

Middle Age 151

Chapter 151: Man of the World

The next day, Qi Yun received a call early in the morning from the guide Mamati, who said that the personnel registration procedures had been completed and he was calling to confirm the departure time.

Qi Yun thought for a moment, then asked, "Are we setting out from Shanshan County again this time?"

"That's right, entering the desert from there is the closest route and can save a lot of time," Mamati replied.

"Then let's meet up at Shanshan County tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? Okay, Boss Qi," Mamati responded and continued, "This time I've found three experienced helpers; we'll have four modified off-road vehicles in total, so you don't need to prepare any vehicles on your side."

"As for the supplies, I plan to buy most of them in Shanshan County, but some special items can't be bought in small places. You might need to get those from your side and bring them over."

"No problem, I'll follow your lead. Send me a list of things you need me to prepare, and I'll arrange for someone to purchase them," Qi Yun replied.

"Alright, and one more thing..." Mamati paused, then said with a smile, "it's about the cost. You're Brother Hong's friend, and we've worked together before, so I'll be straight with you."

"Since we have quite a few people and vehicles this time, we discussed it and decided on a rate of twenty thousand a day. How do you feel about this price?"

Upon hearing the price, Qi Yun quickly calculated in his mind and thought it was reasonable.

After all, last time it was just him, and it cost five thousand yuan.

Also, this time they would be going deep into the desert, where the risks are high. Plus, Mamati had found three experienced helpers, and the vehicles were all provided by him, which all required costs.

He then readily said, "No problem, it's twenty thousand a day as you said, as long as you ensure the safety of our trip this time."

Mamati was relieved to hear Qi Yun agree to the price and said with a smile, "Boss Qi, don't worry, I've been crawling around in the desert for so many years and have never had any accidents."

Qi Yun nodded, "Hehe, alright, quickly send me the list of supplies I need to prepare so I can have someone go purchase them."

"Okay, Boss Qi, I'll send the list to you right away," Mamati replied quickly.

"Alright, then let's leave it at that for now. We'll meet in Shanshan County tomorrow and discuss the details further then."

"Okay, Boss Qi, see you tomorrow."

After hanging up, Mamati quickly sent over a list. Qi Yun glanced at it; it consisted of some professional outdoor tents and sleeping bags, as well as emergency rescue medicines.

He immediately forwarded the list to Zhong Rui and transferred twenty thousand yuan to him, asking him to make the purchases.

After completing these tasks, he checked his watch.

Since it wasn't time for the hot pot restaurant to get busy yet, he didn't rush to Old Feng's place. Instead, he dialed the number of Ma Baoguo, whom he met yesterday.

"Hello, Mr. Qi, what can I do for you?" came Ma Baoguo's friendly laughter over the phone.

Qi Yun tentatively asked, "Director Ma, I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"Not at all, Mr. Qi! I happen to be off today," Ma Baoguo replied hastily, although whether he was truly off work only he knew.

"That's perfect, I have some free time today too and wanted to invite Director Ma for a meal. Would that be convenient for you?" Qi Yun said with a smile.

Upon hearing this, Ma Baoguo's tone became even more enthusiastic: "Oh my, Mr. Qi, you're too kind! Of course, it's convenient, it's just embarrassing to make you spend money."

Qi Yun responded with a laugh, "Director Ma, you're being too formal. After hitting it off yesterday, I already consider you a friend in my heart."

"It's just nice that we both have time today to grab a meal and have a chat, connect a bit more. Who knows, I might have to bother you often in the future."

After hearing this, Ma Baoguo responded quickly, "Mr. Qi, you're too polite. If you say we're friends, then there's no need to talk about bothering. Your matters are my matters in the future."

"Hehe, alright, then I'll thank Director Ma in advance. Let's meet at two in the afternoon at the same hot pot place as last time," Qi Yun said.

"Sure, last time's hot pot there was great. I've been thinking about those flavors, so let's meet in the afternoon."

After hanging up, Qi Yun lay on the sofa scrolling through the news until it was almost one o'clock before leisurely driving over to Old Feng's hot pot restaurant.

After parking in the lot at the entrance, he glanced up at the shop next door, which had already begun renovations. It seemed Old Feng had already finalized everything.

Even though it wasn't yet meal time, there were already quite a few customers inside.

That's how it is in Jiang Province; many people wake up late, combining breakfast and lunch into one.

Behind the bar, Old Feng was somewhat surprised to see Qi Yun come alone.

"What's got you free to inspect today?"

Qi Yun laughed heartily, patted him on the arm, and the two of them sat down at a table in the corner.

"Has the store been peaceful lately?"

Upon hearing this, Old Feng was taken aback, then replied, "What do you mean? I've already smoothed out all the necessary relationships."

"Not talking about that," Qi Yun shook his head, "I'm asking if there have been any problematic customers."

"There are often those who get drunk, but no one causing intentional trouble," Old Feng raised an eyebrow and continued to ask, "What's up?"

"Nothing much, just asking casually," Qi Yun said as he glanced out the window, "I have an appointment with Director Ma from the precinct to have a meal here later, you should get to know him."

Chapter 152: Man of the Streets (Part 2)

Old Feng's eyes lit up as he handed over a cigarette, "Sure, do we need to prepare anything?"

Qi Yun took the cigarette, lit it, and after a puff, frowned and replied, "Just prepare a few membership cards worth two thousand each for him."

Old Feng blew out a smoke ring and nodded.

A few membership cards aren't considered anything valuable; it's just normal relationship maintenance. Even if the other party can't use them, they can give them to someone else.

If you give something expensive right off the bat, others will get suspicious.

As they were talking, a black Passat pulled up to a parking space in front of the hot pot restaurant.

Qi Yun immediately spotted Ma Baoguo getting out of the car and lightly nudged Old Feng, signaling him.

Old Feng followed his gaze and also saw Ma Baoguo, quickly stood up, straightened his clothes, and put on a big smile.

Ma Baoguo walked into the hot pot restaurant, saw Qi Yun and Old Feng waiting by the table in the corner, and quickly walked over, smiling, saying, "Mr. Qi, sorry to keep you waiting."

Qi Yun quickly stood up, shook hands with Ma Baoguo, and said, "Director Ma, you're too polite. I just got here a little while ago. Please, have a seat."

Old Feng warmly added, "Director Ma, welcome, welcome, please have a seat."

"This is my good friend and also my partner in this hot pot restaurant, Old Feng," Qi Yun said, smiling as he introduced Ma Baoguo.

Upon hearing this, Ma Baoguo's eyes showed a hint of surprise. He smiled and reached out to Old Feng, "Hello, Old Feng, it's a pleasure to finally meet you. I thought your restaurant was excellent the last time I dined here, so it's nice to know you officially today."

Old Feng quickly grasped Ma Baoguo's hand, his face full of smiles, "Director Ma, you flatter us. In the future, please look after our little restaurant. It's our honor to have you here."

After the three sat down, the waiter quickly brought over some tea.

Old Feng picked up the menu and handed it first to Ma Baoguo, "Director Ma, see what you like to eat. We just got fresh beef this morning; you should try more of it."

Ma Baoguo waved his hand and declined, "You choose; I'm not picky with food."

Hearing this, Old Feng didn't insist and called over the waiter to order a large table of dishes.

Qi Yun glanced at his watch, then scanned the packed restaurant but didn't spot the person he was waiting for.

Just then, the phone on the table rang, with Zhang Dayong's name displayed on the screen.

Sitting opposite, Ma Baoguo happened to look over, his eyes slightly narrowing.

Qi Yun answered the call, smiling, "Hello, Director Zhang."

"Haha, no need for thanks, a meal on another day will do."

"Yes, alright, I'll wait for your call."

"..."

On the phone, Zhang Dayong just said the matter was handled, but Qi Yun knew what he was referring to.

As for whether the last replica ended up in someone's hands or the evidence room, it wasn't his place to ask, nor did he have any interest in finding out.

