

Middle Age 411

Chapter 411: Astonishing Discovery

Inside the main burial chamber, Director Hua saw the passageway ahead and displayed an extremely excited expression.

"It's open!"

Qi Yun and Duan Pingyu snapped back to reality, their eyes wide open, not expecting there to be something extraordinary below.

Even though they had anticipated it, when the passageway beneath the sarcophagus actually appeared, it still felt incredible.

As the sarcophagus was raised to about two meters high, it finally stopped moving. Director Hua stepped forward, took a palm-sized device from his toolkit, inserted it into the passage for a test, then turned back to Qi Yun and the others, calling them: "Let's go, the air down there is fine."

The two of them followed, and Qi Yun took one last look at the Bronze Warriors in the main burial chamber, still standing at the four corners of the sarcophagus. Their vacant eyes seemed to observe silently in the darkness.

He took a deep breath and followed Director Hua onto the stone steps, where a slightly decayed dry scent hit him in the face.

The stone steps were wide, each covered with half a centimeter of dust, which crunched underfoot and was particularly clear in the silent passage.

Director Hua led the way, the headlamp beam piercing through the darkness, illuminating the chisel marks on the stone walls. The steps in front of them descended at a slight incline, and they couldn't see where it ended.

The three of them walked for a good ten minutes, unsure of how many meters they were below the surface when the darkness at the end of the steps was suddenly torn open by a faint light, and the scene ahead finally changed.

The moment they stepped out of the passage, the three of them gasped in unison.

In front of them was a vast plaza, and in the center of the plaza stood an underground palace as magnificent as a palace!

The underground palace seemed to be shrouded in a mist, making it hard to see clearly.

The three walked out of the passage and set foot on this plaza, and their view instantly expanded.

The entire plaza was at least the size of a football field, paved with large slabs of dark blue stone, each slab half a meter square. The ceiling was so high it couldn't be seen, with only dim light filtering down from above, barely revealing crisscrossing stone beams, with many withered vines hanging from them, gently swaying as if blown by the wind.

"No wonder there's plenty of oxygen down here. There must be an air circulation design..." Qi Yun murmured to himself.

The underground palace in the center of the plaza was indistinct in the mist, like floating amid clouds.

Director Hua shone his powerful flashlight towards the palace, observed for a long time, and finally snapped out of his awe, calling Qi Yun and the other two: "Let's go over there, keep close to me."

With that, he led the way to the center of the plaza, occasionally striking the ground with a stick in his other hand.

The three smoothly reached the foot of the magnificent underground palace. Its walls were built with dark gray bricks, over ten meters high, decorated with clear and intricate carvings crisscrossing each other.

However, from their vantage point, they couldn't accurately discern what these carvings depicted.

The entrance to the underground palace consisted of two massive stone doors, each over three meters high, with a smooth, flat surface as if polished from a single slab of dark blue stone, with not a single gap at the edges. The sheer weight of the stone doors themselves was tens of tons, making one wonder how it was transported during the construction of the underground palace.

In the center of the stone doors were two bronze rings, each as large as a plate, with a faint metallic sheen, still looking new despite the centuries, with only a bit of dust but no hint of rust.

If Shanyang Hu had made it here earlier, those bronze door rings wouldn't have been preserved.

Director Hua meticulously examined the entrance, then extended a hand, touching the surface of the stone door, moving along to the location of the rings.

After frowning and pondering for a while, he turned and called to Qi Yun: "Qi, grab the right ring and follow my movements to knock."

Qi Yun had been standing at the back, not daring to step forward, fearing he might inadvertently trigger a mechanism. But upon hearing Director Hua's instruction, he approached the right stone door and reached out to grasp the ring.

The next second, he felt an icy chill seeping into his head, as if the ring had just been taken out of a freezer.

"Begin!" Director Hua called out.

Qi Yun followed his movements, pulling hard, lifting the three to four-pound ring and letting it strike against the stone door with a clear "clang" that resonated throughout the plaza, echoing for what seemed like an eternity.

"Again! This time hit it twice!"

"Again!"

"..."

They kept trying for more than ten minutes.

Suddenly! Qi Yun again heard that familiar "creak" sound, as if some mechanism was being triggered.

Followed by a rumbling noise, the enormous stone door weighing tens of tons began to slowly open inward by itself!

As the stone door moved, clouds of dust fell, forming a haze in the flashlight beam, causing the three to cover their mouths and noses, turning their faces away.

Once the dust settled, the stone door was fully open, revealing a peculiar light from within.

"Let's go!" Director Hua called out excitedly, yet cautiously leading the way inside.

The three walked into the palace interiors and were once again rendered speechless by astonishment.

The interior was several stories high, with a gilded dome painted with patterns resembling the Milky Way.

Each star held a massive Luminous Pearl, casting a dim light throughout the palace.

The light they saw earlier from the plaza was likely from these Luminous Pearls.

Chapter 412: Shocking Discovery (Part 2)

Director Hua looked up at the dome and sighed, "These Luminous Pearls are very precious phosphorite stones, extremely rare in number. Even after a thousand years, they still emit light. They were used for illumination in Zhaoling of Emperor Taizong of Tang."

Duan Pingyu smacked his lips and remarked, "Then these Luminous Pearls must be worth a lot, right?"

"These are precious cultural relics. Don't you think it's vulgar to measure them with money?" Qi Yun retorted irritably, sneaking a glance at Director Hua and then involuntarily swallowing.

Thinking to himself, if he could sell these Luminous Pearls, they probably wouldn't be less valuable than a shipload of Gold Coins.

Director Hua smiled without answering, and continued walking forward.

On either side of the hall stood twelve stone pillars, seven or eight meters high, with patterns resembling long spears carved on them, topped with three prongs.

"It's Suludeng!" Director Hua's voice was filled with excitement. He quickly walked to the stone pillar and rubbed the carvings with his hand.

