuable. God, why wasn't this the treasure I discovered?"

For a moment, exclamations of surprise in various languages rang out from the conference room. Many of the reporters attending the press conference were involved in the international art auction industry, and some of them were knowledgeable enough to make an immediate judgment on the value of the items in the display cases.

The unveiling of the Klaus Treasure ignited the enthusiasm of the audience. Hundreds of reporters, no longer paying attention to Zhuang Rui and Huangfu Yun, were all taking photos from various angles.

The magnificent golden anchor and the mysterious golden mask undoubtedly became the main focus of the press conference.

Everyone's face showed a fanatical expression, wanting to get a closer look at Klaus's treasure. If it weren't for the armed police on site, the crowd would probably have already overwhelmed the display cases.

The scene was chaotic for a time, and order was gradually restored after another group of armed police officers entered. As for Zhuang Rui and Huangfu Yun, they were almost pushed out of the crowd just now, and only now did they return to the front of the podium.

"Alright, everyone has seen the treasure of Pirate King Klaus. As for the authenticity of these items, the answer will naturally be given at the subsequent expert academic conference..."

Now it's time for questions. Mr. Zhuang will answer ten questions in total. Please think carefully before asking your questions!

Huangfu Yun coughed a few times into the microphone, and as he spoke, the area gradually quieted down. These reporters were all seasoned veterans, and as soon as Huangfu Yun finished speaking, countless hands were raised high.

"Miss, please ask your question..."

Huangfu Yun glanced around and finally pointed to a blonde woman with a hot figure and glasses. Her professional dress showed off her graceful figure, easily reminding people of a famous Page 3 girl from a certain newspaper.

Zhuang Rui glared at Huangfu Yun, annoyed. This guy's taste is still so tacky. But this woman is really good-looking. I remember in some European and American adult films, women like this usually play the role of office secretaries.

"Mr. Zhuang, I am a reporter from National Geographic. I would like to know if you intend to return the Golden Mask, as a symbol of ancient Egyptian civilization, to the Egyptian government?"

However, the beautiful female reporter's question brought Zhuang Rui to his senses.

Chapter 854 Ownership (Part Two)

National Geographic is the official magazine of the National Geographic Society of the United States. Since its founding in 1888, it has become one of the most successful and widely recognized magazines in the world.

This also makes the magazine a place where photojournalists from all over the world dream of publishing their photos. Does Zhuang Rui not even consider that a journalist who can work in such a place is likely to be all looks and no brains?

"Damn it, I'm not digging up America's treasure, what's it to you?"

Zhuang Rui was extremely dissatisfied with the US's world police tactics. The beautiful female reporter with golden eyes and blue hair seemed to ask a very casual question, but she had set a trap for Zhuang Rui, making it difficult for him to answer.

As one of the countries in the world most severely affected by the loss of cultural relics, China's relevant departments have been negotiating with cultural heritage departments of various countries in recent years to recover cultural relics that were lost a century ago.

Therefore, the reporter's intention in raising this question at this time becomes very sinister. If Zhuang Rui agrees to return the goods, it will be a waste of time and effort, and the Egyptian government will only thank the American reporter.

But if Zhuang Rui disagrees, they can hype it up, saying that the Chinese are unwilling to return national treasures to other countries. When relevant domestic departments try to recover cultural relics in the future, others will definitely use this as an excuse.

"Miss, I've heard that the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is a famous museum on par with the British Museum in London, the Louvre in Paris, and the St. Petersburg Museum in Russia. Is that true?"

Zhuang Rui did not answer the question at first, but instead asked the reporter a question.

"Of course, the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the United States is a place that brings together precious works of art from all over the world. But Mr. Zhuang, this has nothing to do with the ownership of your golden mask, does it?"

The pretty reporter wasn't just a pretty face; she immediately guessed Zhuang Rui's intention and steered the conversation back on track.

"Oh no, no, I've heard that the Metropolitan Museum of Art's prized possession is an entire 2,460-year-old Egyptian tomb. I wonder which is more important, my golden mask or that?"

Furthermore, the Metropolitan Museum of Art also has many works by ancient Chinese artists such as Huang Tingjian, Mi Fu, Li Gonglin, Zhao Mengfu, Dong Qichang, and Fu Shan, right? I'd like to ask, where did they come from? And you... have no intention of repaying them?"

Zhuang Rui's voice was initially very gentle, but towards the end his tone became increasingly louder, adopting a completely questioning tone.

Seeing that the female reporter still wanted to speak, Zhuang Rui continued, "As for that 2,500-year-old Euphronios pottery vase, it seems that you didn't obtain it in a very honorable way either, did you? I ask you, what right does such a country have to criticize the problems of other countries?"

Oh, I've gone off-topic. I haven't answered this lady's question yet. What I wanted to say was that if your country could return the ancient Egyptian tombs, Chinese calligraphy and paintings, and other precious artworks obtained through illegitimate means, I, as a private individual, would be very happy to return this golden mask to the Egyptian government free of charge..."

Zhuang Rui paused here, glanced at the female reporter, and said with a half-smile, "All of you here can be witnesses. What I say will remain valid for the rest of my life!"

The Euphronios vase that Zhuang Rui mentioned is a precious ancient Greek artifact that was acquired by the Metropolitan Museum of Art through irregular means in 1972. Its price was only \$100.

The seller was Robert Hector, wanted by Italian police. For over thirty years, the Italian authorities have demanded that the Metropolitan Museum of Art return the stolen artwork, but the museum has consistently delayed and has yet to do so, resulting in a terrible reputation in the international art world.

Zhuang Rui's meaning is very clear: if I, as a private individual, am willing to endure the loss and return the priceless works of art, then as the questioning party, are you willing to return the precious cultural relics that you have illegally looted from various countries?

Zhuang Rui had essentially turned the tables on the reporter. Not only was she not qualified to make the decision, but even someone who was qualified wouldn't dare to challenge Zhuang Rui anymore.

As a country with only a few hundred years of history, the United States has no history or culture of its own. The collections in their museums are almost all obtained through illegitimate means.

If the Metropolitan Museum of Art were willing to return those artworks, the museum would likely face closure soon.

Zhuang Rui's words silenced the room completely. China is the country with the most lost ancient cultural relics. Which of the national museums to which these people belong does not have illegally obtained Chinese cultural relics?

If we follow Zhuang Rui's line of thinking, then the museums of the Eight-Nation Alliance of that time, and now those of Britain, France, Germany, Tsarist Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Austro-Hungarian Empire (now Austria and Hungary), would probably all be empty.

Of course, some small countries do not have Chinese cultural relics, but they have no conflict of interest with Zhuang Rui, so they naturally will not speak out.

Even the Egyptian journalists remained silent. After all, simply asking for the return of items without any real evidence was not convincing. Zhuang Rui could shut them down with a single sentence: "There are plenty of Egyptian antiques lost in British and American museums. Why don't you go and ask for them back?"

The female reporter blushed deeply at Zhuang Rui's words, but she couldn't refute them. Americans always judge others by their own standards, never considering whether they themselves are clean. This time, she was thoroughly humiliated by Zhuang Rui.

"Alright, I think this young lady is very satisfied with Mr. Zhuang's reply. You can go back and meet with the head of government first. If it can be done as Mr. Zhuang said, we will definitely let everyone know as soon as possible that we have returned the golden mask to the Egyptian government!"

Although Huangfuyun had worked in the United States for many years, he still held the United States in contempt deep down. After a moment of silence, he kicked the injured female reporter hard again.

"Sir, please ask your question..." Huangfu Yun called on another reporter.

"I am a reporter from The Times of London. I would like to ask Mr. Zhuang, in the early 14th century, it was our British and German joint fleet that captured the pirate king Krauss. In other words, Krauss's loot should have been divided between Britain and Germany. I wonder what Mr. Zhuang's views are on this issue?"

The tall, thin reporter with glasses was even more ruthless, directly questioning the ownership of these treasures. These reporters are really shameless, actually bringing this up. If you're so capable, why didn't you find the treasure back then?

"Damn it, couldn't you have found some Chinese journalists to ask the questions?"

Zhuang Rui glanced at Huangfu Yun, clearly dissatisfied with both of these issues. Wasn't this just someone who was annoyed by his friend's success and came to nitpick?

However, the question still needed to be answered. After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui said, "I think if Klaus were still alive in England, I would definitely return this treasure to you..."

Zhuang Rui's words caused a burst of laughter. He was mocking the reporter. More than 600 years had passed. Even if Klaus had not been captured by Britain and Germany, he would have long since turned to dust. His treasure would still fall into the hands of future generations. What did it have to do with Britain?