The less you know about these matters, the better.

After hanging up, Qi Yun placed the phone back on the table.

Ma Baoguo picked up the teapot to refill Qi Yun's tea, just about to say something when suddenly a shout interrupted them.

"The boss! Who's the boss! Come out here quickly!"

By the counter, a few burly men were loudly shouting.

In an instant, they attracted the attention of almost everyone in the restaurant.

Old Feng's expression changed, and he quickly got up, smiling as he approached, "I'm the boss. What can I do for you gentlemen?"

The leader, with a thick neck and a large gold chain, glared at Old Feng and shouted, "My wife ate at your restaurant last night, got a stomach ache afterward, and is still in the hospital! Are you going to give me an explanation or what?"

As he spoke, he slapped a stack of medical reports onto the counter, "See for yourself! The test results clearly say it's your restaurant's dirty stuff!"

Old Feng's heart sank, keenly sensing that they had come looking for trouble.

Nobody would typically handle such a situation like this.

Yet he kept smiling, reaching out for the reports, "My brother, please don't worry. Our restaurant has always been very particular about the freshness and hygiene of our ingredients; we've never had an issue like this before. Let me take a look at the reports."

The man with the gold chain slapped a hand over the reports, his face set in a fierce scowl, "What's there to look at? The fact is right here. Your restaurant's food has issues. What are you going to do?"

"Everyone, listen up, this place is a sham! They use rotten meat! My wife ate here last night and ended up in the hospital!"

The guests in the restaurant looked surprised upon hearing this, with a few older ladies even spitting their food into the trash on the spot.

"Huh? Rotten meat? No wonder it tastes different from other places."

"I came because I saw the ad on the museum ticket, but who knew it would be such a shady place!"

"Wow! I'm not paying for this later!"

"..."

This society is never short of people who jump to conclusions at the first sign of trouble...

However, a group of young people joked, "Ma'am, is it possible that the meat you usually eat is rotten, and this place actually serves fresh meat, so it tastes different to you?"

"Impossible! Young man, watch how you speak."

"..."

Listening to the surrounding discussions, Old Feng, who had been trying to maintain a smile, now looked cold. He glanced at the man with the gold chain and calmly said, "You guys came here deliberately to stir up trouble, didn't you?"

Hearing this, the man with the gold chain stiffened his neck and shouted, "How can you say that? My wife got sick from your place, and you accuse us of making trouble?"

Chapter 153: Socialite (Part 3)

"If you don't resolve this issue for me today, don't even think about keeping the shop open!"

Old Feng was about to say something more when a cold laugh came from behind.

"Oh, Zhang San, when you were hauled into the station last month, didn't you register as single? Got a wife so soon?"

The man with the gold chain turned his head at the voice, his face instantly turning sour, transforming from a fierce tiger to a docile lamb.

"Ma... Director Ma, you... what are you doing here?" The man with the gold chain, also known as Zhang San, stammered.

Ma Baoguo walked over to Old Feng, patted his shoulder, and said, "Old Feng, let me handle this."

Old Feng nodded and stepped aside.

Ma Baoguo turned around, his gaze piercing as he stared directly at Zhang San, his voice carrying a hint of authority: "Zhang San, it seems you've forgotten the pain after your wounds healed; not long after the last incident, you're out stirring trouble again."

Zhang San and the brothers behind him simultaneously shrank their necks, too scared to make a sound.

"This time, I'll drag you back and lock you up for a month or two. That'll make you behave."

"It doesn't have to be like that, Director Ma!" Zhang San was terrified at the thought of being locked up for two months and quickly begged for mercy, "We didn't commit any crime, just someone told us to come over and cause some trouble..."

Ma Baoguo didn't bother with them, pointed to the door, and said, "Wait for me outside first. Explain your business back at the station, and don't disturb their business."

After saying this, he turned again to the diners and said loudly, "Ladies and gentlemen, these people are here to cause trouble deliberately. I frequently dine at this shop myself; the ingredients are absolutely fine, so please don't worry."

The guests, upon hearing Ma Baoguo's words, gradually quieted their murmurs, many picking up their chopsticks again, with their doubts fading away.

"Thank you, Director Ma, good to have you here," Old Feng said gratefully.

Ma Baoguo waved his hand with a smile, "No need to thank me; it's my duty. Since I'm here, I should handle it."

"If anyone else comes to cause trouble at your shop, call me directly."

Old Feng quickly nodded and agreed.

At this time, Qi Yun also came over to express his gratitude.

Ma Baoguo laughed heartily, "Mr. Qi, it seems today's meal has to be canceled; let's meet up another day."

Qi Yun smiled and nodded, "Just call me by my name; calling me Mr. Qi feels like you don't consider me a friend."

"Then let me know when you're free, and we'll arrange it."

"Alright." Ma Baoguo replied cheerfully, "Qi, my brother, let's keep in touch. I'll take these guys away first to prevent affecting the shop's business."

"Okay, take care," Qi Yun said, giving Old Feng a meaningful look.

Old Feng quickly went behind the counter, pulled out four 2000 yuan membership cards, and chased them outside.

While shaking hands and bidding farewell, he discreetly slipped them into the other party's hand.

"Haha, Director Ma, take these membership cards home for your family. Feel free to come for hotpot anytime; I'll reserve a spot for you in advance."

Ma Baoguo chuckled and turned to glance at Qi Yun standing at the door, nodding slightly at him.

After sending the people off, the two returned to sit in a corner.

Old Feng lit a cigarette and looked at Qi Yun with a half-smile, asking, "Now I understand what you meant by that previous question. Did you know someone would come to cause trouble?"

Qi Yun picked up a slice of beef and swirled it around, not denying, "Probably sent by the hotpot shop across the street; keep an eye out in the future."

Hearing this, Old Feng furrowed his brows, exhaled a thick cloud of smoke, not showing surprise or anger.

After years of hustle and bustle in the business world, there wasn't a tactic he hadn't seen.

...

After handling this matter, Qi Yun drove to the pharmaceutical factory.

Cao Yufei and Liu Meng were chatting inside; seeing him come in, Cao Yufei excitedly greeted him.

"Old Qi, the price of Tufuling keeps rising today; I estimate it could reach twice what you mentioned by tomorrow or the day after."

Qi Yun smiled and nodded at him, "Alright, then contact the buyer and sell directly."

"Tomorrow, I'm taking Brother Meng on a trip; it might take five or six days, so make sure to watch over this batch of goods."

Cao Yufei hesitated, "I'll definitely watch the goods, but won't you be around during the sale?"

That's seven or eight million. Knowing his current situation, isn't he afraid I'll take the money and run?

"Makes no difference whether I'm there or not," Qi Yun said as he patted his shoulder, "I trust you."

Upon hearing this, a warm feeling surged through Cao Yufei's heart.

Now, he was like a plague; everyone avoided him, fearing he'd ask for money.

Yet, the person he'd known for less than a month already trusted him like this, which moved him deeply.

"Alright, I'll make sure to collect every last penny from the sale."

"Mm." Qi Yun nodded, "Then I'll leave it to you. I'll take Brother Meng and head out first."

After leaving the factory, Qi Yun first dropped Liu Meng home, telling him to bring two thick coats for the trip tomorrow.

Once Liu Meng got out of the car, Qi Yun finally took out his phone and dialed Hong Weize's number.

"Hey, Qi, my brother, what made you think of calling me?"

"Heh." Qi Yun laughed as he spoke, "I need a favor."

Hong Weize responded affably, "No need for formality between brothers; just tell me what you need. If I can do it, I'll definitely help."

Qi Yun lit a cigarette and said, "Here's the thing, I'm going out of town for a few days and want you to keep an eye on someone for me... make sure he doesn't notice."

Chapter 154: Man of Society (Part 4)

"If he plans to leave Jiang Province, you call me. If you can't reach me, find a way to stall him for me."

After a moment of contemplation, Hong Weize responded, "No problem, I'll handle this for you."