Qi Yun also came over, shining the flashlight on these patterns, asking suspiciously, "What is Suludeng?"

"Suludeng is the Mongolian battle flag totem. The three prongs symbolize 'Eternal Heaven, Earth, and Ancestors.' These spear patterns mean 'Spear of Victory.'"

Director Hua's eyes became brighter, "Genghis Khan had a guard unit named the Kheshig army, which consisted of twelve commanders, possibly corresponding to these twelve stone pillars."

"This might indeed be the tomb of the Mongolian Khan!"

"What Mongolian Khan?" Duan Pingyu asked weakly.

Qi Yun stepped forward, "You'll find out in a while."

The three continued walking forward along the stone slabs beneath them, and after passing these stone pillars, there was a stone wall more than twenty meters wide ahead, without any traces of brickwork, as if a whole section of a mountain had been moved here.

This stone wall was undecorated but was covered with murals painted with some kind of pigment, remaining vivid after hundreds of years without fading or flaking.

The murals on the far left depicted a group of cavalry galloping across the grasslands, the leading figure donned in leather armor, wielding a spear, followed by twelve knights, each with the same symbol engraved on their armor.

"This is the scene of the Kheshig army following the great Khan on the western conquest!" Director Hua's flashlight beam moved along the mural, "See the red gem in the leader's helmet? It was the Blood Jade Marrow contributed by the king of Khwarezm Royal Court when Mongolian iron tread crushed their court."

"Historically, the Mongolian army conquered westward, destroying Western Liao, Khwarezm, the Arab Empire, even reaching the present 'Ermao' and 'Damao'. Mongolians not only conquered Asia but also Eastern Europe..."

Director Hua seemed very knowledgeable about this history, enthusiastically explaining the mural to Qi Yun and Duan Pingyu.

The scene in the middle of the mural was more grandiose, with countless cavalry gathered alongside a river, nine white flags floating above the water, each painted with a wolf head, people on the riverbank kneeling in worship, and in the corner, words 'Genghis Khan' in Mongolian script.

"I'm 90% sure this is indeed the tomb of Genghis Khan!"

"Genghis Khan!?" Duan Pingyu's face showed some surprise. He did not really know the significance of this tomb in archaeology, he just found this name somewhat familiar.

After all, he relied on Combat Power for a living, his knowledge base being his weak point.

Seeing his interest, Director Hua explained with greater fervor...

"This mural scene likely occurred before the western conquest, at the Kurultai by the Wolan River, when 44-year-old Tie Muzhen was elected by various Mongolian factions as Genghis Khan, which translates to 'Ocean-like Broad Ruler' in Chinese. Later, Tie Muzhen passed away..."

"This depicts the Mongolian people's funeral scene for Tie Muzhen..."

Qi Yun wasn't very interested in this history, but seeing Director Hua's enthusiasm, he begrudgingly listened, as it was their guide who led them here.

However, his eyes were constantly observing the murals, trying to find the content related to the facet mirror.

But he ended up slightly disappointed, having viewed the entire mural without finding even a trace.

Just as Director Hua's mouth was getting dry from speaking, the walkie-talkie conveniently transmitted Captain Wu's inquiry, finally prompting Director Hua to pause reluctantly.

"Let's move on. The next area should be the tomb chamber. We can't be certain if there are any traps, so remain cautious."

"Understood." Qi Yun and Duan Pingyu responded, following behind him toward the back of the stone wall.

Behind the stone wall was a very spacious passageway, paved with dark green stones that were more smooth than outside and still fit seamlessly after hundreds of years.

The stone walls on either side of the passage were bare, with no murals, but at about a meter high from the ground, they had a row of grooves chiseled into them.

These grooves contained a heap of ashes, vaguely showing they were once torch holders, but the torches had long decayed into powder, leaving only ring-shaped charred marks.

Director Hua walked in front, his steps very slow, constantly observing the stone tiles on the ground and the walls on either side of the passage.

Duan Pingyu was also very alert, muscles tense, with his peripheral vision continually focused on the following Qi Yun.

A few minutes later, an entrance to a stone chamber appeared on the left side of the front passage. This stone chamber had no door, and after a glance amongst the three, Director Hua gestured to halt, first scanning inside with a flashlight.

Chapter 413: Incredible Discovery (Part 3)

The stone chamber appeared quite large, roughly thirty square meters in area, with a floor paved with the same dark stone as the passageway. Against the walls were several unlocked large boxes, distinctively well-preserved, unlike the boxes seen in the previous tomb, with no trace of decay.

"These are specially designed storage boxes, made from heavy iron wood and covered with a layer of copper sheeting to prevent moisture and pests. They can last for hundreds of years without falling apart," Director Hua said, cautiously taking a few steps inside, as if checking for any mechanisms.

"Mongolians would generally use these boxes to store important wartime documents and such."

After thoroughly inspecting the stone chamber, he motioned to Qi Yun and his companion, "Come in."

Qi Yun and his companion, hearing him, then entered the stone chamber.

"Can we open these boxes and take a look?" Qi Yun asked, glancing at Director Hua.

Director Hua didn't respond verbally but immediately grabbed the copper ring on the edge of the box lid and sharply lifted it.

With a creak, the heavy iron wood box lid was lifted, releasing a scent mixed with ink and the raw smell of sheepskin.

At the bottom of the box was a layer of dark red velvet, neatly arranged with dozens of rolls of sheepskin documents, tied at the edges with leather thongs.

Director Hua casually picked up a roll, untied the thong, revealing densely written Mongolian script on the parchment.

"The content here is about some aspects of Tie Muzhen's life."

After a brief scan, he picked up another roll, finding similar content, mostly extolling the great achievements of Tie Muzhen.

Qi Yun, uninterested in these, was preoccupied with thoughts of the mirror and began searching through the other boxes.

After opening three boxes filled with sheepskin scrolls, the fourth box finally held something different.

The moment he opened it, the glitter was almost blinding to Qi Yun's eyes.