Zhuang Rui coughed twice, and after the room quieted down, he continued, "To put it bluntly, the world we live in now was changed by pirates."

The early discoverers and explorers of new lands were essentially pirates. Their motivation was nothing more than to divide the spoils and acquire wealth. While there was progress in civilization, it was also accompanied by dirty and cruel killings and plundering.

Because piracy is a private activity, unlike the aggressive plundering of other countries' wealth by some nations, I personally believe that the legacy of piracy belongs to world civilization!

In my museum, there will be a pirate exhibit, displaying the treasures of pirates from around the world, allowing people worldwide to understand the history of piracy and condemn those nations and their actions of plundering other countries' wealth through the seas!

Zhuang Rui was making a veiled attack, also implying that Spain, Portugal, Britain, and other early colonial countries were also included in the criticism.

The actions of these countries at that time were no different from those of pirates. They killed the natives of many African countries and emptied their wealth. These are undeniable facts!

Zhuang Rui's words silenced the room, but applause soon followed. There are very few places on this earth that have not been invaded by colonized countries, and Zhuang Rui's words were quite gratifying.

Only journalists from colonies like Britain and Spain looked embarrassed and unable to refute the claims, because in those days, many pirates were actually soldiers from those countries in disguise.

"Mr. Zhuang, I am the executive director of the World Adventurers' Association. Could you please explain in detail the process of obtaining this pirate treasure? Also, everyone is very curious about where this treasure was discovered?"

Having witnessed Zhuang Rui's quick wit, the reporter stopped pressing the issue of the treasure's ownership.

"No problem, I can reveal the coordinates of the desert island where the Bukraus treasure is hidden."

Furthermore, I personally suspect that the Klaus Treasure is not limited to these items; I also have two treasure maps that can be auctioned off!

Zhuang Rui's words caused a huge stir, making the once quiet meeting room boil over again.

Chapter 855 Flaw

Zhuang Rui was willing to reveal the coordinates of Pirate Island because, shortly before the press conference began, he had already learned that the deserted island did not belong to the Virgin Islands, but was an isolated island located in international waters, belonging to no country.

According to relevant international regulations, wealth acquired in such places belongs entirely to the individual, so Zhuang Rui is not afraid that anyone will bring up the island issue again.

"Mr. Zhuang, are you sure you're not mistaken? We can find the treasure map ourselves, why auction it off?"

Huangfu Yun was unaware of Zhuang Rui's idea beforehand, and was immediately anxious, quickly offering advice.

This treasure map is also part of the pirate treasure. Wouldn't it be a loss for the pirate museum if it were sold? Moreover, according to Zhuang Rui's judgment, there is pirate treasure elsewhere. Wouldn't it be a waste to let someone else benefit from it?

However, Huangfu Yun forgot that he had a microphone in front of him. When he said that, everyone in the room could hear him clearly. However, everyone thought the same as him: only a fool would do something like selling treasure maps.

It's worth noting that just one treasure trove yielded so many world-shaking treasures. According to some estimates, Zhuang Rui's profit this time is at least two billion US dollars.

If there were another treasure, even if it were only one-tenth of the treasure in this one, it would still be a huge fortune of 200 million US dollars, worth exploring for many adventurers.

However, those people didn't know that Zhuang Rui had concealed most of the gold coins. If those gold coins were included, Zhuang Rui's gains this time would be at least four billion US dollars.

"Ahem, everyone, please be quiet for a moment. Let me first talk about the treasure map. I received two treasure maps, and the contents on them were different. I only searched one place and found Klaus's treasure..."

Due to supply issues, I didn't have time to search for the other treasure map. Regarding whether there is treasure in another location, I must first state that I can only guarantee the authenticity of the treasure map, but I cannot be certain that there is treasure there...

Because the preparations for this expedition were inadequate, it was almost a matter of life and death, which had a profound impact on me. I don't want to go back to that place, but I also don't want the treasure to remain buried on the deserted island. That's why I made the decision to sell the treasure map!

Most of what Zhuang Rui said was true. However, whether there was still treasure on that isolated island was certain; there were bird feathers, pearls, and a few loose gold coins, perhaps even a few left. But the items before them were definitely not there.

Zhuang Rui's decision to auction the treasure map was also an attempt to divert public attention, because once the press conference was held, it seemed that the media's attention was focused on him, which was something Zhuang Rui did not want to see.

His expedition was mainly triggered by Muta's planting of a bomb on the plane. Although that guy had already gone to meet Allah, some people might still associate it with him. Zhuang Rui didn't want that African madman to cause him trouble.

Once the treasure map is photographed, the media will inevitably pay attention to the subsequent developments, and the pirate treasures in the Dingguang Museum will also attract attention from all over the world, allowing the photographer to remain behind the scenes.

Whether the person who photographed the treasure map can find the treasure is none of Zhuang Rui's business. Anyway, the map is real. If you find it, you're lucky. If you don't find it, Zhuang Rui has already stated beforehand that he has completely absolved himself of any responsibility.

"Mr. Zhuang, I admire your selflessness, but how can you guarantee that the person who obtains the treasure map will not be disturbed by other factors and will be the first to find the treasure's location?"

You must understand, you're talking about an auction, which means whoever gets this treasure map will have to pay a price..."

The vice president of the Adventurers' Guild raised his question: if Zhuang Rui were to publicly reveal the coordinates of Pirate Island, then anyone in the world could go there to search, and the treasure map would lose much of its significance.

The vice president himself is a successful businessman with a net worth of hundreds of millions. Adventure and treasure hunting are an indispensable part of his life, so he was extremely interested in the treasure map in Zhuang Rui's possession.

Zhuang Rui was taken aback upon hearing this. His decision was made on the spur of the moment, and he hadn't really considered this issue. After thinking for a moment, he replied, "This gentleman is quite right. The auction will take place after the press conference, and I also promise that the coordinates of Pirate Island will be announced three months after the auction..."

As the first guest on that pirate island, to show my sincerity, I will also tell the person who took the picture of the treasure map the original location of the treasure, and allow him to take a picture of the treasure map after the treasure has been unearthed, so that this friend can go and verify it!

However, I must reiterate one point: whether the second treasure map will contain Klaus's treasure is something I cannot guarantee..."

Zhuang Rui's words were indeed very sincere. Announcing the location of the pirate island's coordinates in three months would be enough for the treasure map holder to discover the treasure. Moreover, his willingness to provide the first treasure location also showed that Zhuang Rui had nothing to hide.

"Mr. Zhuang is right. No one can guarantee whether Klaus stored the treasure in two separate locations back then..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the vice president was quite satisfied. He wasn't particularly concerned about whether there was treasure there; what he cared about was the thrill and excitement of searching for pirate treasure.

With Zhuang Rui's announcement of the treasure map being auctioned off as a gimmick, the questions that followed the press conference became somewhat perfunctory.

Half an hour later, Huangfu Yun announced the end of the press conference. Before the reporters could leave, people who had heard that Zhuang Rui was going to auction the treasure map immediately rushed in.

These people are experts and scholars from all over the world who came to participate in this academic exchange conference. Many of them are wealthy individuals, and they all showed great interest in this treasure map, which may or may not contain any treasure.

However, Zhuang Rui first summoned renowned scientific researchers with great international prestige, including Professor Zhou from Peking University, to conduct an appraisal of the two treasure maps in a small meeting.

Zhuang Rui wasn't worried that these people could remember the crooked lines on the treasure map. Even if they did, they wouldn't know the location of the island, so he could still ensure the fairness of the auction.

Without a doubt, after more than half an hour of authentication, the two treasure maps made of parchment were unanimously identified as genuine by the experts, who also signed their names on the authentication certificate.

"This thing is an antique, shouldn't we find a skill to inflate the price?"

Holding the certificate of authenticity and two treasure maps in a box, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but let his imagination run wild.

If it weren't for the fact that the pirate island blocked all modern communication signals, Zhuang Rui would have even wanted to take it over and develop it into a tourist destination.

"Mr. Zhuang, isn't this auction being conducted far too hastily? Ever since you released the news, my phone hasn't stopped ringing; everyone's asking to participate in the auction..."

Zhuang Rui had just stepped out of the small conference room when he was stopped by Huangfu Yun. He was still dizzy from the phone call. Not only people from abroad, but also many wealthy people in China were very interested in this treasure map.

Zhuang Rui glanced around and whispered, "I'm just diverting trouble, aren't I? To avoid people having designs on me. Brother Huangfu, there's a limit to fame; we can't go too far..."