"Alright, thanks. Let me know how much it costs, and I'll treat you to drinks when I return," Qi Yun said with a smile.

"..."

After hanging up, he exhaled a long puff of smoke and muttered, "Hope you won't disappoint me."

...

After dealing with the matters here, Qi Yun went to the office. Zhong Rui had already purchased everything and had placed them in the adjacent empty room.

Seeing him enter, Zhong Rui quickly came over. "Boss, I've bought everything. Here are the receipts, and I've transferred the leftover money to your WeChat."

Qi Yun glanced at the receipts. These items weren't cheap; they cost over eighteen thousand in total.

"Alright, well done. Just like last time, the bonus for this business trip is ten thousand yuan."

Hearing this, Zhong Rui's eyes lit up with delight. "Thank you, boss! You're generous!"

He beamed with a smile, cherishing the job even more.

Reflecting on the days just after his release from prison, he couldn't even land a security job due to his record, or some bosses wanted him to return to his old ways.

Now working under such a generous and trusting boss was indeed his blessing.

"Alright," Qi Yun patted his shoulder and continued, "Later, rent a van and load everything into it. We're leaving tomorrow."

"Got it, boss." Zhong Rui quickly replied.

"Okay, I'll head out now. I'll call you tomorrow." With that, Qi Yun waved and prepared to get in his car.

Zhong Rui slapped his forehead as if he remembered something and quickly followed. "Oh, boss, the jersey you had me put online has been sold. The buyer has deposited fifty thousand yuan into your account. Remember to check it."

Qi Yun paused, took out his phone, and indeed saw a fifty thousand yuan credit.

He almost forgot about this. Who'd have thought that Real Madrid's number 7 could actually sell?

...

Upon returning home, estimating that his daughter would soon be back from school, Qi Yun headed into the kitchen to prepare dinner.

By the time Zhao Qing returned with the little girl, the table was already filled with dishes for the two of them to enjoy.

"Oh, back so early today," Zhao Qing said, setting down her bag and looking at Qi Yun with surprise.

Qi Yun came up to her, helping his daughter take off her backpack, replying, "Nothing much today, so I came back early. Go wash up and let's eat."

Zhao Qing took the little girl to wash their hands and soon returned to the table.

The little girl eagerly picked up chopsticks, grabbed a lotus root slice, and happily said, "Dad's food is so good!"

Qi Yun teased her nose with a smile, "Didn't you say last time that Xiao Qing's cooking was better than mine?"

The little girl blinked, tilted her head thinking, then hugged Qi Yun's neck playfully, "Daddy's cooking is good too!"

Zhao Qing, watching from the side, couldn't help but laugh, "Nuannuan, finish eating first. After you're done with vocabulary, I'll play games with you."

The little girl's eyes lit up instantly, "Okay!"

After dinner, Qi Yun cleaned up the kitchen before joining Zhao Qing on the couch, putting his arm around her as she read.

"I need to tell you something. I have to go out of town tomorrow, probably for five or six days."

Zhao Qing paused, putting down her book, and turned to Qi Yun, "So sudden? Where are you going, and why for so long?"

Qi Yun hesitated slightly, not wanting to worry her. He decided to conceal the desert trip and vaguely said, "Just some business matters. The location is quite remote, and the signal might be bad. If I don't respond promptly, don't worry."

Zhao Qing furrowed her brows slightly, raising her hand to touch his face, "Alright, just be safe. If anything happens, call me immediately."

Qi Yun smiled, holding her hand and nodding, "Don't worry, I'll be careful. Take care of yourselves at home too."

"If there's an urgent matter and you can't reach me, call Lao Feng or Brother Peng. I'll send you their numbers later."

"Okay," Zhao Qing replied softly, closing her book and leaning into his embrace.

That night, after Zhao Qing and their daughter fell asleep, Qi Yun glanced at his phone and suddenly remembered another piece of information about a dropout from Fuda University.

Thinking it was a bit late to call, he opened WeChat to try searching the person's phone number, adding them as a friend.

Unexpectedly, the friend request was quickly accepted.

"Hi, I heard you've developed a game and you're looking for investors?" Qi Yun typed.

Elsewhere, in a dim, cramped rental room, a young boy around eighteen or nineteen typed quickly on a keyboard.

"Yes, did you see my forum post? My game is in the testing phase and will soon be ready for release."

Qi Yun paused, not denying it, and continued, "How much investment are you looking for? Also, can I see what your game looks like?"

He quickly received an installation file from the other side. If it weren't for the information he had, he wouldn't dare to open something like this.

"I need about fifty thousand yuan to purchase servers and bandwidth. My game is very fun and perfect for commuters to kill time. You can try it out."

Qi Yun clicked on the installation file, and soon an icon for a game called "Defense of Azeroth" appeared on his phone screen.

The game loaded slowly, revealing a realistic medieval fantasy scene.

There were several options on the screen, allowing players to choose different factions and allocate card characters based on them, each with its own unique skills.

The game was quite easy to pick up. Qi Yun followed the prompts once and knew how to play.

It felt similar to the card games available on the market, with the difference being additional World of Warcraft elements, and a greater variety of card combinations, making it quite entertaining.

As the person described, a game round lasted about twenty minutes, perfect for playing during commutes.

Qi Yun played on the couch until he fell asleep.

Meanwhile, in the dim room, the boy continued typing code, occasionally checking his WeChat messages.

As the clock ticked past 3 AM, he still hadn't received a response from earlier, leaving a bitter smile on his lips.

"Could it be that my game really is just a pile of crap..."

Chapter 155: The Mine Collapsed

Early the next morning, before dawn, Qi Yun was awakened by a sudden ringing of the phone.

Peng's name appeared on the phone screen. He raised his hand to look at the time—it was just past eight.

The call coming so early made him tense up instantly, fearing that something had gone wrong with the caller.

"Old Qi, something's happened!" Peng's voice was filled with obvious tension on the other end of the line.

Qi Yun immediately sat up from the sofa, his heart contracting sharply: "What happened!?"

"Du Fei just told me that Old Xu's mine was operating illegally, and two people were buried inside last night!" Peng quickly explained.

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun's breath hitched, and he found himself unable to speak for a moment.

During the last dinner, Du Fei had mentioned that there was no management at Old Xu's mine, and the workers completely disregarded safety issues, posing significant risks. He didn't expect it to come true so quickly.

"Have the people been rescued?"

"It's still unclear now." Peng sighed, "I heard the rescue started last night. Old Xu is likely done for this time."

"Sigh~"

Qi Yun also sighed heavily. Although he and Old Xu were like strangers now, hearing such news inevitably made him feel like the fox mourning the rabbit's death...

Even if the buried people could be rescued, that mine would surely be sealed off, with no chance to sell anymore.

No money to repay the high-interest loans would mean only running away.

If the rescue fails, Old Xu will face not a predicament but a dead end.

With illegal mining, and expired insurance for the workers, it seems impossible for him to get through this.

Old Xu probably never thought that arrow he shot in Macau two months ago would hit him right between his eyes today.

After hanging up, Qi Yun lost all desire to sleep. He washed up and headed to the kitchen to prepare breakfast for Zhao Qing and their daughter.

At this time, Zhao Qing's voice came from behind: "Eh, why are you up so early?"

She was dressed in loose home clothes, her hair casually tied back, carrying a hint of laziness.

Qi Yun snapped back to reality, forcing a smile: "Well, I'm heading out of town today, so I woke up a bit early."

He didn't want Zhao Qing to notice anything strange about him, so his tone was deliberately light.

Zhao Qing came up beside him, reached out to touch his face, and showed concern: "You look a bit off-color, didn't you sleep well?"

Qi Yun held her hand and then gently kissed her forehead: "I'm fine, quickly wake Nuannuan for breakfast."

Although Zhao Qing was full of doubt, she didn't press further and turned to wake Nuannuan in the bedroom.

In a short while, the little girl came to the table rubbing her sleepy eyes.