The box was piled with various gold and silverware, including a palm-sized gold plate intricately carved with exquisite patterns and encrusted with pigeon blood rubies along the rim.

The steppe peoples revered eagles and wolves, and even the spout of the silver wine jug was crafted in the shape of an eagle's head, with its eyes embedded with green jade gleaming softly under the flashlight.

There were also dozens of glistening gold ingots...

"Wow! How much is this worth?" Duan Pingyu couldn't help but exclaim, wiping away the drool that was about to spill.

Qi Yun also pursed his lips, feeling a bit parched.

However, he didn't touch any of the items in the box, merely glanced over it and, finding no mirror, closed the lid again.

Even though Duan Pingyu was tempted by the gold ingots, since Qi Yun said nothing, he didn't take any either, but remained closely behind, alert for any potential danger.

A few minutes later, Qi Yun finally discovered a different kind of box in the corner. It was noticeably smaller than the other boxes and lacked the copper sheathing, crafted instead from some reddish-black wood.

Qi Yun crouched down, carefully lifted the box, and brought it over to Director Hua.

This box was unlike the others, and he dared not open it easily, unsure if it was safe.

Director Hua examined the box, saying, "This is ebony, even more resistant to moisture than iron wood, normally used to store the most valuable items."

"Everything in this stone chamber is burial goods. There won't be any traps, or we wouldn't have entered so easily."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun felt reassured and gripped the copper ring of the lid, gently lifting it. Unlike the other boxes, it opened smoothly without a creak.

Inside was a piece of velvet, upon which lay a palm-sized Bronze Mirror with an exceptionally smooth surface.

As soon as he saw the Bronze Mirror, Qi Yun's spirit lifted—he had finally found it!

In his view, the Bronze Mirror in his hand emitted a faintly familiar glow.

The back of the copper mirror lacked the glitz of gold and silverware, adorned only with a simplified star map. In its center, a line of small characters was inscribed, looking different from the previous Mongolian script, which Qi Yun couldn't understand, so he handed it to Director Hua.

"Director Hua, could you please help decipher what these characters mean?"

Director Hua took the mirror, glancing at Qi Yun with surprise, "Is this the mirror you were looking for?"

Qi Yun nodded solemnly, "Yes, this mirror is very important to me, though for reasons I can't disclose right now. I'll explain everything in detail when the time is right."

Director Hua nodded slightly, without further inquiry, and returned his focus to examining the Bronze Mirror.

"Judging by the craftsmanship of this mirror, it should be from either the early Qin Dynasty or the Eastern Zhou period. The script on it is called 'Golden Script.'

"In modern language, it translates to 'Between twin mountains, the dark valley lies, as mist guides the path freshly bright.'

Between twin mountains, the dark valley lies, as mist guides the path freshly bright?

Qi Yun murmured softly to himself.

It seemed to match the characteristics of a road clue, but was not quite the same as the previous inscription. Could it be due to the semantic differences in the script?

After Director Hua finished speaking, he placed the Bronze Mirror back into the box and sealed it.

He then left the stone chamber, saying, "I'll go scout ahead."

Duan Pingyu looked bewildered, asking Qi Yun curiously, "Why did he leave all of a sudden?"

Qi Yun shook his head, offering no explanation, and carefully retrieved the mirror from the box, stowing it cautiously in his backpack.

This was an arrangement he made with Director Hua beforehand: if they indeed found the mirror below, the other would turn a blind eye and let him take the mirror first.

Chapter 414: Shocking Discovery (Part 4)

After everything is settled, it will be returned to the Jiang Province Cultural Relics Bureau in the name of a donation for them to handle.

The purpose of doing so is also to prevent this bronze mirror from being exposed to the outside world, just like that stone tablet.

The group sent by De Gaulle were able to accurately locate this tomb, clearly having some information. Once the route behind the bronze mirror is known to them, they'll lose this important trump card.

After securing the items, Qi Yun and the others also left the stone chamber and went outside to find Director Hua.

At the corner of the passage ahead, Director Hua frowned, staring intensely at the stone slabs overhead.

Qi Yun noticed the strange look on his face, leaned in, and asked softly, "Director Hua, what did you discover?"

Director Hua's expression was grave: "I smell sulfur."

Qi Yun immediately held his breath, his nose twitching lightly, indeed smelling a faint, acrid odor similar to that after popping firecrackers.

"It's a fire trap." Director Hua pointed to the pattern at the center of the slab, "The stone slabs above and on both sides of this area are hollow, hiding flammable slots, once triggered, the slabs will crack open and spray fire."

"This structure is similar to the Tianbao dragon glass top in some grand tombs; once activated, the high-temperature flames can instantly burn everything in the passage!"

Duan Pingyu chimed in: "Like in Ghost Blows Out the Light, right? I've read it!"

Director Hua nodded: "Pretty much like that."

"Do we have a way to get past it?" Qi Yun asked worriedly.

"If fully equipped, there might be a way to disarm it, but we've only brought simple tools, and I can't do anything." Director Hua replied with a sigh.

He could only admit that if they couldn't enter the main tomb chamber today, there would be no chance once the people above take over.

Qi Yun rubbed his chin, puzzled: "Why are there no traps outside among the burial items, but suddenly there's one here?"

Director Hua shook his head: "Ever since the Eastern Han Dynasty, grave robbing has been rampant. The designers of this underground palace perhaps hoped that tomb raiders taking the burial items would give up and retreat."

"After all, these fire traps are one-time; once activated, they won't stop any tomb raiders coming in afterward."

"I see..." Qi Yun nodded thoughtfully.

"Forget it, let's not push it." Director Hua sighed regretfully, "Based on our current discoveries, we can basically confirm this is the Genghis Khan Mausoleum; let's head out."

"Alright."

...

Half an hour later, the three of them exited the tomb through the entrance used by the raiders. Captain Wu, who had been waiting outside, breathed a long sigh of relief upon seeing them return safely.