Huangfu Yun was still a little unwilling and advised, "What if there really is a treasure? Wouldn't we be selling it at a loss? President Zhuang, why don't we cancel it and go and explore it ourselves?"

"One shouldn't be too greedy, Brother Huangfu. Let's do as I say..."

Zhuang Rui smiled. No one knew better than him whether there was a treasure, but after hearing Huangfu Yun's words, Zhuang Rui felt a little uneasy, as if he had forgotten something.

"Holy crap, that was a huge problem..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered something, slapped his thigh hard, and quickly called out to Huangfu Yun, who was turning around to arrange the auction, saying, "Brother Huangfu, you're right. Many people don't know about the treasure map now, so we can't maximize the profits. How about this, the treasure map auction will be held a week from now, and it will be hosted by a professional auction company!"

"Tch, doesn't that mean there'll still be an auction? Fine, never mind, I'll go arrange it..."

Huangfu Yun curled his lips. In his opinion, it would be best if Zhuang Rui handed over the coordinates and treasure map to him, and then Director Huangfu would lead the team to carry out another archaeological excavation and exploration that would shock the world's scientific research community!

After Huangfu Yun went out and told everyone about Zhuang Rui's decision, everyone could understand. After all, it was already a rare thing for Zhuang Rui to be willing to put the treasure map up for auction, so it was understandable that others wanted to maximize their profits.

However, no one noticed that Zhuang Rui had already entrusted the academic exchange meeting to his mentor, Professor Zhou, to deal with the experts from all over the world. Zhuang Rui himself had quietly slipped out of the museum and returned to the courtyard house.

"Peng Fei, you almost made a huge mistake by having to make this trip again..."

Upon finding Peng Fei recuperating at home, Zhuang Rui recounted the entire incident, urging Peng Fei to immediately travel to Pirate Island to help him resolve Muta's problem.

Zhuang Rui had meant well by burying Muta on the beach, but the traces of the burial were impossible to miss from the eyes of professional explorers. If Muta's body were dug up, he would probably face accusations of murder.

Zhuang Rui was filled with regret; he wished he had thrown Muta's body into the sea.

"Brother Zhuang, don't worry, I'll take care of it. I'll fly to the Virgin Islands first, then rent a boat and go out to sea. It'll only take three or four days to get this done..."

Upon hearing this, Peng Fei immediately agreed. Neither he nor Zhuang Rui expected that someone else would one day set foot on that mysterious island.

Chapter 856 Reputation

"Take the satellite phone with you and keep in touch with me at all times. Also, have Hao Long accompany you on the way, so they can look out for each other..."

The vast ocean holds many unpredictable dangers, and Zhuang Rui wouldn't have wanted Peng Fei to make this trip again if it weren't for the immense importance of the matter.

"Okay, Brother Zhuang, don't worry, there won't be any danger..."

Peng Fei nodded. This was not the time to show off. Although he had been recuperating for a while, his physical strength had not yet returned to its best. Having someone accompany him would make things much easier.

"Xiao Rui, I couldn't get through to you on the phone earlier. So you're at home?"

While Zhuang Rui was talking to Peng Fei, Ouyang Wan pushed open the door and walked in. She had originally intended to have her godson go find Zhuang Rui, but she did not expect Zhuang Rui to be here.

"Godmother..." Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei both stood up when they saw Ouyang Wan come in.

"Mom, what's up?" Zhuang Rui asked. Naturally, he had to turn off his phone while holding a press conference.

"It's about the white lion. It hasn't eaten since yesterday and won't let us near it. Maybe it's sick. Why don't you go and check on it..."

Bai Shi had lived with Ouyang Wan and the others since he was a tiny child, so he was considered part of the family. That's why Ouyang Wan was a little anxious.

"Okay, I'll go take a look right away. Peng Fei, get ready, we'll leave tomorrow morning..." Zhuang Rui looked at Peng Fei.

"Brother, no need. I'll call Zhang Qian later and leave tonight. This needs to be done as soon as possible..."

Peng Fei shook his head. He knew the status of that terrorist in Africa. If suspicion were really placed on Zhuang Rui, a suicide bombing might occur in the city one day.

"Xiao Rui, what are you and Xiao Fei doing? He's not fully recovered yet, why are you running around again?"

Ouyang Wan looked at her two sons suspiciously, wondering what they were talking about. 060.08

"Mom, it's nothing. He'll be back in a few days. It's business..."

How could Zhuang Rui dare tell his mother about Muta? Although he didn't kill Muta himself, the blame could still fall on him and Peng Fei, especially since Peng Fei had slashed Muta more than two hundred times. If that were to be said, everyone in the yard would be terrified.

Pulling Ouyang Wan to the backyard, Zhuang Rui immediately saw the white lion lying in front of the door. He couldn't help but feel a little guilty. Since returning from the sea, Zhuang Rui had been busy settling King Kong and spending time with his family, and had had much less interaction with the white lion.

On the ground in front of the white lion was a bowl of minced meat mixed with eggs, but the white lion did not seem to have eaten it. Ouyang Wan only discovered it when she came to bring food to the white lion.

Although the family members are growing, the white lion, who was the first to follow Zhuang Rui, still holds the highest status.

"Waaah..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui approach, the white lion stood up from the ground, bared its teeth at Ouyang Wan as if warning her, then rubbed its big head against Zhuang Rui's head before lying back down at the front door.

"You brat, why are you showing your teeth to my mom? You heartless wretch, don't you even know who feeds you every day..." Zhuang Rui slapped the white lion on the head in annoyance.

"Woo woo..." After being reprimanded by Zhuang Rui, the white lion's gaze towards Ouyang Wan softened slightly.

"White Lion, what's wrong? Are you sick?"

Zhuang Rui stroked the white lion's big head and used his spiritual energy to groom its body. In his memory, this guy had never been sick and had never missed a meal.

"whimper....."

The white lion let out a comfortable groan, looked back into the house, and let out a low growl, as if telling Zhuang Rui something.

"Where's the snow mastiff? Why isn't it eating?"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback. Ever since they brought Xue'er back from the snow mountain, the white lion couple had always been inseparable. It was quite rare to see the white lion lounging in the doorway, sunbathing by itself.

"Damn, you actually kept it a secret?"

Zhuang Rui scanned the white lion's den with his spiritual energy and discovered that there were several fluffy little lumps under the snow mastiff. He immediately realized that the white lion had become a father.

Tibetan mastiffs are extremely protective of their cubs. Even the owner doesn't dare to approach the mother mastiff during her labor. However, Zhuang Rui didn't care about that. He gave the white lion a hard knock on the head and turned to walk into the room.

"Waaah..."

Upon seeing someone enter, the Tibetan Mastiff, which was lying in its warm nest in the corner, immediately tensed up and let out a warning growl. Not daring to look closer and see that it was Zhuang Rui, it immediately relaxed and lazily lay back down.

"Oh, really, it's a Tibetan Mastiff that gave birth to puppies?"

As Ouyang Wan followed Zhuang Rui into the house, she immediately spotted several puppies lying under the belly of the snow mastiff and excitedly barked.

"One...two...four, Mom, the Tibetan Mastiff gave birth to four puppies..."

Zhuang Rui had Xue'er lift up, and found four little creatures in total. The little creatures that Zhuang Rui was playing with made weak whimpering sounds.

Tibetan Mastiffs usually live in litters of six to eight, but the birth rate of purebred Tibetan Mastiffs is not that high. This litter of four puppies was already a pleasant surprise for Zhuang Rui.

The puppies were all of the Snow Mastiff breed. Because they were newborn, their fur was a bit grayish. As they grew older, their fur would turn pure white. Looking at these tiny creatures, no bigger than the palm of his hand, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but recall the time when he took in the white lion.

"Mom, bring me a basin of warm water, I want to wash them..."

The puppies were still a bit sticky, but after Zhuang Rui used his spiritual energy to cleanse their bodies, they all fell asleep comfortably.

White Lion also entered the house, looking at his children with tenderness in his eyes. Only Zhuang Rui could get so close to the little mastiff. If it were Ouyang Wan, White Lion would not allow it. Whether it is a person or an animal, the love between parents and children is the same.

"Sigh, where am I supposed to find mates for your children in the future?"

Zhuang Rui took the warm water his mother brought and carefully washed the dirt off the little ones before placing them back under their mother's belly. The little ones, awakened from their slumber, hadn't opened their eyes yet, but instinctively found their mother's milk and began to drink.

"Mom, look at these little guys, should we raise them ourselves, or..."