"Daddy, you made my favorite porridge today!" the little girl said happily.

Qi Yun smiled and patted her head: "Yes, Daddy has to go on a trip far away. I won't be home for a few days, so you need to listen to Sister Qing."

The little girl tilted her head, her eyes full of reluctance, her voice dropping: "Daddy, where are you going? When will you come back?"

Qi Yun squatted down, pulling the little girl into a hug, and patiently said: "Daddy has to take care of some very important things, and it will take about five or six days to come back."

The little girl pouted and snuggled into his arms: "Alright, but Daddy, you must come back soon, I'll miss you."

Qi Yun kissed her cheek: "Daddy promises to come back immediately after finishing things."

Zhao Qing then walked out of the bedroom, pushing a suitcase with the clothes she had prepared for him.

"Nuannuan, eat quickly; we have to go to kindergarten after breakfast, and Daddy will be back in a few days."

"Okay." The little girl reluctantly left Qi Yun's embrace.

After breakfast, Zhao Qing hurried to wash up and put on makeup, while Qi Yun was braiding his daughter's hair beside her.

Once she finished tidying up, she snuggled into Qi Yun's arms with a whisper: "Be careful out there, we're waiting for you to come back."

Qi Yun gently rested his chin on her head, feeling the warmth of her hair, took a deep breath, and replied softly: "Don't worry, I'll take care of myself."

"Okay, we have to go." Zhao Qing released him, tiptoeing to plant a kiss on Qi Yun's lips, then called to the little girl, "Nuannuan, put on your backpack quickly, we're going to be late."

After seeing them into the elevator, Qi Yun returned indoors, looking at the suitcase packed next to the coffee table, with a smile of happiness at the corner of his mouth.

He went back into the bedroom to find a thick down coat and stuffed it into the suitcase, then sat down on the sofa to check the day's intelligence.

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Red): Zhang Dayong got a recommendation from an upper-level person, officially promoted to Executive Deputy Director of New District Branch yesterday afternoon.]

[Today's Intelligence 2 (White): Zhong Rui brought back an invoice yesterday, one of which can scratch off a ten-thousand-yuan bonus.]

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Blue): Vice President Liu, aware that his wife has begun to suspect him of keeping a mistress, took the opportunity of a business trip to Hong Kong to convert the embezzled money of the past two years into two kilograms of gold, hidden in the locker at Central MTR Station.

Locker number A386, password 9203]

"Wow! That bastard really hasn't embezzled any small amount." Qi Yun exclaimed in surprise.

Two kilograms of gold, at today's gold price, must be worth 1.4 million, right?

What expression would Vice President Liu make if, after being kicked out by his wife and going to Hong Kong, he finds the gold bars missing?

Qi Yun already began imagining that scene in his mind...

Seeing the time was about right, Qi Yun packed everything, grabbed the suitcase, and set off.

Chapter 156: The Mine Collapsed

He first drove to pick up Liu Meng, and then the two went to the office.

Zhong Rui was already prepared, and everything was packed into the rented van.

"Boss, shall we set off now?"

Qi Yun nodded at him: "Mm, go find those invoices from yesterday for me."

"Alright, boss." Zhong Rui didn't understand why he needed the invoices, but he quickly went back inside to get them.

Qi Yun took the invoices, didn't look at them closely, and stuffed them all into his wallet.

"Okay, let's go."

The three of them got into the car, Zhong Rui drove, Qi Yun and Liu Meng sat in the back, and the van headed towards Shanshan County.

"We'll probably be gone for five or six days this time, did you explain to your wife?" Qi Yun handed Liu Meng a cigarette and asked.

Liu Meng took the cigarette and skillfully held it in his mouth: "Yeah, I told her."

Qi Yun nodded and slowly exhaled a smoke ring: "After this trip, I might have to go to Russia next month, interested in joining me to take a look?"

"Russia?" Liu Meng was a bit stunned, "What are you going there for? It's freezing!"

"To discuss some business." Qi Yun laughed and patted his shoulder, "You can sit and fish on the ice all day, why aren't you afraid of the cold then."

Liu Meng lifted his chin and replied in a muffled voice, "That's different, you don't understand the joy of fishing."

He knew Qi Yun was asking him to go for a reason, so he continued, "Just let me know when you're going, I can leave at any time."

Qi Yun nodded at these words.

A few hours later, the car arrived at Shanshan County.

Qi Yun called Mamati and learned that they were heading to the gas station on the east side of the county.

He then said to Zhong Rui, who was driving, "Go to the east gas station."

When they arrived at the gas station, four modified off-road vehicles were parked on the side: two Jeep Wranglers and two Ford Raptors.

Mamati and his three helpers were there refilling spare fuel cans.

Getting into the gas station was quite troublesome, needing to scan ID cards, so they just waited outside.

After refilling the fuel, Mamati and his group came out and immediately saw Qi Yun not far away, so they parked by the roadside and came over to say hello.

"Boss Qi."

Qi Yun nodded, his gaze sweeping over the three Uighur men behind him, and asked with a smile, "Was the journey smooth?"

"Smooth." Mamati said and began introducing, "These are my good brothers, Ah Li, Beck, and Ai Shan. They've been running the desert for many years and are very familiar with the terrain."

Ah Li was small and thin, Beck had a full beard, both were young men.

Ai Shan looked about the same age as Qi Yun, perhaps due to running in the desert for many years, his skin was tanned.

Qi Yun nodded to them: "We'll be relying on you all."

Ai Shan and others responded politely, with friendly smiles on their faces.

At this time, Liu Meng was carefully examining the modified off-road vehicles beside him, clicking his tongue in praise: "Wow, a 3.5T Ford Raptor, this thing must consume a liter of fuel with one step on the pedal, right?"

Ah Li laughed heartily: "Brother, these big guys have plenty of power, running in the desert is thrilling, if you're interested, you can try it later."

Liu Meng shook his head with a smile and said no more.

Qi Yun looked at Mamati and asked, "Is this fuel enough for a round trip?"

"Not enough, we'll drive the two Wranglers and one Raptor in, Beck and the other Raptor will stay in the county to support us. When we return, he'll bring in some more fuel." Mamati explained.

Qi Yun nodded: "Okay, you arrange it. When do we set off?"

Mamati looked at the time and said, "Let's replenish supplies first, leave in the afternoon, and try to reach the first campsite sixty kilometers away tonight."

"Alright."

Qi Yun responded, turning to call Liu Meng and Zhong Rui into the car.

The cars drove to a supermarket entrance and began loading supplies, mainly water and some food for sustenance.

After loading up the three vehicles, Qi Yun and the others got into Mamati's Wrangler and headed towards the desert.

Half an hour later, the convoy drove over a stretch of bumpy dirt road, beyond lay the vast dunes.

The convoy stopped slowly, Mamati got out to deflate the tires.

After a round of checks, they set off again.

As the convoy entered the desert, the vehicles began to bounce over the dunes. Mamati skillfully maneuvered the steering wheel, while reminding the vehicles behind via walkie-talkie: "Maintain distance, avoid the soft sands, don't get stuck!"

The journey was thrilling but without incident. By around nine at night, the convoy finally reached the designated first campsite, a lowland beside a dune.

The three cars formed a circle, with the dune on the side helping to block the wind and sand.

Everyone got off, the nighttime temperature in the desert dropped drastically, and the wind cut across the face like a knife.

Mamati rubbed his hands, untying the Ford Raptor's straps, and began unloading the camping equipment.

They bought three tents, just enough for two people per tent.

In no time, the tents were set up.

Mamati and the others had well-prepared equipment, with portable power sources, camp stoves, cooking gear, all sorts of necessities.

A few people sat together, eating instant noodles.

"The desert nights are really cold, good thing we came prepared." Liu Meng said, exhaling a breath of white mist while eating instant noodles.

Ah Li laughed and said, "This is not even the coldest. Once I took some guests into the desert and ran into a cold snap, the temperature dropped to minus twenty-something degrees, and the car's radiator froze."