The scattered cigarette butts on the ground showed he'd been worried outside.

"We've received a call; Northern Mongolia will send people from the provincial cultural relics bureau and criminal investigation to take over the site here, probably tonight."

Upon hearing that, Director Hua's eyebrows shot up, angrily saying, "Damn, those people got lucky!"

Captain Wu, puzzled by the remark, looked towards him, "What do you mean?"

Director Hua didn't answer his question, growing increasingly dissatisfied. He pulled out his phone and walked aside, "No way, I have to report this matter upwards; it was clearly our discovery!"

Qi Yun smiled helplessly and explained to Captain Wu, "The tomb below is Genghis Khan's; Director Hua has already confirmed it."

"This..." Captain Wu opened his mouth as if understanding why Director Hua was so upset, "Alright then..."

"There's food left in the tent for you; go eat something first."

Qi Yun nodded: "Okay, thanks, Captain Wu."

Captain Wu knew what Qi Yun was thanking him for, patting his arm, "As long as everyone's safe."

Qi Yun didn't hurry to eat; instead, he glanced at Director Hua's distant back, walked aside, and took out his phone to call Wei Xueming, briefly describing the situation at the site.

Upon learning they really discovered Genghis Khan's Mausoleum, Wei Xueming was so shocked he couldn't say anything for a long time.

"You always manage to pull off big things quietly..."

Chapter 415: An Anticipated Commendation

In the camp, Qi Yun explained the situation to Wei Xueming over the phone and continued with a bit of helplessness, "I didn't expect all those foreigners to die in the tomb. Now, the higher-ups have sent people from Northern Mongolia to take over, and our archaeological team can't continue with the excavation work."

"Mr. Wei, do you think you can figure out a way to get Director Hua to join the Northern Mongolian archaeological team?"

There was a few seconds of silence on the other end, then Wei Xueming's voice came through, "It's normal for Northern Mongolia to take over such a big incident; according to the rules, it has to be locally led."

"But this decision is based on the fact that the higher-ups are unaware that beneath the tomb lies a Genghis Khan's Mausoleum."

Qi Yun thought it was hopeless after hearing the first half of the sentence, but the latter half seemed to present a turning point.

"What do you mean?"

"Didn't you say Hua Weiguo has already reported the discovery to the Jiang Province Cultural Heritage Bureau? I think things will change soon."

"This is Genghis Khan's Tomb; local authorities no longer have the standing to interfere. The National Cultural Heritage Administration should organize an archaeological team to take over."

"The National Cultural Heritage Administration?" Qi Yun clenched his phone after hearing this, "Mr. Wei, can you get Director Hua into it?"

Wei Xueming chuckled softly, "Do you really need to ask me for this? If you want to help Hua Weiguo, you can do it yourself."

"I can do it myself?" Qi Yun was taken aback, a wry smile appearing on his face, "Mr. Wei, you know my capabilities; an organization like the National Cultural Heritage Administration would never give me any face."

On the other end of the phone, Wei Xueming sighed, "You kid usually is as sharp as a monkey, but now your brain seems foggy."

"If your face isn't big enough, you can find someone with more face, right? Didn't Director Yu owe you a favor last time? For him, this small matter is just like inviting someone to a meal."

Qi Yun's eyes lit up. The Chinese Academy of Sciences isn't an administrative unit, but since they arranged for him to get into Politics X last time, their influence is vast.

Since many large domestic projects require approval from ministries, relevant departments will fully listen to the opinions of experts from various fields in the Chinese Academy of Sciences, so their connections are beyond question.

So, arranging for Director Hua to join the Cultural Heritage Administration's archaeological team, finding that old guy should work.

"I understand, thank you, Mr. Wei."

"Haha, no need to thank me; it's me who should thank you," Wei Xueming said with a sigh, "Many domestic and international experts and scholars have spent decades searching for Genghis Khan's Tomb and haven't found it. Who would have thought it would be you, kid, who discovered it."

"This discovery is a milestone for the archaeological world."

"You kid, wait to be rewarded."

The two chatted for a few more sentences and then ended the call.

Qi Yun immediately found Director Yu's number and dialed it.

The other party, after listening to his description, had a reaction similar to Wei Xueming's, equally shocked beyond words.

As for the matter of Director Hua joining the national archaeological team, he agreed right away, saying he would talk to the top of the National Cultural Heritage Administration tonight.

"You kid always manage to bring surprises to people."

"Haha, it's all the credit of the team; I'm just leading the way," Qi Yun responded with a dumb smile, effortlessly mouthing pleasantries.

"Alright, I also heard from the Jiang Province people about your discovery of the Loulan Ancient City ruins in Lop Nur last time. The higher-ups will likely commend you on these matters together, so wait for the news," Director Yu said before hanging up the phone.

Qi Yun put away his phone, feeling delighted in his heart; with both old-timers saying so, he couldn't help but look forward to the award this time.

Inside the tent, Director Hua sat on a small stool, not having touched a single bite of the food on the table beside him, looking worried and gloomy.

Qi Yun walked over with a grin, sat down, and handed him a cigarette.

He initially wanted to inform Director Hua after Director Yu handled the matter, but seeing him unable to drink tea or eat meals, he feared he would become depressed, so he shared what was said on the call with him in advance.

After listening, the worried expression on Director Hua's face disappeared instantly, and he excitedly grabbed Qi Yun's hand, "Are you serious? Can I really join the National Archaeological Team?"

Qi Yun felt pain in his wrist from the grip, thinking that the old man's strength was quite big.

"Of course, Director Yu from the Chinese Academy of Sciences has already agreed to me, and tonight he will go talk to the leadership of the National Cultural Heritage Administration," Qi Yun withdrew his hand and took out a lighter to light the cigarette for the other, "So don't overthink it, have a meal and rest well, and wait for the notification from above."

Director Hua took a deep drag of the cigarette, his hand still trembling slightly, "Thank you! Qi boy, from now on you are my own son!"