It's estimated that the white lion will give birth to a litter like this every year. If they are kept, he could probably open his own mastiff kennel in a few years. So Zhuang Rui is a little unsure about what to do with these mastiff puppies.

"Xiaojun has been saying he wants one for a while, and Dachuan wants one too, so let's keep the remaining two for ourselves..."

Looking at these fluffy little guys, Ouyang Wan also liked them very much. If her nephew hadn't asked, she wouldn't have been willing to give them to them.

"Well, these two guys certainly know how to take advantage..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. If he were to sell such a small Tibetan Mastiff, he would ask for at least ten million if he encountered someone like Fatty Ma. This was the purest second-generation Tibetan Mastiff.

...

Upon hearing the news of the snow mastiff giving birth, Liu Chuan, who had just returned to Pengcheng, rushed back overnight. Ouyang Jun also treasured it dearly, to the point that even the famous Xu was a little jealous, as he had never seen his own son treated with such care.

Since Zhuang Rui wouldn't agree to let them take the puppy for another month, these two guys, in order to deepen their bond with the puppy, actually neglected their son and settled down in the courtyard. Every day, Zhuang Rui's courtyard was a chaotic mess, with eagles flying and dogs leaping about.

Peng Fei, who had left ***, called back on the fourth day. He said he had taken care of the matter and was on his way back. Zhuang Rui could start auctioning the treasure map at any time.

Meanwhile, the academic seminar on the Klaus Treasure, chaired by Professor Meng, was also coming to an end. Zhuang Rui had not participated in it at all; he was still a little lacking in the skills for this kind of purely academic discussion.

However, the significance of this academic symposium is self-evident. The discovery of the golden mask indicates that there are other undiscovered ancient Egyptian tombs besides those in the Valley of the Kings, allowing for a deeper study of the history and culture of ancient Egypt.

Many of those medieval gold and silver coins are rare and unique coins that have never been seen before. Through the study of these gold and silver coins, experts have gained groundbreaking insights into the monetary policies and social structures of various countries in the Western world at that time. In particular, experts who study the ancient monetary systems of various Western countries have benefited greatly.

After a week-long symposium, all the participating experts gave the conference extremely high praise. Some experts even said that the conference solved many mysteries of the Middle Ages and was a major archaeological discovery of historical significance.

Major media outlets around the world, such as The Times of London, National Geographic, and Le Monde, have given it extensive special features. Reports of this major archaeological discovery have appeared in various media outlets in more than 100 countries around the world.

Domestic newspapers spared no effort in giving special reports on the discovery and academic discussions surrounding the treasure, and even CCTV produced a special program about it, giving the Dingguang Museum a lot of exposure.

Among these reports, the phrases that appeared most frequently were "Dingguang Museum" and "pirate treasure".

As a result, the Dingguang Museum, with its golden mask and pirate exhibit, has become one of the most desired museums to visit among foreigners, and its reputation is now on par with the world's most famous museums, such as the British Museum and the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fame naturally brings profits. Riding on the popularity of the movie "Pirates of the Caribbean," almost all Chinese and foreign tourists visiting *** would choose to visit the Dingguang Museum first, bringing them extremely rich returns.

The auction of the treasure map attracted the attention of many explorers from all over the world, and it was eventually won by an American explorer for a high price of nine million US dollars.

Chapter 857 The Plan (Part 1)

The weather in *** was getting hotter day by day. By early June, the temperature had reached over 30 degrees Celsius. Compared to the courtyard houses in the city center, the manor in the lush suburbs was much more popular. Even the White Lion family moved there, preparing for a long stay.

The Dingguang Museum has now become the first large-scale museum in China that comprehensively showcases Chinese and foreign art, attracting tens of thousands of tourists from all over the world every day.

Sketches by Picasso, one of the world's most acclaimed art masters, and mysterious and eerie ancient Egyptian gold masks add many highlights to the Dingguang Museum.

Riding the wave of popularity of the movie "Pirates of the Caribbean," the pirate exhibition hall has become a must-visit for tourists. The magnificent golden anchor, the glittering gold coins, the mysterious treasure map, and the ancient jewels that sparkle with brilliance have deeply attracted the attention of tourists.

Even the Palace Museum, the leading museum in China, has set aside its pride and negotiated with the Dingguang Museum multiple times, requesting to exchange exhibits on a small scale.

The press conferences and academic exchange meetings held by Zhuang Rui have generated huge economic benefits. In just two months from April to June, the number of visitors to the museum reached 2 million, and the direct economic benefits amounted to nearly 80 million RMB.

However, this far exceeded the reception capacity of Dingguang Museum. Zhuang Rui bought the green belt and garden area around the museum, and the second phase of the museum is now under construction.

Of course, Zhuang Rui didn't concern himself with the specifics. With Huangfu Yun and others handling the work, he became a hands-off manager. After resuming his studies, Zhuang Rui returned to school.

However, after this unforgettable island trip, Zhuang Rui changed his research direction. He is now working on ancient Chinese and foreign shipwrecks.

The underwater treasures he saw upon returning home had left Zhuang Rui itching to explore them. If it weren't for the worry for his family, he probably would have already organized a treasure hunt in the high seas near the South China Sea.

Zhuang Rui's classes for this semester have ended, and Ya Ya has started her summer vacation. After discussing it with her mother, they decided that the whole family, including Peng Fei, Zhang Ma, and Li Sao, would come and stay at the manor.

The change of environment delighted the children. The little girl was having a water fight with King Kong in the swimming pool. When she lost, she simply climbed onto King Kong's shoulders, creating a striking contrast between the two.

"Sweetie, slow down! You'll be starting school next year, and you're still running around like that..."

Seeing her granddaughter's condition, Ouyang Wan called out repeatedly by the pool, fearing that King Kong might have hurt the little girl.

"It's alright, King Kong is a good boy!"

The little girl answered crisply, and her praise made King Kong very excited. He picked her up with one big hand and walked her around the pool. The excited little girl shouted.

In one corner of the pool, there was also a family of white lions. The white lions, who always loved the harsh winter, loved to soak in the water in the summer, along with their two-month-old puppies, who were also splashing around in the water.

The naturally quiet Ya Ya watched from the side, and when the two little Tibetan mastiffs were exhausted, she took them to the edge of the pool to rest.

Meanwhile, Zhuang Rui's two children, Fangfang and Yuanyuan, were under a parasol by the pool, stretching their arms and kicking their legs as they watched others play. The two little ones were very lively; if they hadn't been secured to their lounge chairs, they might have climbed into the pool by now.

"My little girl has grown up too..."

Zhuang Rui and Qin Xuanbing sat on lounge chairs by the pool, watching the children play, their faces filled with happiness.

Zhuang Rui's days are very fulfilling now, even though he gets up in the middle of the night to change his child's diapers—that's a real experience of being a father.

Sitting to Zhuang Rui's right are Zhao Guodong and Zhuang Min. Their business in Pengcheng is basically stable now, so Zhao Guodong doesn't need to keep an eye on it all the time. The couple missed their daughter, so they came to *** to stay for a while.

Sitting to Zhuang Rui's left are Peng Fei and Zhang Qian, a married couple. They got married last month, and Zhang Qian also found out she was pregnant. Peng Fei was so excited that he almost made Zhang Qian quit her job.

"Brother Zhuang, can we talk about this? Can you make sure I don't have to study next semester?" Peng Fei said to Zhuang Rui with a bitter face.

"Don't even think about it. You don't even have a bachelor's degree. Do you know how hard it was for me to get you into Peking University?"

Zhuang Rui glared at Peng Fei. This kid didn't need to learn any crooked ways; he could understand them at a glance. He could also speak two or three languages, but he just refused to study. Zhuang Rui was planning to train Peng Fei so that he could manage the museum's affairs in the future.

"Why should I read so many books? I'll be following you anyway..." Peng Fei muttered discontentedly.

"Mom, your godson doesn't like studying. He says studying is useless. Could you please go and talk to him?"

Zhuang Rui ignored Peng Fei, turned around and shouted at his mother, which startled Peng Fei so much that he stood up and plunged into the pool.

Although Ouyang Wan was his godmother, when Peng Fei talked about her, he felt that even if his biological parents were alive, they wouldn't be as powerful as this godmother.

Peng Fei's actions elicited laughter. Zhuang Rui shook his head with a smile, when suddenly the phone that his son was holding like a toy rang.

"Here, play with this..."

Zhuang Rui put a pacifier in his son's mouth and coaxed him to hand over the phone.

Hello, who is this?