Mamati nodded in agreement: "Yes, so try not to leave the camp, getting lost in the desert can be very dangerous."

Qi Yun and the others nodded, showing they understood.

After eating, unable to withstand the cold wind outside, everyone went into the tents and crawled into sleeping bags, finally feeling a bit of warmth.

Qi Yun and Mamati shared a tent. With nothing to do, Qi Yun started chatting with him.

"Have you encountered any very dangerous situations during your years as a guide?"

Mamati shrank into his sleeping bag, his eyes fixed on the top of the tent, lost in memory.

"Plenty, Boss Qi." he slowly said, "Once, we took a team of adventurers into the desert. Some young folks in that group underestimated the danger of the desert, ignored the advice, and quietly left the convoy."

"They quickly lost direction; the dunes in the desert look alike, and without professional equipment and experience, it's hard to tell the direction."

Qi Yun listened intently, frowning: "Were the people found later?"

"After realizing they were missing, I and another guide immediately started searching separately, but we didn't find them even after looking all day."

"At that time, we were also running low on fuel, so we split into two groups. The other guide took the rest of the guests back first, leaving me and a friend to continue searching."

"After another half a day, we finally found their car, but no one was inside. It looked like they got stuck and couldn't get free, so they took the supplies and walked away."

"It was late at night when I finally found them next to a small hill. By then, the three of them were already unconscious from the cold. If we had been a bit later, they might have been in real danger."

"That incident really scared me." Mamati still had lingering fears as he spoke of it now, "Since then, I rarely take young people into the desert."

Qi Yun nodded: "In this desert, there's no room for the slightest carelessness."

The two continued chatting for a while until the tent was filled with the sound of snoring.

At dawn, as the sky started to brighten, the convoy set off again.

They had to cover two hundred kilometers today to reach the next campsite.

Chapter 157: Encounter with a Wolf Pack, New System Feature

The desert scenery is indeed magnificent, but seeing too much of it can inevitably lead to fatigue.

By midday, the temperature finally rose noticeably, no longer as cold as the frigid night.

The convoy came to a safe place to stop for a brief rest.

Mamati and three others got out to check the vehicle conditions, while Qi Yun stood nearby to light a cigarette.

At this moment, Liu Meng came over with two boxes of self-heating meals, handed one to him, glanced around, and then asked in a low voice, "What are we doing on this trip?"

Qi Yun took the meal box and replied, "We're here to find a caravan that was buried by the sands many years ago. They were carrying something very valuable."

He naturally trusted Liu Meng, so he didn't conceal anything.

Upon hearing this, Liu Meng raised his eyebrows, a hint of curiosity flashing in his eyes, "Treasure hunting, huh? Similar to the movies?"

Qi Yun smiled slightly, "More or less."

Just as Liu Meng was about to say more, suddenly, a gust of wind swept through, and sand flew everywhere, a bunch directly blowing into his mouth.

"Pah!"

"Let's go back to the car to eat."

...

After the brief rest, the convoy continued on, and it was quiet in the car. Qi Yun held onto the handle above the door frame, his body swaying with the vehicle, and fell asleep without realizing it.

When he opened his eyes again, the outside had already grown dim.

He was roused by the roar of an engine.

Qi Yun pushed open the car door, a gust of biting cold wind hitting him, making him shiver and subconsciously tighten the collar of his down jacket.

Looking towards the sound, he saw that the Ford Raptor driven by Ah Li behind had unfortunately become stranded, its tires spinning frantically but unable to break free.

Ai Shan had parked the Wrangler nearby and was taking out a tow rope from the car, preparing for rescue.

After securing the tow rope, the Wrangler's engine roared deeply as it slowly moved forward, the tow rope gradually stretching taut, creaking loudly.

The Ford Raptor's tires spun rapidly, kicking up a cloud of dust, but the vehicle only trembled slightly, still deeply stuck in the sand pit.

"It won't work like this, it can't be pulled!" Mamati patted the car window, signaling Ah Li to stop, "The load in the truck bed is too heavy, let's unload some things and try again."

Ah Li quickly nodded, and the two vehicles temporarily stopped as everyone worked together to unload the items from the Raptor's bed.

Once most of the supplies were unloaded, Ah Li got back in the car and started the engine again.

The Wrangler ahead powered up again, its engine roar echoing across the empty desert.

Under the immense towing force, the Raptor's body finally made noticeable movement, and Ah Li floored the accelerator, the vehicle suddenly lunging forward and finally escaping the sand pit.

This effort consumed a lot of time, and Ai Shan got out of the Wrangler to suggest to Mamati, "Why not camp here tonight? It's easy to get stuck in the dark; this area doesn't have much wind and sand. Camping should be fine."

Mamati frowned, scanned the surrounding dunes, hesitated slightly, and then nodded, saying, "Alright, let's camp here tonight. Set up the tents first, then reorganize the supplies."

Everyone started to busy themselves, Ah Li drove the Raptor to a relatively flat area to park and put the previously unloaded fuel back into the truck.

The tents were quickly set up, and Mamati and Ai Shan picked up some dry wormwood and poplar wood nearby. Everyone sat around the campfire at the center of the camp.

The warm firelight dispelled some of the chill, and a touch of relaxation appeared on everyone's face.

"Tonight we have grilled lamb skewers to eat," Mamati said, taking out a plastic bag filled with skewered lamb from the car's refrigerator.

Seeing this, Qi Yun and the others' eyes instantly lit up.

Having eaten instant noodles for several meals, their mouths had become bland, and they indeed wanted some meat.

As the meat grilled on the rack, the dripping fat sizzled on the ashes, sending up wisps of smoke, with the scent of cumin and chili powder wafting in the air, making one involuntarily want to swallow.

Liu Meng rubbed his hands together eagerly, "Mamati, let me help flip them, I'm good at this."

Mamati didn't refuse, handing him a bunch of lamb skewers to grill.

At this moment, everyone's attention was focused on the campfire, oblivious to the few pairs of green eyes watching from behind a nearby dune.

Liu Meng's hands kept turning the willow skewers, and the lamb gradually became golden and enticing, the aroma permeating.

"I'm not exaggerating, but my grilling skills are not worse than those of the professionals," he said while distributing several skewers to everyone, "Here, have a taste."

Zhong Rui eagerly took the lamb skewer he offered, bit into it without hesitation, his eyes widening, and he mumbled unclearly, "Meng, your skills are exceptional, so fragrant!"

Qi Yun also tasted a couple of pieces; the flavor was indeed quite good.

Soon, everyone finished the bag of lamb, yet Liu Meng still seemed to want more.

After dinner, as the fire burned low, everyone crawled into the tents to rest.

Qi Yun walked a few steps further away to relieve himself.

With a cigarette in his mouth, one hand unzipping his pants and the other holding a lighter.

As he raised his hand to light it, he suddenly caught a glimpse of green lights flashing briefly in the distance.

He immediately felt a chill sweep over him from behind, causing the hairs on the back of his neck to stand up.

But when he carefully looked in the direction of the sand dune ahead, he saw nothing.

"Was I seeing things?"

He stood still, staring for a good two minutes, but everything remained normal.

At this moment, a voice called from behind: "Boss Qi, what's wrong?" It was Mamati, who came over out of concern when he noticed Qi Yun had not returned to the tent for a long time.

Qi Yun quickly shook himself, zipped up his jacket, and turned to walk towards Mamati.

"It's nothing, I just thought I saw a few green lights over there, maybe it was a mirage."

Though the speaker was unintentional, the listener was attentive. Upon hearing this, Mamati instantly became wary: "In which direction?"

Qi Yun turned and pointed behind him: "Right there, at the sand dune in front."

Mamati looked over but saw nothing either.

Still, his expression remained serious. His years of experience in the wild alerted him to the potential danger.

Turning to Qi Yun, he said, "We can't stay here overnight tonight; we have to leave immediately. What you saw could be wolves."