Qi Yun's face turned dark immediately upon hearing this.

I use my favors to help you, and in the end, you want to take advantage of me and become my dad?

But he could understand the other's excited feelings...

Throughout history, there have always been people like this. They don't love money, don't love women, only aspire to leave a name in the annals, hoping to leave their mark on the river of history.

Considering the significance of Genghis Khan's tomb domestically, it clearly could realize this person's wish.

In the future, the TV and newspapers introducing Director Hua will probably say - Jiang Province Cultural Heritage Bureau, Director of Cultural Heritage Protection and Archaeology, one of the discoverers of Genghis Khan's Tomb, participated in leading the excavation work of Genghis Khan's Tomb...

If this place becomes a tourist spot in the future, his name should be on the stone tablet at the entrance.

...

Two days later, Qi Yun returned to Bird City from Northern Mongolia.

The situation at Genghis Khan's Tomb was almost as Wei Xueming predicted; the archaeological team sent by the Northern Mongolian Cultural Heritage Bureau was called back before they reached the site.

Chapter 416: Anticipated Reward _2

The site has been temporarily sealed off by the Northern Mongolia Provincial Hall's criminal investigation team. Once the National Archaeological Team arrives, they will conduct the excavation and deal with the removal of those foreign bodies.

The Northern Mongolia Cultural Relics Bureau personnel, upon learning that there's an underground palace of Genghis Khan beneath the tomb, were astounded and turned back halfway, each of them in disbelief.

Although they felt resentful and argued fiercely with higher-ups, they ultimately had to face reality.

After all, the level of Genghis Khan's mausoleum was too high for the local archaeological team to handle.

State-level intervention not only ensures excavation standards but also balances the interests of all parties.

Later, under the coordination of high-level authorities, Northern Mongolia was also allocated a spot for an archaeological team, considering the tomb was found there, and various resources needed local collaboration.

As for Director Hua, he successfully joined the National Archaeological Team through Director Yu's efforts, and with this experience, a promotion upon his return was a natural progression.

This was also Qi Yun's way of repaying Director Hua for risking his life to accompany him into the tomb.

Although the other party was personally interested in going down, it was only after Qi Yun brought it up that he agreed to go and persuade Captain Wu together.

A gentleman judges deeds, not intentions, so Qi Yun acknowledged this favor, and with the matter of the Bronze Mirror, sought Director Yu's help to make arrangements.

In the past two days, Qi Yun received two system intelligence updates, one containing purple-grade information, which included a coordinate.

[(Purple 4/6): 31°08'03"E, 29°58'45"N]

According to the map, this coordinate is located in the southwestern part of Egypt Cairo, an area with many long-existing ruins, including the renowned Sphinx and ancient Pyramid Complex.

And this coordinate points to the Khufu's Pyramid, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, existing for nearly five thousand years.

As for the clues hidden within this pyramid, Qi Yun is currently unaware.

Although Ignacio and his mentor are assisting in unraveling these mysteries, there is scant documentation on them, so progress is limited.

This is the advantage of the De Gaulle family; they not only know how to read map information but also likely know the hidden clues at these locations on the map.

However, Qi Yun also has his own advantage, which is that he now knows the detailed coordinates of four locations: Loulan Ancient City, Genghis Khan's Tomb, Mayan Ruins, and Khufu's Pyramid.

And he's already mastered the clues at the first two locations.

Whether or not to explore the Mayan Ruins and Khufu's Pyramid will depend on his meeting with De Gaulle. If De Gaulle has already acquired leads to these places, then there's no need to pursue them further.

...

At eleven o'clock at night, the sky had not completely darkened.

In Koi Mountain Park, Qi Yun found Zhou Hongchang behind an artificial hill.

"Why meet here? Feels like a spy rendezvous." Qi Yun smiled and sat down on a nearby stone bench.

Zhou Hongchang stared at Qi Yun for a few seconds, then, in front of him, pressed the power button on his phone to turn it off and placed it on the stone table beside him.

Then he took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one: "It's quiet here."

Qi Yun accepted the cigarette, noticing Zhou Hongchang's serious demeanor, so he asked, "Something happened?"

"Yes." Zhou Hongchang nodded, clutching a lighter to light Qi Yun's cigarette, "There's something I want to chat with you about."

Qi Yun held the cigarette in his mouth, gently tapping the back of Zhou's hand, and after the cigarette was lit, he took a couple of puffs: "What's up, tell me."

Zhou Hongchang looked around and seeing no one, carefully asked: "Do you know Qiu Jiahao?"

Qi Yun's expression froze, turning to stare at Zhou Hongchang, thinking the latter wanted some help, he didn't expect such a question.

"Why ask that?"

Zhou Hongchang, a veteran constable, noted Qi Yun's muscle twitch, recognizing his sudden alertness.

He lowered his head, took another cigarette from the pack, and lit it, speaking at ease: "I was recently assigned to a case, where the deceased was Qiu Jiahao."

"This investigation was conducted secretly, few knew, and we were ordered to keep it confidential." Zhou paused and looked at Qi Yun, his expression sincere: "Meeting you and discussing this is already against the rules."

"Old Qi, you've been good to me, so trust that I wouldn't harm you."

Qi Yun paused with his smoke, ash dropping on his shoe.

He could sense Zhou Hongchang was truthful, yet remained vigilant at heart.

The connection between Qiu Jiahao and himself wasn't a secret, easily discovered without governmental aid upon inquiry.

Thus, for Zhou to meet at personal risk, it surely wasn't just to ask if he knew Qiu Jiahao, there must be more.

He needed to clarify Zhou Hongchang's true purpose.

"The case was initially handled by the New District Branch; their conclusion was accidental heart attack death."

"However, we secretly arranged for a forensic re-examination of Qiu Jiahao..."

Zhou Hongchang's Adam's apple moved, speaking even lower: "The forensic found trace mercury residue inside him!"