Seeing that the phone number was a landline from Hebei, Zhuang Rui felt a little unfamiliar with it. He guessed that it should be the number of Boss Li, who was involved in the black market. Old Li was very good at dealing with people. Some time ago, he sent Zhuang Rui a set of tools for training hawks. Although Zhuang Rui didn't need them, he still appreciated the gesture.

"Brother Zhuang, it's me, Lao Xu, Xu Guoqing!" A hearty voice came from the phone.

Recently, Zhuang Rui has become increasingly mature, and even Huangfu Yun rarely calls him "brother" in private anymore. Apart from some old friends, only Xu Guoqing calls him "brother" all the time.

"Mr. Xu, I called you three times a while ago, but you didn't answer..."

Last month, Zhuang Rui took Qin Xuanbing on a trip to Hokkaido, Yunnan. He saw a ceramics company in Yunnan claiming that it had reproduced ancient porcelain from a thousand years ago. Zhuang Rui suddenly remembered the Cizhou porcelain incident and called Xu Guoqing several times, but the guy was too busy to answer. He was still a bit out of touch with reality, just like before.

"Brother Zhuang, he's out, he's out..."

Xu Guoqing hadn't even remembered Zhuang Rui's phone call. At that moment, he was so excited that he was talking incoherently.

Zhuang Rui frowned and asked, "What came out?"

"I've successfully replicated the Cizhou official kiln porcelain. Although I don't have a real piece to compare it with, the simulation level is over 99% when compared with the broken porcelain fragments unearthed in Cizhou!"

Xu Guoqing was like a child who had scored 100 on a test, reporting his report card to his parents, explaining the whole story in one go.

Although Xu Guoqing was a bit stubborn, he wasn't completely clueless about the ways of the world. Since last year, Zhuang Rui had invested more than 20 million yuan in his laboratory. Xu Guoqing didn't say anything, but he was under a lot of pressure.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui was overjoyed and quickly asked, "How many pieces were successfully fired?"

Cizhou ware holds a pivotal position in the history of Chinese ceramics, especially in folk ceramics. However, during the wars of modern times, the secret recipe for firing the ancient official kilns was lost, causing its transmission to be interrupted, which is a painful thing for many Chinese people.

So even when funds were tightest, Zhuang Rui never cut off Xu Guoqing's research funding. Now that the results have been achieved, Zhuang Rui is naturally happy.

"Brother, this...this...only two exquisite pieces were fired; the others have some flaws. But don't worry, I've now completely mastered the firing temperature, and I believe the success rate for the subsequent firings will be very high..."

Xu Guoqing felt a little embarrassed when he heard Zhuang Rui's question. He had spent more than 20 million yuan and only managed to fire two items. Even if these were genuine ancient ceramics, they would not be worth this price, let alone modern imitations.

"Two items?"

Zhuang Rui pondered for a moment and said, "Xu Gong, you must keep these two porcelain pieces a secret. Don't tell anyone, and don't continue firing them. I'll send a car to pick you up right away. Bring these two porcelain pieces to ***..."

Hearing Zhuang Rui's serious tone, Xu Guoqing quickly replied, "Brother, don't worry, I won't tell anyone. Even those researchers don't know. Don't send a car. Just give me an address, and I'll go there myself with my things..."

"Okay, take care on your journey..."

Zhuang Rui didn't press the issue. Xu Guoqing was over forty years old; surely he knew his way around? After giving the other party the address, Zhuang Rui hung up the phone.

"Honey, what's up?"

Qin Xuanbing saw that Zhuang Rui looked excited after answering a phone call, and couldn't help but ask curiously.

"It's okay, I'm going to play a game of chess. Anyway, I'm just killing time during summer vacation, haha..."

Zhuang Rui chuckled smugly, then stood up, picked up the phone, and dialed a number.

"Mr. Li? This is Zhuang Rui from ***. Yes, it's me. Do you have some time these next few days? I need your help with something..."

Zhuang Rui made this call to Boss Li, who had connections in both the legitimate and underworld circles in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region. The matter he was currently working on could not be accomplished without Boss Li's cooperation.

"Oh, Mr. Zhuang, what are you saying? Just tell me what you need, why are you talking about helping or not?"

Upon hearing that it was Zhuang Rui calling, Li Dali immediately withdrew his large hand, which had been groping a minor celebrity's chest, and stood up. His respect was no less than if Zhuang Rui were right in front of him.

Since that incident in Gao County, Li Dali has actually gotten to know several powerful figures in Shijiazhuang, and his business has been going very smoothly lately.

Chapter 858 The Strategy (Part Two)

Because black market auctions involve dealing with shady characters from all over the country, one wrong move and you're in trouble. Therefore, Li Dali has always been very cautious, and in recent years he's even been planning to go legal.

However, the saying "a man in the martial world is not free to do as he pleases" is not without reason. Even if Li Dali wanted to quit, the brothers who relied on him for their livelihood would not agree. In addition, some of his past deeds were not clean, so Boss Li has always been drifting in this ambiguous state.

But since meeting Zhuang Rui, Li Dali seems to have seen a completely different path. If he can erase the past, his black market auctions might as well become legitimate.

After getting to know several high-ranking officials in Shijiazhuang and Hebei Province, Mr. Li began to ponder the matter. It wasn't difficult to clean up his act and get back on his feet, but he needed to carefully consider the future developments.

During this time, he also came to *** once, hoping to relive the glory of the little star at the club in the suburbs of Beijing, but he never expected that the place had become Zhuang Rui's private estate.

This made Li Dali even more respectful of Zhuang Rui. A high-end club worth hundreds of millions of yuan had been transformed into a private manor in the blink of an eye. This was something that money alone could not accomplish.

So after receiving Zhuang Rui's call, General Manager Li immediately called his driver and drove to ***.

"Mr. Li, please have a seat. Here, have a cup of tea..."

Zhuang Rui called Li Dali in the morning, not expecting him to arrive in the afternoon. Since he didn't want to entertain him at the manor, he simply invited Li Dali to the courtyard house.

Because the matters he needed to discuss with Boss Li were somewhat shady and the fewer people who knew about them, the better, Zhuang Rui arranged for the meeting to take place in a courtyard house.

Zhuang Rui now usually takes Hao Long with him when he goes out, except for very important matters. This has resulted in a shortage of security personnel at the courtyard house. Therefore, Zhuang Rui asked Ouyang Lei for several retired special forces soldiers to serve as security for the courtyard house.

Not only that, the security at the manor has also been reorganized. Now, these two places are Zhuang Rui's foundation, and he cannot afford to make any mistakes.

"Mr. Zhuang, this courtyard of yours is worth a fortune! Tsk tsk, if I could have a place like this in *** City in my lifetime, I would have lived a truly fulfilling life..."

Li Dali sat under a big tree in the central courtyard, drinking the Kung Fu tea poured by Zhuang Rui. His eyes looked around, and he occasionally made "tsk tsk" sounds of admiration. Half of his words were flattery to Zhuang Rui, but the other half was genuine shock.

Since the government liberalized the sale of courtyard houses in 2004, the few remaining courtyard houses in *** City have seen their prices change daily. For a large courtyard house like Zhuang Rui's, with three courtyards and two gardens, you wouldn't even dare to ask the price unless you were worth over a billion yuan.

"Hehe, buying early did give me a bit of a bargain..."

Zhuang Rui smiled upon hearing this; he hadn't expected the domestic real estate market to rise so rapidly in recent years.

Leaving aside the courtyard house, even the property I bought in China Overseas, which was only 10,000 yuan per square meter back then, has now risen to 50,000 yuan per square meter. And it's still a case of having a price but no houses available, with no one willing to sell. As a result, the property manager calls Zhuang Rui every few days, asking him if he's willing to sell.

"That's because you have good taste, Mr. Zhuang..." Li Dali flattered him again without revealing his true feelings.

"Alright, Mr. Li, let's get down to business..."

Zhuang Rui almost got carried away by the flattery, but his expression turned serious as he said, "Mr. Li, I have a few pieces of official kiln porcelain that I'd like to borrow from you. Would that be convenient?"

Given Zhuang Rui's current status, he naturally couldn't directly tell Li Dali, "Brother, I want to set up a scheme and I need your cooperation." Although that was the meaning behind it, he couldn't say it outright.

"Walk around my area?"

Li Dali was stunned upon hearing this, almost doubting whether he had misheard. 69shu.com

Given Zhuang Rui's standing in the antique trade, if he wanted to determine the authenticity of an item, he could make even a fake seem real, without anyone questioning it. These days, experts still have some prestige, unlike in a few years when they'll be commonplace.