"Wolves?!" Qi Yun was taken aback.

Mamati nodded: "Yes, there are wolves in the desert too, and they are more fierce and cunning than wolves in other places. I have seen them over by Lop Nur, and they are very large."

"However, desert wolves usually have fixed habitats and only hunt near water sources. We must have intruded into their territory."

With that, he quickly led Qi Yun back to the camp, waking up Ai Shan and Ah Li to explain the situation.

After hearing this, both of them also looked serious. Without much thought, they quickly opened the car doors, started the vehicles, and turned on all the headlights, illuminating the surrounding sand and casting long shadows.

Qi Yun called for Liu Meng and Zhong Rui to quickly pack up. Hearing there were wolves, Zhong Rui immediately showed a tense expression, while Liu Meng remained calm, intentionally or unintentionally sticking close to Qi Yun.

Everyone worked quickly and efficiently to pack up their things.

Just as they stuffed the tents and sleeping bags into the car and were about to pack up the items in the middle of the camp, a long, low howl suddenly broke the desert silence, echoing in the night sky.

The sound seemed to come from all directions, sending chills down their spines.

Soon after, more wolf howls followed one after another, getting closer and closer.

"Get in the car!" Mamati shouted loudly.

They dared not delay and quickly scrambled into the cars, leaving some items behind.

Mamati floored the pedal, and the car shot forward like an arrow, with Ah Li and Ai Shan following closely behind in the other two vehicles.

They hadn't driven far when, under the car headlights, they were horrified to find a pack of large desert wolves emerging from behind the sand dune, numbering no less than a dozen.

Their eyes glowed a ghostly green in the darkness as they swarmed toward them.

Seeing their tense expressions, Mamati comforted them: "No need to worry; as long as we're in the car, we're safe. They'll give up after a while."

Indeed, after following the cars for several hundred meters, the dozen or so wolves gradually slowed down, ceasing their pursuit.

Everyone collectively exhaled a sigh of relief, and the tension in their nerves finally relaxed a little.

"This is why we plan the camping sites in advance: we choose locations that not only shield us from sandstorms but also have few wild animals," Mamati said.

"I see; it's a good thing you're experienced. Otherwise, we would have been in big trouble tonight," Qi Yun said, still with lingering fear.

Mamati nodded: "That's right, in the desert, any carelessness can lead to big trouble."

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, taking a deep drag before exhaling.

At this moment, a screen spontaneously appeared before his eyes.

[Host did not receive intelligence messages yesterday. Expired intelligence messages will be stored as intelligence points (Note: After upgrading to Level 4, intelligence points can be used to query specific information about a particular individual.)]

[Current intelligence points: 1]

Qi Yun was taken aback, checked his phone for the time, and realized it was already midnight.

He had dozed in the car for a whole day and completely forgot about checking the intelligence messages.

Though he unknowingly discovered a new function of the system, it wasn't a complete loss.

"Using intelligence points to query specific information about a particular individual seems useful..."

The convoy drove for another two hours before finally arriving at the camping site Mamati had chosen.

After pitching their tents, Mamati and Ai Shan remained concerned and took a flashlight to inspect the surroundings, ensuring safety before crawling into their tents to sleep.

...

By noon the next day, the convoy stopped by a sand dune.

Mamati looked at the GPS in his hand and said, "Boss Qi, here is the location you were looking for."

Chapter 158: A Box from the Tang Dynasty!

Qi Yun got off the vehicle, looking around, and saw one small sand dune after another.

Although he had anticipated this, the situation still left him a bit dumbfounded.

The intel said the remains of the camel train were buried beneath the dunes, but where should they start digging...

He took a deep breath and said to Zhong Rui, "Go get the shovels."

"Got it, boss," Zhong Rui responded, turning to get the shovels from the Raptor's cargo bed.

Qi Yun then turned to look at Mamati and the others, saying, "Since we're all here, I won't hide it from you. I'm here in the desert heartland to find a certain chest.

But I only know that the chest is buried under the sand dunes, so we'll need to dig up these dunes one by one and check."

"If you three are willing to help, whether or not we find what I'm looking for, I'll give each of you an additional five thousand yuan as compensation."

Upon hearing this, Mamati looked at Ah Li and Ai Shan, knowing he was willing, but it depended on whether his two brothers were.

Ah Li and Ai Shan nodded in unison, smiling as they replied, "Thank you, Boss Qi."

At this point, Zhong Rui came over, placing several folding shovels on the ground.

Everyone stepped forward, each grabbing one.

Mamati approached Qi Yun and whispered, "Boss Qi, our water and food can only last 7 days. Beck will come to pick us up from 150 kilometers away, so subtracting a day for the return, we can only stay here for 6 days at most."

He felt the dozens of sand dunes couldn't possibly be dug up in short order and was worried that Qi Yun, after making such an effort, might not want to leave without finding anything.

Qi Yun nodded with a smile, patting his shoulder, "Don't worry, I understand what you mean. We'll head back when the time is up, regardless of whether we find it. I won't risk everyone's safety."

Hearing this, Mamati felt relieved, continuing, "Then you all wait a moment, Ai Shan and I will take a short recon ahead to see if there's any quicksand danger."

"Alright, much appreciated," Qi Yun replied, moving aside with Liu Meng for a smoke.

He glanced at Ah Li, who stayed in place without moving over, and in a low voice said, "Meng, keep an eye out over the next few days."

Liu Meng gave him a look and nodded, "Understood."

About half an hour later, the two scouts returned.

"We checked carefully and didn't find any danger," Mamati said, looking to Qi Yun, continuing, "But I still suggest splitting into pairs so that if anything unexpected happens, there's someone to watch over."

Qi Yun nodded, "You're right, safety is most important. Let's go two per group, and report any findings immediately."

Everyone agreed, grabbing their folding shovels and heading towards the dunes.

Ai Shan and Mamati were a pair, Liu Meng and Ah Li made another, while Zhong Rui followed Qi Yun.

These sand dunes were large and small, arranged irregularly.

The group reached the dune tops and began digging downward.

Even though it was winter in the desert and the temperature was low, the work kept them from feeling cold; Qi Yun even removed his down jacket.

The only discomfort was from the wind, which blew sand everywhere, soon covering their faces and bodies.

As the shovels flew, the sand dunes' height steadily decreased.

After more than half an hour of digging, Zhong Rui, breathing heavily, asked, "Boss, how deep is the chest you mentioned buried?"

"How should I know? Just keep digging. If it goes deeper than a meter, move on to the next one," Qi Yun answered.

"Alright!"

"..."

Three hours later, the dune beneath their feet had been dug to a depth of a meter, yet nothing was found.

Qi Yun couldn't help but sigh, taking a folding shovel to check the other groups' progress. Everyone was at a similar stage, with the same lack of results...

"Let's take a break, have some water. If you dig more than a meter and find nothing, move to the next one," he said.

The group nodded, sitting down to rest.

Fortunately, it's winter; if it were summer, desert temperatures could reach forty to fifty degrees, making work impossible.

After a short break, they all headed to the next target to repeat the previous work.

The sky gradually darkened, and the temperature began to drop. Exhausted and drained, the team had found nothing.

"Let's head back to camp and rest. We'll continue tomorrow."

Everyone, dragging their weary bodies, returned to camp to set up tents and boil water.

Of course, the boiling water wasn't for bathing; it was for cooking instant noodles.

In the desert wilderness, having a bottle of water to brush your teeth each day is already quite luxurious...

The biting night wind starkly contrasted with the day's heat from working.

After dinner, everyone was too exhausted and retreated to their tents to rest.

Despite being pricey at over three thousand yuan, the tents were indeed excellent at keeping out the cold and wind; it was much warmer inside than out.

Qi Yun crawled into his sleeping bag, turned to Mamati, and asked, "We won't have any wolves at camp tonight, will we?"