"And it was refined liquid mercury, extremely toxic, capable of causing cardiac arrest within minutes."

Chapter 417: Anticipated Reward _3

"With this kind of poison, the death appears exactly like a heart attack on the surface."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun's fingers holding the cigarette butt tightened suddenly.

Although he had long suspected that Qiu Jiahao did not die of a heart attack, when this conclusion was truly confirmed, a chill ran up his spine.

Those people are ruthless, first killing the father, then the son...

Zhou Hongchang pulled out a photo from his pocket, handed it to Qi Yun, and continued, "There's also this, he had a very small pinhole on the back of his neck, concealed by his hair, which the forensic doctor only discovered after shaving it."

"It's presumed to be left from the injection of the toxin."

Despite the turbulence within him, Qi Yun still tried hard to maintain his composure on the face: "What do you mean by telling me all this?"

Zhou Hongchang was silent for a few seconds: "We investigated the last three months of Qiu Jiahao's life and found that you had contact with him several times."

Qi Yun chuckled softly, exhaling a smoke ring: "Do you suspect I killed him?"

Zhou Hongchang shook his head: "I believe you wouldn't do such a thing."

"Qiu Jiahao was under strict surveillance, and we preliminarily determine that the other party was likely trying to obtain some information or object from him."

"The people monitoring him are very well-hidden; we still haven't found any trace of them."

Zhou Hongchang paused again at this point, then after a long silence, he said thoughtfully, "I don't know if you're involved in this, but if you know anything, I hope you can tell me."

"If you don't want to say anything... I won't force you, but you should be careful; the people who killed him are very professional."

Qi Yun nodded, continued smoking, the alarm bells in his mind ringing loudly.

Since Zhou Hongchang could discover his frequent contacts with Qiu Jiahao, with the energy of that group, he believed it wouldn't be long before they would find out as well, and by then, they would most likely suspect him too.

In the end, he's still caught up in this mess...

Only when the cigarette burned out did Qi Yun ask an ostensibly unrelated question, "Who initiated and established your investigation team?"

After hearing this, Zhou Hongchang didn't answer immediately, his eyes drifted to the distant streetlamp, and after a full half minute of silence, he reached out and wrote a '2' on the stone table.

"He directly ordered the criminal investigation team, even the city bureau leaders weren't informed."

Qi Yun contemplated for a long time, eventually letting out a lengthy sigh, stood up, and patted Zhou Hongchang's shoulder: "Many things, even he may not be able to handle."

With that, he walked into the night.

Zhou Hongchang watched Qi Yun's departing figure, his eyes filled with incomparably profound shock!

...

On the other side, London, Kensington Palace Gardens.

This place is known as the "Billionaires' Row," where the world's top tycoons and the British royal family members are gathered, including that "small target" man, who all own mansions here.

In an estate in the central area, a middle-aged man with a small mustache was on the phone, speaking in a perfect London accent.

His name is James, James Boot.

"Do you know what you're saying?"

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Boot, this time it's indeed our issue, please don't be angry!" The attitude of the person on the other end of the line was very humble, "We have tracked the traces of those robbers, but they've already left with the goods on a cargo ship, so please give us one more day, we will definitely retrieve the goods."

James swirled the wine glass in his hand, his face showing no hint of emotion: "For God's sake, I can grant you one more day, but my patience is limited."

"Understood! Understood! Thank you for your leniency, Mr. Boot!"

Chapter 418: Stirring Up Trouble!

Egypt, Suez Canal.

The noonday sun scorched the water's surface, and on the sparkling canal, cargo ships lined up end to end, slowly moving like a long iron dragon.

This is one of the busiest shipping lanes in the world. Every day, numerous merchant ships enter the Red Sea from the Mediterranean Sea through this passage, heading to Asia, the Atlantic Ocean.

At the end of the canal, a cargo ship flying the Panama flag, named "Desert Fox," was slowly advancing.

This is a medium-sized container ship, with a deadweight of 80,000 tons, carrying over two thousand standard containers, dozens of which are filled with weapons and ammunition.

This ship will first stop at Hong Kong Island in China before heading to its final destination.

In the cockpit, An Zai, with his buzz cut, curiously stared at the navigation map on the screen and asked the captain, "Are we about to enter the territory of Somali pirates? I've heard it's quite thrilling here, isn't it?"

The black captain, with a cigar in his mouth, glanced at An Zai's curious face and flashed a big white smile, "Indeed, in the past few years, merchant ships passing through the Red Sea had to be prepared for being robbed by them."

"Now, with Egyptian military patrol boats on both sides of the canal and the international escort fleet, their days have become much harder, and they dare not appear casually."

Hearing the wistful tone of the captain, An Zai couldn't help but doubt the guy's stance.

"Don't worry, those guys are also clients of Mr. Harris. Even if we run into them, they won't rob us," the black captain pouted his thick sexy lips and added another sentence.

An Zai gave him a thumbs up, "Niubi!"

While they were talking, the intercom on the console suddenly transmitted a crew member's shout: "Captain! A speedboat is approaching from the east!"

Before the captain could respond, another anxious voice came through the intercom: "Captain! Three speedboats from the west! Two nautical miles off the port side!"

The captain habitually smoked his cigar, snorting with dismissive laughter, "These young sailors are more timid than women." Then he turned his head and looked at the first mate beside him, "First Mate, go negotiate, give them two boxes of wine, and tell them whose ship this is!"

The first mate showed no sign of panic, evidently not his first time handling such an incident. He shrugged and headed for the elevator, "Alright, those bastards, we don't even have enough wine for ourselves."

Hearing this made An Zai a bit excited. He turned to greet Old Bai, who was on duty with him, "I'm going to take a look at what these Somali pirates look like."

Old Bai, sitting in his recliner reading a newspaper, waved his hand casually.

Though this was the merchant ship arranged by Qi Yun, it was still abroad, so Chen Wei seemed to remain vigilant, making appropriate arrangements after boarding.