Zhuang Rui pointed to the meat and said, "That's right, we need to visit your place. These are several pieces of Cizhou official kiln porcelain from Hebei. The body color is pure, and the quality is excellent..."

"Wait, Mr. Zhuang, please wait a moment..."

Upon hearing about Cizhou official kiln porcelain, Li Dali almost jumped up. As a native of Hebei and someone who dealt in antiques, he was extremely familiar with Cizhou porcelain.

The so-called Cizhou official kiln only existed for a very short period during the Southern Song Dynasty. It is not recorded in the history of Chinese ceramics, so there is a lot of debate in academic circles.

The theory behind its existence is that some exquisitely crafted porcelain fragments made with high-quality materials were found at the excavated Cizhou ancient kiln site, and some of these fragments bear the marks of the Southern Song Dynasty imperial court.

Furthermore, some unearthed Song Dynasty documents also record that Cizhou ware porcelain was presented as tribute to the imperial court, so some scholars say that Cizhou once produced official kiln porcelain.

However, the opposition also has a valid argument: no actual porcelain pieces from the Cizhou official kiln have been unearthed since the Southern Song Dynasty. What is scientific research? It is to verify based on unearthed artifacts. Since there are no actual Cizhou official kiln pieces, it can be said that the kiln did not exist.

Just like Zhuang Rui's Dingguang sword, although it is clearly recorded in historical books, people still consider it a legend because none of the so-called Ten Great Swords still exist in the world.

It wasn't until the Dingguang Sword was discovered and carbon-14 dating confirmed that it was indeed a product from thousands of years ago that the consensus was reached, silencing the doubts from the academic community.

So when Li Dali heard the words "Cizhou official kiln", he immediately jumped up. That kind of thing only existed in legends and no one had ever seen it. Zhuang Rui mentioned several pieces, and they were all in perfect condition. How could he not be surprised?

"President Zhuang, this... this is no joke. If Cizhou official kiln porcelain is unearthed, it will definitely fill a gap in the history of ceramics. This... no one will believe it if you tell them..."

Li Dali didn't even need to look at the actual items to know that what Zhuang Rui had was fake. At that moment, he was thinking to himself, "You're so rich, why do you need to pull out a few fake porcelain pieces to fool people?"

Although Li Dali's words did not explicitly reject the idea, they did express his opinion. It is true that he runs a black market for antiques, and the sources of his goods are not entirely legitimate, containing both genuine and fake items, but the items he photographs are generally reliable.

If Zhuang Rui were to bring the so-called Cizhou official kiln porcelain to Li Dali's black market auction, it would be like his auction house having produced the He Shi Bi jade – probably very few people would believe it.

"Hehe, Mr. Li, I heard that a kiln site in Handan was recently excavated, and a lot of exquisite Song Dynasty porcelain was unearthed. Are you aware of that?"

Zhuang Rui suddenly changed the subject, which made Li Dali scratch his head, as he was a little confused.

Li Dali makes a living from antiques. He knows about ancient tombs and kiln sites even faster than the relevant national departments. However, he really knows nothing about the Handan ancient kiln that Zhuang Rui mentioned.

"Mr. Zhuang, as far as I know, it seems there aren't any in Handan... Oh, I see..."

Who is Li Dali? Having been in the underworld for so many years, he quickly understood Zhuang Rui's words after a moment's thought: Zhuang Rui was setting a trap!

To put it bluntly, Zhuang Rui is setting a trap. He hyped up the discovery of the Cizhou official kiln beforehand, and then used this as a pretext to promote the so-called ancient kiln porcelain. If he plays the trick well, he might be able to sell the item. After all, there are quite a few gullible and rich "pseudo-experts" these days, and Yang's father in Zhonghai is a representative of this type of person.

Li Dali was a little confused. With Zhuang Rui's wealth, was it really necessary to fuss over such a small amount of money? No matter how valuable Cizhou ware was, it couldn't compare to Yuan blue and white porcelain. The Yuan blue and white porcelain in Zhuang Rui's Dingguang Museum had been authenticated as genuine.

Moreover, if this got out, Zhuang Rui's reputation would be ruined. Li Dali weighed the options in his mind and said, "President Zhuang, if we do this, it will attract attention and might draw the attention of some departments. If you're not available right now, I'm quite generous with my resources. Just name your price..."

Even though Li Dali straddles both the legal and illegal worlds, he doesn't accept certain sensitive items and will even report them to the relevant departments. Therefore, the relevant departments turn a blind eye to his black market auction house.

However, if news of the excavation of the Cizhou official kiln were to spread, regardless of whether it was true or false, it would attract the attention of those departments, which is why Li Dali made such a statement.

As for asking to borrow money, Li Dali really had that thought in mind. He would rather lend Zhuang Rui a few million than get involved in this trouble.

"Um?"

Zhuang Rui frowned upon hearing this. He hadn't expected Li Dali to react so strongly, but without Li Dali, this matter would be difficult to handle.

After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui said, "Mr. Li, you must be quite familiar with some people overseas, right?"

"What?!"

Li Dali suddenly stood up. He was frightened by Zhuang Rui today. This guy was not old, but he spoke in a very disjointed way. How did he end up talking about foreign countries again?

It's important to know that Li Dali deals in antiques simply to make money. He's done his fair share of smuggling antiques out of the country. Of course, Mr. Li is very experienced in the ways of the world and is careful enough not to make any mistakes.

However, Mr. Li was feeling guilty. As soon as Zhuang Rui brought up the matter, Li Dali's face turned very ugly. Zhuang Rui's words were meant to warn him.

"President Zhuang, although I, Li Dali, am greedy, I always acquire wealth honestly. I would never sell ancestral artifacts..."

Li Dali replied righteously that he had indeed not done it; it was all done by his subordinates. He spoke with great confidence and conviction.

Chapter 859 The Plan (Part 3)

Li Dali's dealings in cultural relics, at most, would be considered receiving stolen goods. Even if he were implicated and killed, he'd only get a few years in prison, and he could even have his underlings take the blame. (69shux.com)

However, smuggling cultural relics is a much more serious crime. If the amount of money involved is large and the cultural relics are of high quality, it is not impossible for them to be taken out for target practice.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Boss Li immediately became anxious. If he hadn't been afraid of the power behind Zhuang Rui, he would have already turned hostile.

"Mr. Li, you misunderstood me. I meant, could we try another route for these few pieces of Cizhou official kiln porcelain? I've heard that some countries are particularly interested in Cizhou ware..."

When Zhuang Rui realized that Li Dali had misunderstood him, he quickly explained, almost suggesting that Li Dali should invite the *** guests.

Zhuang Rui's "Xuanrui Zhai" wasn't opened for nothing. Although it didn't make a lot of money, it was a place where information was readily available. Any new developments in the antique trade would definitely spread through Panjiayuan first.

Zhuang Rui also learned a lot of inside information from the monkey. The smuggled antiques from China are mainly concentrated in two places. The first is Hong Kong, which serves as a transit point for the goods to be sold to countries such as Europe.

The second place is ***. Since *** itself has little culture and history, it has always coveted Chinese antiques. Every year, the foreign tourists who are found by customs to be carrying the most Chinese cultural relics out of the country are basically *** people.

For example, when Zhuang Rui first participated in the black market for antiques in ***, he encountered a *** person. This was not a coincidence. Many *** people who come to China will use various channels to buy up valuable antiques and bring them back to ***.

In this process, people like Li Dali play a key role; to put it nicely, they are middlemen; to put it bluntly, they are cultural relic smugglers.

"Mr. Zhuang, the Cizhou ware you mentioned, is it the one we had last time..."

Li Dali now understood Zhuang Rui's meaning; so this guy was trying to scam foreigners? However, just to be on the safe side, Li Dali still wanted to figure out the reason behind it.

You see, if something goes wrong, people will only go to him, the middleman, not Zhuang Rui.

Li Dali had been to Xu Guoqing's lab with Zhuang Rui before, and had already guessed that the item Zhuang Rui was talking about must have come from there. He only asked Zhuang Rui to confirm it.

"Mr. Li, with everyone involved in the antique market right now, it's always been booming. And with your extensive network, you could consider making your auction house more standardized and international. There's no need to stick to a small-scale operation in one corner..."

Zhuang Rui did not answer Li Dali's question, but instead said something else.

Zhuang Rui spoke somewhat casually, but Li Dali listened with wide eyes. The prosperity of the antique market brought about the country's attention to it, and relevant regulations were constantly being introduced, making the survival space of the black market for antiques increasingly smaller.