Mamati shook his head, "Don't worry, there are no water sources nearby, so there shouldn't be any animals around."

Reassured by this, Qi Yun relaxed and quickly fell asleep.

[Current Intel Points: 2]

The next morning, Qi Yun climbed out of the tent, and the biting cold enveloped him, instinctively tightening his down jacket.

After a night's rest, everyone had recovered some of their strength.

After a simple breakfast, everyone picked up their folding spades once more and set out towards the dunes.

Today they dug through a total of fourteen dunes, but as dusk fell, they still hadn't discovered anything...

The third day...

The fourth day...

The fifth day...

At night, inside the tent, Mamati looked at Qi Yun and reminded him, "Boss Qi, tomorrow will be our last day here; the day after, we must return."

"Yes," Qi Yun nodded, a sigh echoing in his heart.

Could it be that what's beneath these dunes is truly not meant for me?

...

The next day, just like usual, after breakfast, everyone set off towards the dunes ahead.

After days of digging, everyone except Liu Meng began to doubt whether there really was anything buried under the dunes.

The morning passed peacefully and swiftly.

Everyone returned to the camp, rested briefly after lunch, and then resumed work.

Suddenly, Ai Shan felt his spade hit something that didn't feel like the sand they had been digging through before.

His hands sped up, and in just a few moves, he unearthed a bone!

He couldn't tell whether it was human or animal.

Invigorated, he started digging more vigorously, and before he finished a cigarette, a heap of white bones and a nearly collapsed wooden box appeared in front of him!

Through the gaps in the box, he could see something faintly reflecting light inside.

His heart raced, suppressing the excitement within him, he bent down and opened the box.

What came into view was a pile of jewelry, there were gold hairpins glimmering and green agates...

Ai Shan inhaled sharply.

He forcibly suppressed his excitement, and whispered towards the other side of the dune to Mamati, "Mamati, come over here."

Mamati heard him calling, and immediately carried his spade, walking over.

When he saw the pile of bones and the open box, his eyes widened, a look of disbelief on his face.

He crouched down, carefully observed the jewelry in the box, the gold hairpins and green agates shining charmingly under the sunlight.

"Is this... is this real?" His voice trembled a bit, almost not believing his eyes.

Ai Shan nodded, glancing towards the direction of the other two groups.

The large dunes were far apart, so others didn't notice what was happening here.

He crouched down again, lowered his voice, "You're not mistaken, it's all real!"

It took Mamati a while to recover from the shock, and he was about to call Qi Yun over.

But unexpectedly, Ai Shan grabbed him from behind, "What are you doing! I found this!"

Mamati, startled by the sudden tug, paused, showing a trace of surprise on his face.

Seeing the greedy look in Ai Shan's eyes, he immediately understood what the other was thinking.

"Ai Shan, what are you doing?" Mamati's voice was deep and solemn, "Boss Qi hired us to find this box, we can't keep it!"

Ai Shan's hand held tightly onto Mamati's arm, showing no sign of letting go, and said in a deep voice, "But I found it first, I don't want to just hand it over."

If we sell these jewels, we'll never have to come into the desert again; think about it, how many hardships have we endured here over the years, how many times have we almost never made it out alive!"

Hearing these words, Mamati sighed, patted Ai Shan's hand, and tried to calm him down.

"Ai Shan, I know what you're thinking, but we can't do this, Boss Qi hired us and paid us, maybe he'll even give us more reward for finding the box."

"And have you thought about it? If you hide these jewels privately and Boss Qi finds out, what will be the consequences? He could accurately track this lead and spent so much to come here, can he be an ordinary person? We can't afford to offend him."

Ai Shan fell silent after hearing this, his expression struggled, obviously unwilling.

After a while, he whispered darkly, "Then we can find a way to make them stay here forever, after all, every year many people go missing in the desert..."

As he spoke, the muscles on his face unconsciously twitched.

Mamati heard this, his eyes instantly widened, staring at the other.

He suddenly felt that the brother he grew up with seemed a little unfamiliar, as if not the same as in his memory.

After a long silence, he let out a long sigh, "Boss Qi is Hong Ge's friend, don't you think his family and friends would investigate even if he went missing? At that time, the police would surely question us thoroughly. Do you want to get us all killed?"

"Let it go, Ai Shan..."

"Why!" Ai Shan gritted his teeth tightly, his expression somewhat frantic, "Then we... we can bury the box back, and after sending them away, we can come back to get it later, can't we?"

Seeing this, Mamati helplessly shook his head, looking at the other with eyes full of disappointment.

"Doing this will cause us to completely lose our reputation, no one will ever dare to trust us again."

"Have you forgotten what your father said? We only take what we're supposed to, don't let desire blind your eyes."

Saying that, he forcibly broke free and walked towards Qi Yun.

Leaving Ai Shan standing there, staring blankly at the box of jewels on the ground.

Chapter 159: A Bountiful Harvest

On the other side, Liu Meng was whispering something in Qi Yun's ear, when they saw Mamati quickly running over.

"Boss Qi, there's a discovery over there. We've dug up a box!" Mamati shouted loudly.

"Really, let's go and take a look," Qi Yun replied, and hurriedly walked towards the dune.

When they arrived, Ai Shan was standing beside the sandpit, with a complex expression.

Qi Yun glanced at him nonchalantly, then focused his eyes on the old wooden box in the pit.

The box contained a pile of shimmering jewelry, evidently valuable.

"Oh my God!"

Ah Li and Zhong Rui, behind him, couldn't help but exclaim at the sight.

Qi Yun crouched down, picked up a few pieces of jewelry to inspect them, then asked Liu Meng to go to the car to fetch a bag and pack them all up first.

Upon hearing this, Liu Meng quickly ran to the car, and soon returned with a canvas bag.

Once everything was packed, Qi Yun picked up a folding shovel and said, "Dig further down in this area, and be gentle with your movements."

After hearing the instructions, everyone resumed their work, moving carefully.

As time passed, the sun gradually set, and the areas beside the dune were filled with skeletons and old wooden boxes.

Apart from the initial box of jewels, two other boxes contained ivory, crystal stones, and plant powder that had long been weathered beyond recognition.

Although the harvest was considerable, these were not Qi Yun's main targets.

"There's another box here!" Zhong Rui exclaimed.

Upon hearing this, everyone halted their movements and quickly gathered around his location.

Qi Yun rushed over, and saw next to Zhong Rui, a partially buried box with one corner exposed, its material similar to the wooden boxes discovered earlier.

He crouched down and carefully cleared the sand around it, then cautiously opened the box.

Inside was a pale yellow, already tattered brocade fabric, wrapped around a rectangular object.

Qi Yun's breath caught; he sensed this might be the Qingnang Book he was searching for.

His hands trembled slightly, as he gently picked up the pale yellow brocade, which had weathered severely, seeming ready to crumble with any exertion.

He took a deep breath, steadied himself, and slowly unfolded the brocade.

Once the brocade was fully opened, a somewhat damaged ancient book appeared.

The book's cover was deep brown, with aged leather, devoid of writing or any other markings.

Qi Yun's heart pounded wildly; the object before him was likely the Qingnang Book that had vanished thousands of years ago!

He refrained from easily flipping the cover, fearing it would be damaged.

Instead, he asked Zhong Rui to return to the camp to fetch a piece of clothing from his suitcase, then gently wrapped the ancient book and handed it to Liu Meng for safekeeping.

After completing this task, his gaze returned to the wooden box, which contained another booklet with the words "Passage Document" written on it.

It seemed it was likely the passage documents for this caravan, functioning similarly to modern-day passports.

The booklet's pages were yellowed, appearing extremely fragile, ready to shatter at a touch, so he carefully wrapped it with clothing as well.

"Continue digging in this area, see if there's anything else beneath."

The group heard this and picked up folding shovels to disperse around, continuing the excavation in the surrounding area.

By nightfall, apart from some skeletons, no other discoveries were made.