An Zai and Old Bai were responsible for standing guard at the control station to keep abreast of any emergencies, while Chen Wei and the other three were in the room below, guarding the batch of goods.

The first mate and An Zai took the elevator to the third floor. After passing through a narrow passage, they emerged onto the deck of the cargo ship.

The sea breeze carried a strong smell of salt as it swept over. On the left side, three speedboats had already drawn near, with several others fast approaching from behind.

These speedboats had black flags; the pirates on board wore headscarves, leaving only their eyes visible, holding outdated AK47s, their gun barrels glinting under the sun.

A young sailor, apparently inexperienced with such a scene, shivered as he asked the first mate, "Should we prepare the high-pressure water guns?"

Typically, cargo ships passing through pirate-infested waters would pre-install iron bar nets and set up high-pressure water guns on the railing to prevent pirates from boarding.

Some ships carrying high-value cargo even hire specialized security, armed guards.

However, such security is very expensive, costing 500,000 to 600,000 USD per person, with three to four security personnel assigned to each vessel for two to three days until the ship passes through dangerous waters.

This means the cost just for hiring security could nearly reach two million USD, more than the fee for a cargo ship to pass through the Suez Canal.

So, the number of ships hiring security is quite limited. Typically, captains organize their crew to make defensive arrangements in advance.

But this ship's captain evidently hadn't taken these small-time Kalamai pirates seriously, so no preparations had been made beforehand.

The first mate made a relaxed wave at the sailor's query and instructed, "Go get two cases of wine over here."

The sailor was somewhat perplexed but quickly complied, jogging off towards the cabin.

The speed of large cargo ships is slow, around eight to ten knots on a normal route, so in this blink of an eye, those speedboats had already come alongside the cargo ship.

An Zai leaned on the railing; he could even see the chest hair of the guy nicknamed "Blackie" below.

The first mate also leaned out halfway, a perfunctory smile on his face, holding a megaphone and shouting to those below, "Friends! Please tell your boss, this is Mr. Harris's ship!"

"Please do not approach to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. I will lower two cases of wine to you!"

However, the pirates below gave no response.

Not only that, but on a nearby speedboat, a pirate stood up, holding a grapnel launcher, aimed at the ship's railing, and pressed the trigger.

"Shoo—clack!"

The grapnel gun's steel claw shot out with a sharp whistling sound, biting precisely onto the ship's railing, and the rope instantly tightened.

The pirates on the speedboat burst into cheers. The leading pirate waved his hand, and a few figures wrapped in headscarves immediately grabbed the rope and climbed up swiftly like monkeys, evidently very skilled.

Chapter 419: Stirring Up Trouble!

The first officer noticed the situation, the smile vanished from his face, and he seemed to realize something was not quite right. As he was stunned, several grappling hooks from other speedboats were already flying towards the ship's rail.

"What are you doing! This is Mr. Harris's ship!" The first officer was obviously a bit panicked, as their actions were unexpected, and they were starting to board the ship by force.

But the pirates still ignored him, each climbing up the ropes onto the ship.

At this moment, the sailor who had gone to the cabin to fetch wine earlier came running back, panting heavily, and was scared stiff by what he saw. Stammering, he asked, "Do...do we still give them the wine..."

"You idiot, are you blind! Hurry and get the high-pressure water gun! Grab an axe! Cut their ropes!" The first officer cursed angrily, while commanding the deck crew to defend and grabbed a walkie-talkie to report, "Captain, pirates are boarding the ship!"

"Bang!"

A gunshot rang out without warning, a bullet grazed the first officer's shoulder, drawing a line of blood.

The first officer screamed out in pain, quickly squatted down, and dared not stick his head out again.

Meanwhile, An Zai had already sensed something was wrong when the pirates fired the launching cable gun and quickly returned to the cockpit without looking back, simultaneously notifying Chen Wei in the cabin of the situation outside.

By the time An Zai got to the cockpit via the elevator, besides Eagle left to guard the cargo, Chen Wei and the other two had also arrived.

"How many of them are there? What are they equipped with?"

"There are about thirty on the left side of the hull; the right side is probably the same, equipped with AKs, no heavy firepower discovered." An Zai concisely described the situation.

Chen Wei pondered for two seconds, then turned to look at the captain, "What do you suggest?"

The captain's forehead was already covered in cold sweat, continuously listening to the reports coming through the walkie-talkie, "It's too late to stop them! Pirates have already boarded from the rear!"

"The best plan now is to gather all the crew and hide in the bottom cabin. There's a fire door there; the pirates can't get in!"

"I'll use the radio to seek aid from the Egyptian government later, have them send a patrol team for rescue!"

After he finished speaking, he picked up the walkie-talkie again, giving orders to all crew members to gather at the bottom.

In theory, the captain's arrangement was fine because pirates had already boarded, meaning the situation was out of control.

Besides him and the first officer being Harris's subordinates, there were two others responsible for guarding the dozens of crates of firearms, pitting four against seventy to eighty pirates, there was certainly no chance of winning.

The other crew members were just ordinary people; probably all would shake at the sound of gunfire.

So, gathering everyone onboard to avoid casualties was the best choice.

Additionally, the ship was carrying over two thousand containers, most of which contained ordinary goods. The dozens of crates of firearms were in a very concealed corner, impossible for the pirates to find.

Although the plan had no flaws, Chen Wei couldn't help but frown after hearing it.

Because their cargo was not at the bottom but on the fourth floor, even moving to the bottom now would be too late.

If he let the pirates come up, he wouldn't be able to explain if the cargo was lost to Qi Yun.

"You go to the bottom, leave the pirates to us! Don't contact the government!" Chen Wei stared at the captain, his face serious.

There would definitely be casualties later, and once the Egyptian government intervened, they would surely investigate the entire incident, the ship wouldn't be able to leave, and it would be forcibly taken back to port, complicating the situation.