Moreover, tomb raiding organizations are becoming increasingly rampant. Li Dali is always on edge when receiving stolen goods, fearing that there might be something that the state is watching. He knows better than anyone that the reason he is still alive and well is because he has not crossed the line of the law; otherwise, he would have been sent to jail long ago.

Two years ago, Li Dali wanted to quit his job and go ashore, but he didn't have enough connections and couldn't make a proper living after leaving the business. Now that Zhuang Rui said this, it hit Li's weak spot.

"I have a good relationship with Mr. Qian from Kyoto Auction House. I can introduce you to Mr. Li. You could be affiliated with Kyoto and open a branch in Hebei Province, which would be a good idea..."

Zhuang Rui threw out another bait. He knew that talking about national righteousness and friendship with someone like Li Dali was pure nonsense. Without sufficient benefits, Li Dali would never risk helping him to make arrangements.

"Mr. Zhuang, that's wonderful..."

The entry requirements for auction houses are very high, especially for antique auctions, which require relevant qualifications. Li Dali's publicly known auction house in Hebei Province is merely affiliated with a government department and only has the authority to auction related real estate and equipment.

Now that Zhuang Rui has given him an opportunity to enter the antique auction through legitimate channels, Li Dali knows it's bait, but he's determined to swallow it whole.

"Mr. Zhuang, leave this matter to me. I guarantee you'll be satisfied. However, you'll need to give me those two items first, preferably with some supporting evidence. I'll have someone look at them and then release the information..."

Having already washed his hands of the trade and returned to the real world, why would Li Dali care about ruining his reputation in the antique black market? Once he made up his mind, Li Dali didn't hesitate any longer and simply took on all the work of setting up the trap himself.

"Sure, Mr. Li, don't worry. Those items are over 99% similar to the official porcelain from back then. Unless they undergo carbon-14 dating, there will be absolutely no problem..."

Seeing that Li Dali had agreed, Zhuang Rui breathed a sigh of relief. Without someone like Li Dali, he really couldn't have accomplished anything.

"That's good. Don't worry, Mr. Zhuang. Give me a month, and I'll definitely get this auction going. Let's hold a special auction for Cizhou official kiln porcelain..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Li Dali completely put aside his concerns. The items were fake, so even if the relevant departments were watching, he wasn't afraid. At most, it would just be a case of tax evasion, and what could they do to him?

"Okay, Mr. Li, could you please stay at *** for a couple more days? I'll bring the things over to you tomorrow..."

Li Dali was willing to take on everything, which Zhuang Rui was more than happy to do. This Boss Li was a man of the underworld, and he was definitely more professional than Zhuang Rui when it came to setting up a scheme.

After seeing Li Dali off, Zhuang Rui received a call from Xu Guoqing, who then asked him to come directly to the courtyard house.

"Mr. Xu, I recognize this piece. It should be called a white vase with black cloud and phoenix design and four handles, but what was its purpose? Could you please explain it to me?"

The two porcelain pieces placed in front of Zhuang Rui were a white-glazed vase with black floral cloud and phoenix patterns on a white background and four handles. The vase was large, round, and heavy, and was decorated with patterns such as cloud dragons and jade algae.

Zhuang Rui recognized the four-piece bottle, but he couldn't quite understand the other one. This porcelain piece was square with a small opening about the size of a palm, and all four sides were decorated with figures. Zhuang Rui wasn't sure what it was used for.

When Xu Guoqing saw that Zhuang Rui didn't recognize the item, he immediately laughed and said, "Hehe, this is an ancient urinal, specially used by emperors and their concubines for relieving themselves. Cizhou kiln itself produced porcelain for civilian use, so it's quite fitting that I made this..."

Hearing Xu Guoqing's words, Zhuang Rui felt a chill run down his spine. Wasn't this the emperor's toilet? There's a joke in the antique trade that an emperor's toilet is priceless, and that's exactly what this object in front of him was like.

However, if Zhuang Rui hadn't known that this thing was freshly made, he would never have touched it.

After Xu Guoqing finished his introduction, Zhuang Rui carefully examined the two pieces of porcelain. In terms of glaze, body, and firing temperature, it was really difficult to find any flaws in these two pieces of porcelain.

Compared with Cizhou porcelain from folk kilns, these two pieces retain the bold, unrestrained, and free-spirited painting style, while also possessing the meticulous and exquisite characteristics of official kiln porcelain.

"Great, XCMG, excellent craftsmanship!"

If it weren't for the fact that the item had just come out of the kiln, Zhuang Rui would have had a hard time distinguishing the real from the fake with his own eyes, and he couldn't stop praising it.

"Brother Zhuang, I've delivered the goods. Is there anything else I need to do?"

Xu Guoqing had just successfully fired two pieces and was itching to try again, but his mind was already back in the laboratory.

"XCMG, since you're here, why don't you stay for a few days before you leave..." Zhuang Rui said.

Upon hearing this, Xu Guoqing shook his head vigorously, saying, "No, brother. I'm going back now. I have a few unfired paintings on hand, so I don't have time to linger here..."

"Alright, then you can go back. But Mr. Xu, don't release any news about the successful firing of the Cizhou official kiln yet. Don't let even a whisper of it leak out..." Seeing that he couldn't keep Xu Guoqing, Zhuang Rui quickly gave him a few instructions.

Xu Guoqing's laboratory is now receiving a lot of attention from the local government because if they can replicate Cizhou official kiln porcelain, it will fill a gap in the history of ceramics, which is a very meaningful thing.

This matter, when transferred to the local government, could naturally become a political achievement, and Zhuang Rui didn't want those ambitious officials to ruin his plans.

Having previously discussed the foreign exchange earnings from Tang Sancai (Tang tri-colored pottery), Xu Guoqing naturally understood Zhuang Rui's intentions. He immediately replied, "I understand. Even those researchers didn't know about these two porcelain pieces. Don't worry, brother..."

Xu Guoqing went from being so poor that he couldn't even afford electricity to now living a comfortable life with his wife and children. He naturally knows what's good and bad. Besides, this stuff is going abroad to cheat foreigners out of their money, so Xu Guoqing has no qualms about it.

After seeing Xu Guoqing off, Zhuang Rui handed over the two porcelain pieces, as well as several unearthed Cizhou official kiln porcelain fragments that Xu Guoqing had brought, to Li Dali the next day.

As for how to age the material, Li Dali has his own professionals, so Zhuang Rui doesn't need to worry about it at all.

About half a month later, when Zhuang Rui went to Xuanruizhai in Panjiayuan, he heard a message from a monkey: a tomb raiding gang in Handan, Hebei Province, recently unearthed an ancient kiln site in Cizhou and unearthed many valuable items.

According to well-informed sources, two exquisitely crafted porcelain pieces were found at the looted ancient kiln site. After authentication by some folk experts, they are suspected to be official kiln porcelain from Cizhou, Southern Song Dynasty, which was presented as tribute to the imperial palace.

The speed at which gossip spreads in the antique market is no less than that of old women who enjoy prying into other people's private lives. In a very short time, the news of the excavation of Cizhou official kiln porcelain spread throughout the north and south of the Yangtze River and along both banks of the Yellow River.

Chapter 860 Exchange

"Teacher Zhuang, what are you busy with?"

Zhuang Rui was watching King Kong perform in the manor when he suddenly received a call from Fatty Jin, an associate researcher at the Palace Museum.

"Oh, Brother Jin, please don't call me teacher, it makes me feel really awkward..."

For reading Taiwanese novels, choose Super Smooth

Although Zhuang Rui is quite famous in the antique industry and is called a teacher by antique enthusiasts, he still lacks a bit of depth compared to people like Fatty Jin who have formal training.

"Hehe, then I'll just call you 'brother' then. What's up? You caused such a stir a while ago, are you now keeping a low profile?"

Fatty Jin dared not underestimate Zhuang Rui. When the two first met more than two years ago, Zhuang Rui was only a minor celebrity in the jade industry. But two years later, in terms of both career and personal achievements, Zhuang Rui was undoubtedly a leader in the industry.

"Hey, Brother Jin, I'm just lucky. I don't actually know much. I don't want to go out in this heat, so I'm staying home. What can I do for you, Brother Jin?"

Zhuang Rui picked up the little snow mastiff that had climbed onto his lap and handed it to his niece while exchanging casual pleasantries with Fatty Jin.

It has been a full month since he last saw Li Dali. In the meantime, he spoke with Boss Li twice on the phone. Li Dali subtly told Zhuang Rui that three guests from *** had expressed great interest in the two pieces of porcelain.