Qi Yun instructed everyone to return to camp, while he stayed behind to bury the skeletons back in the pit.

Then he lit three cigarettes and inserted them into the dune, bowed, and whispered softly in his heart, "Sorry for the disturbance."

Returning to camp, the group lit a bonfire and sat around discussing the day's findings, their eyes full of excitement, except for Ai Shan, who appeared slightly troubled.

Qi Yun sat by the bonfire, took the hot water Mamati handed over, took a sip, and said, "Everyone has worked hard these past few days. I've decided to give each of you an extra five thousand yuan when we return!"

Upon hearing this, the group's faces lit up with joy, and they all thanked Qi Yun.

Zhong Rui immediately shouted, "Generous boss!"

Ah Li grinned broadly, showing a mouthful of large white teeth, nodding repeatedly, "Boss Qi, you're so generous! If you ever have work again, just call us!"

Only Ai Shan forced a smile, barely moved by the corners of his mouth, then lowered his head, staring at his toes with a wandering gaze.

Mamati noticed his companion's anomaly and changed the subject, asking Qi Yun, "Boss Qi, shall we head back tomorrow morning, is that alright?"

"Sure," Qi Yun nodded, "everyone rest well tonight, and once we're out, I'll treat everyone to a good time!"

"Alright!"

"Thank you, Boss Qi!"

"..."

After dinner, everyone returned to their tents to sleep. Liu Meng carried the valuable items in a bag with him, even when he went to the toilet.

The next day, at dawn, the convoy set off.

By afternoon, the last backup fuel tank was exhausted.

Qi Yun looked at Mamati and asked, "Is Beck coming to meet us?"

Mamati continued to refuel the tank and nodded, "Yes, I contacted him before we departed this morning, he's already on the road."

The convoy set off again and didn't reach the planned location until after eleven at night, with the fuel tank nearly empty.

Mamati opened the car door and frowned slightly.

Beck should've arrived earlier given his route was closer than theirs, but there was no sight of his vehicle at the scene.

Qi Yun also came outside the car, frowned at the desolate desert ahead, and asked, "Hasn't Beck arrived yet?"

Mamati looked serious, shook his head, "I haven't seen his car, he should've been here long ago, and the satellite phone can't reach him."

Qi Yun felt a sinking feeling in his heart; in this uninhabited desert, anything could happen.

Beck's continued absence added a shadow to the already weary group.

"Let's set up camp and rest, I'll try to contact him later," Mamati suggested.

There was no other choice, so everyone nodded and began setting up tents and lighting fires.

Dinner was simply some instant noodles, and after eating, everyone crawled into tents to rest, except for Qi Yun and Mamati, who stayed by the bonfire.

Qi Yun added wood to the fire and asked, "Still can't reach him?"

Mamati sighed, picked up the satellite phone to try again, but heard only the cold busy tone.

He shook his head helplessly, "Still can't reach him."

Qi Yun stared at the pitch-black desert, his brow tightly furrowed, feeling the wind and sand swirl painfully against his face.

"Could something have happened on the road? Perhaps the car got stuck in a sand pit, or had a breakdown?"

Mamati nodded in response, "It's possible, let's wait another night, if we still can't reach Beck tomorrow, I'll find someone else to come to us."

Chapter 160: The Complexity of Human Nature

The cold night wind was biting, and the sand stung his face.

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, his eyes flashing, and looked at Mamati, saying, "Lend me your satellite phone for a moment to let my family know I'm safe, so they don't worry."

Mamati didn't think much and handed over the phone.

Qi Yun took the phone, stood up, walked a bit further away, and dialed a number while relieving himself.

After finishing the cigarette, he shook himself, pulled up his pants, and returned the satellite phone to Mamati.

"I can't hold up anymore, I'm going inside to sleep now."

"Okay, Boss Qi," Mamati replied.

A few minutes later, he also stood up, went into Ai Shan's tent, and woke him up.

The two sat by the fire pit, the orange flames flickered, casting light and shadow on their faces.

"You didn't do anything stupid, did you?" Mamati asked seriously, staring at him without missing any detail on his face.

Ai Shan's body stiffened slightly upon hearing this, his eyes instinctively evaded briefly, and then he feigned calmness, facing Mamati's gaze, chuckling dryly: "What are you talking about? What stupid thing could I do?"

As he spoke, he reached out to add another log to the fire.

Sparks scattered wildly, like his frantic heart at that moment.

Mamati frowned, still staring at him: "You know what I'm talking about, Beck should have arrived long ago, but now we can't reach him!"

Ai Shan avoided his gaze, staring at the dancing flames, his hands rubbing each other unconsciously.

"Maybe he encountered a sandstorm, the satellite phone signal was disrupted, we faced such problems before."

Mamati looked at him deeply, said no more, and headed back to the tent to sleep.

Ai Shan didn't lift his head, a shadow appeared on his face in the firelight.

At three in the morning, the pitch-black desert was silent, only the wind occasionally slapped against the tent.

A figure slowly crawled out of the tent, then quickly disappeared into the night.

About two kilometers from the camp, a Ford Raptor was parked behind a wide sand dune.

"Did you get the stuff?" Ai Shan asked in a low tone.

"Got it." Beck squatted on the ground, smoking, a hint of hesitation in his eyes, "Bro, are we really going to do this?"

Ai Shan threw the cigarette butt on the ground, extinguished it with his foot, his eyes full of determination: "We're at this point, there's no choice but to do it."

"Do you know how much those things are worth? We work ourselves to the bone in this desert and won't earn that much in a lifetime. Once we get hold of them, we'll be set for life."

Beck stood up, frowning: "But Boss Qi isn't bad to us, this job's pay is substantial, isn't what we're doing a bit too unkind?"

He glanced in the direction of the camp, looking slightly uneasy.

"Pay? Compared to the value of those treasures, it's a drop in the ocean." Ai Shan leaned closer to Beck, gripping his shoulders, "Think about what kind of days we've lived, battling the elements for meager earnings."

"This is a chance to change our fate. Miss it, and there'll be no other! Plus, we're just taking things, not hurting anyone, it's not extreme."

Beck bit his lip, eyes filled with struggle: "What if we're discovered?"

"We won't be. I've observed them these past few days, they all sleep heavily at night, as long as we're careful, they won't notice." Ai Shan let go, gently patting his shoulder, "Once you've taken the items, hide them, then drive over at noon, just say you encountered a sandstorm on the road, no one will suspect you."

Beck was silent for a moment, finally nodding: "Alright, I'll listen to you, but if anything goes wrong, we're finished."

"Don't worry, everything will be fine, take out the stuff, let's head over now."

Beck nodded, opened the car door, and retrieved two towels and a small bottle from the glove box.

The bottle was marked "Ether."

Ai Shan shook the bottle near the ether bottle's mouth, a strange smile appeared on his face: "Let's go."

The two crouched low, using the sand dunes to conceal themselves as they silently advanced toward the camp.

The cold wind cut their faces like knives, yet they were indifferent, their eyes filled with greed.

As they drew closer to the camp, Ai Shan halted, signaling Beck to hide behind a dune.

He squinted, carefully observing the camp's conditions, seeing only a few tents swaying gently in the wind, the campfire long extinguished, leaving a pile of dark ashes.

"The stuff is in the tent on the left, remember, act quickly and don't make too much noise." Ai Shan whispered.

Beck nodded, indicating he understood.

Ai Shan took a deep breath, gestured, and the two rose again, stealthily approaching Liu Meng's tent.

He pressed his ear against the tent wall, listening inside, confirmed no anomalies, then quietly unzipped the tent.

Inside the tent, Liu Meng seemed deeply asleep, breathing evenly.

And Zhong Rui inside, snoring like a tractor, loudly.

Ai Shan felt pleased, pulled a towel from his pocket, poured ether on it, then nodded to signal Beck.

They softly crawled into the tent, their gaze quickly scanning the corner, immediately noticing the bag containing the treasures, placed near Liu Meng's feet, within reach.