The black market auction of these two porcelain pieces is scheduled to take place in the next few days. Due to the rumors released by the Cizhou official kiln, the cultural relics authorities have become nervous, so Li Dali is being very cautious. The time and place of this black market auction have not yet been determined.

Zhuang Rui had no intention of participating in this black market auction, so for the past two weeks, he had been spending time with his family at the manor. Although his days were somewhat uneventful, they were quite fulfilling.

"Brother, I have something to tell you. There's a black market auction going on in Langfang recently..." Fatty Jin's voice suddenly lowered, sounding somewhat mysterious.

"Brother Jin, you're not talking about the same kind as last time, are you? I really have no interest in that..."

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment, then laughed. The timing was so coincidental, it must have been organized by Li Dali. It was a good thing that Fatty Jin thought of him.

"Hey buddy, there's something on the black market this time. Have you heard about the Cizhou official kiln porcelain that's been making headlines lately?"

When Fatty Jin saw that Zhuang Rui was unmoved, he became a little anxious. He hadn't called Zhuang Rui for no reason; it was an order from his superior.

"Hey Jin, you're not into porcelain, why are you so concerned about this?"

Zhuang Rui found it rather strange. Fatty Jin was an expert in calligraphy and painting. Although he was no stranger to ceramics, everyone has their own area of expertise. Surely this guy wouldn't change his profession?

"Ahem, brother, I just know you like playing with porcelain, didn't I?" Fatty Jin coughed a few times, a little embarrassed.

"Hey, Brother Jin, we've known each other for quite a while now, so just say what's on your mind..."

Zhuang Rui realized something was amiss; it turned out that Fatty Jin only came to him when he needed something.

"I knew you were straightforward, so I'll just say it directly."

"Well, the boss knows we have a good relationship, and he's thinking... he wants me to discuss with you, my friend, whether... whether we could arrange an exchange of exhibits between the Palace Museum and the Dingguang Museum..."

Fatty Jin still retained some of the aloofness of a scholar, namely, he disliked asking for favors. He stammered as he spoke, indicating that he had been pressured by his superiors.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui frowned. Huangfu Yun had mentioned this matter to him some time ago.

Zhuang Rui felt that the pirate treasure and the golden mask were the Dingguang Museum's most prized possessions, and most visitors came specifically for these items. He believed these artifacts were crucial to the museum's current visitor numbers.

Conversely, what the Palace Museum displays to the public is mostly the buildings of the Palace Museum itself. As for antiques, which are more difficult to preserve, they are mostly stored in the warehouse and rarely taken out. Therefore, Zhuang Rui rejected this suggestion at the time.

Unexpectedly, the other side was persistent and actually sent Fatty Jin to find him indirectly, which made things a bit difficult for Zhuang Rui.

In any case, it was Fatty Jin who introduced the master to him, and the master even inscribed calligraphy for Xuanrui Studio and the museum. This huge favor would fall on Fatty Jin's shoulders.

Furthermore, when Zhuang Rui requested to visit the Palace Museum's collection of fine artifacts, Fatty Jin was very accommodating, arranging not only a tour of the calligraphy and painting collection but also a tour of the ceramics warehouse. He certainly gave Zhuang Rui a great deal of face.

Therefore, Zhuang Rui could refuse those who were leaders without hesitation, but he really couldn't say "no" to Fatty Jin. This is the way Chinese people interact with each other.

"Brother Jin, to be honest, I'm not really keen on this kind of exchange. The Palace Museum is a huge organization with many attractions, but we only have a few highlights. Exchanging them might affect our business..."

Zhuang Rui was telling the truth, but Fatty Jin on the other end of the phone felt a little uncomfortable. Just as he was about to speak, Zhuang Rui's voice came through again: "If your boss brought this up, I definitely wouldn't agree. But since you've brought it up, we can't let you lose face, can we?"

Zhuang Rui's heavy breathing made Jin Pangzi's chubby face turn red and white in turns, but he was secretly overjoyed. Didn't you see? Even a department-level official couldn't get through to Zhuang Rui, but he got it done with just a word from me. What a prestigious thing!

"Brother Jin, which items would your museum like to exchange?"

Zhuang Rui's voice came through the phone, and Fatty Jin quickly said, "Here's the thing, the exhibition exchange is scheduled for about a month. Your Dingguang Sword, Picasso's sketches, Klaus's golden anchor, and the Egyptian gold mask are all exhibits we want to exchange. What do you think, bro?"

"Damn, these are the only few worthwhile items; we need to exchange them all..."

Zhuang Rui cursed inwardly, then asked, "Brother Jin, I wonder which collections the Palace Museum is willing to contribute?"

"Hehe, brother, don't worry. The leader said that as long as you agree to exchange those four items, you can pick any ten items from the Palace Museum..."

Jin Pangzi's words greatly eased Zhuang Rui's resentment. The Palace Museum has many treasures, and if they are really willing to offer their best items, this exchange will not be a loss for them.

After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui said, "The Qianlong-era Golden Cup of Eternal Stability can be one of the collectibles for exchange. In addition, there is Zhang Cheng's carved lacquer plate with cloud pattern from the Yuan Dynasty, the celadon jade incense burner with cloud and dragon pattern from the Song Dynasty, Zhang Zerui's 'Along the River During the Qingming Festival,' Lu Ji's 'Pingfu Post' from the Western Jin Dynasty, and the bronze treasure, the Xueya Square Zun..."

"If the Palace Museum is willing to offer these items, I wouldn't mind if you picked out a few more from our museum..."

"Brother, you're really asking for a fortune! Well, I can't make that decision for you. I'll call you back later..."

Before Zhuang Rui could finish speaking, Jin Pangzi hurriedly interrupted him. Although he had just said that he could pick whatever he wanted from the Palace Museum, these items were all national treasures of the Palace Museum, each a masterpiece among its kind.

The Qianlong-era Golden Cup of Eternal Stability is a representative work of the Palace Museum's cultural relics. When this cup was made, not only were precious materials such as gold, pearls, and gemstones from the Imperial Treasury used, but it was also modified many times until the emperor was satisfied. Therefore, the cup was regarded as a precious ancestral treasure by the Qing emperors.

Zhang Cheng was a master lacquerware maker in the Yuan Dynasty. His surviving works are unanimously considered to be treasures among carved lacquerware, and the Palace Museum has only a few pieces in his collection.

As for Zhang Zerui's "Along the River During the Qingming Festival," there is no need to say more, while Lu Ji's "Pingfu Post" from the Western Jin Dynasty is a representative work of the Palace Museum's calligraphy collection and can be called a priceless treasure.

Zhuang Rui wants to exchange these collections, but even the leaders of the Palace Museum can't make that decision, let alone Jin Pangzi. This matter must be approved by the next higher level of leadership.

"Hehe, let's trade. I won't lose out if we do..."

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui smiled slyly. Who told Fatty Jin to make such a boast, letting him choose whatever he wanted? Zhuang Rui naturally wasn't going to be polite to him.

To Zhuang Rui's surprise, the next day, Fatty Jin called again. Except for "Along the River During the Qingming Festival" and "Pingfu Post" which were not accepted due to their fragility, the Palace Museum agreed to accept the other items.

Out of respect for Fatty Jin, Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement to the exchange of collections. Huangfu Yun was entrusted with handling the specific details. Meanwhile, the Dingguang Museum would host a month-long special exhibition of rare national treasures from the Palace Museum.

"Brother, you have no idea, when I told the boss about your conditions, his face turned green, and he almost fell off his chair, haha..."

Sitting in Zhuang Rui's newly bought Hummer, Fatty Jin smiled happily. He had gotten the job done, and the "deputy" in his title of "deputy researcher" would soon be removed. He was still receiving a government salary and valued his rank.

Sitting in the passenger seat, Zhuang Rui said with a smile, "Alright, Brother Jin, I'm only doing this because of you. If it were someone else with so many treasures, I wouldn't bother with them..."

The driver was Peng Fei. Their destination was the black market for antiques in Langfang. Zhuang Rui hadn't planned to go, but after hearing about it, Peng Fei, who had been idle for several months, insisted on dragging Zhuang Rui out for a stroll.

Zhuang Rui also wanted to see who would buy those porcelain pieces, but he didn't want people to know that he was close to Li Dali, so he contacted Fatty Jin to come and participate in this black market for antiques together.

Langfang is right next to ***. After driving out of the city for more than half an hour, you enter Langfang's territory.

After making a few phone calls, at an intersection, a black Volkswagen sedan pulled up in front of Zhuang Rui's car, blocking the way.