Because Chen Wei and the others hadn't boarded the ship through proper channels, their identities were already sensitive, so even killing pirates could cause trouble.

Moreover, there were valuable goods onboard, if found, there would be no explanation.

So the best way was to take a hard stance with these pirates!

If they retreat knowing the difficulties, let them leave, but if they insist, send them collectively to hell!

The captain's eyes widened like copper bells at the words, the walkie-talkie in his hand dropped on the control panel with a "clatter," "Are you crazy?! You five want to deal with seventy to eighty pirates? They have AKs!"

Though he could see these people were not simple, how could five solve the problem of seventy to eighty pirates armed with AKs?

Chen Wei didn't explain much, his attitude was firm, "Do as I say! Do you have guns?"

The captain wasted no time, quickly nodded, "We have two handguns, two submachine guns!"

Normally, even international ships are prohibited from carrying weapons, but if you hide some onboard, a ship this size would be hard to search thoroughly, especially since they're not doing legitimate business.

"Bring the guns over!" Chen Wei instructed, then turned to An Zai and the others, quickly making a plan, "An Zai and Lao Bai take the left side of the hull, I'll handle the right, Da Pao and Bing Zi clear out the pirates who infiltrated the cabin first, then split up to support."

With these words, each of the five drew their pistols, skillfully chambering a round. They displayed remarkable calm, with no sign of panic on their faces.

Two minutes later, the captain brought all the weapons over, placing them on the console.

"Alright, take the crew down to the bottom. I'll notify you with the walkie-talkie when it's over." Chen Wei instructed the captain before turning to check the firearms.

Two Glock 17 handguns, the same as the ones Xiao Yuan had prepared for them earlier, and two German MP7 submachine guns along with ammunition.

These MP7 submachine guns have substantial firepower with strong penetration, often equipped by special forces in many countries.

Chen Wei only took one submachine gun and two magazines, distributing the remaining ones to the others.

"Prioritize disarming and driving them away, shooting is permitted, use your judgment!" After equipping, Chen Wei shouted loudly.

"Understood!" Everyone nodded in agreement.

"Move out!"

Chen Wei wielded his MP7 submachine gun, leading the way down the stairs to the right.

Now knowing the situation outside, the elevator was obviously not an option, otherwise it would make them sitting ducks.

Just as he descended to the stairwell corner, he encountered two pirates crouching and climbing up, with headscarves covering most of their faces, leaving only their ferocious eyes visible.

On seeing Chen Wei holding a gun, they raised their AKs to pull the trigger.

Chen Wei dared not show the slightest mercy, leveled his submachine gun, and opened fire first!

"Ratatat!" Two short bursts struck precisely at their chests, and the pirates grunted, rolling down the stairs, their AK47s clattering to the ground.

Without hesitating, Chen Wei stepped over them, continuing downstairs while Da Pao and Lao Bai each picked up an AK.

Upon reaching the fourth-floor staircase, the group split into two, Da Pao and Bing Zi began searching for invading pirates in the cabin, while Chen Wei and two others continued towards the outer deck.

As they reached the third-floor corridor entrance, chaotic footsteps and the loud shouts of pirates were heard from the deck.

Chen Wei quickly peeked out to observe the situation outside, then signaled to Lao Bai, who nodded, moved forward with the AK, and unleashed a burst of fire on the deck outside.

"Brrrat!" The rifle roared in the narrow corridor's entrance, prompting the pirates rushing forward to duck and cover.

Several who were slow to react caught stray bullets, screaming as they rolled to the ground.

This was Lao Bai deliberately lowering the muzzle; with normal firing, at least a row would drop.

Chen Wei seized the moment, rolled forward, and charged out of the corridor, sliding beneath a ventilation duct on the deck.

The duct, nearly a meter in diameter, was part of the freighter's ventilation system, made of thick sheet metal, adequately bulletproof.

No sooner had he stabilized than he heard bullets whizz overhead, thudding into the duct with muted "thunk" noises.

While these pirates knew nothing about tactics, and their shooting skills were lacking, being numerous and well-armed with AKs made for a daunting sight.

At that moment, another burst of "Brrrat!" fire erupted from the adjacent corridor. An Zai took advantage of the pirates focusing their fire on Chen Wei, letting loose a burst of bullets.

This time, no mercy was shown. Since the pirates wouldn't retreat, showing leniency would only harm themselves.

The submachine gun's bullets cut through like reaping wheat, instantly claiming seven or eight lives, as pirates fell silently backward from chest wounds.

The two surviving pirates were scared witless, babbling something unintelligible before fleeing in a panic.

The pirate leader who boarded later turned livid upon hearing the situation on this side and spat angrily, "Damn it! With so many dead, twenty million is definitely not enough!"

Chapter 420: The Boot Clan Takes the Field

The battle on the cargo ship's deck continues.

Chen Wei clears his sight of pirates while dashing towards the starboard.

"Bang bang bang!"

After emptying the magazine of his submachine gun, he hurls the gun at a pirate to the left, simultaneously pulling out a handgun from his waist, "Bang! Bang!" and accurately hits the pirate's thigh with two shots.

The pirate cries out in pain, staggering forward, and drops his AK to the ground. Chen Wei quickly steps forward, grabs the rifle up effortlessly, and smashes the butt against the pirate's head, knocking him out cold.

Beside the ship's railing, a new group of pirates climbs up the ropes; they've received their leader's latest order to kill on sight. Upon seeing Chen Wei, they raise their guns and start shooting.

Chen Wei reacts extremely quickly, bending down the moment the enemies raise their hands, executing two rolling motions in succession.

"Ping! Ping! Ping!" Bullets whiz past his back, causing sparks to fly across the deck.

Chen Wei dodges the heavy fire, hides his body behind a cover without poking his head out to observe the opponents' positions, and just based on the gun sounds, he discerns the pirates' locations, swiftly firing three shots, with three pirates instantly collapsing with chest wounds.

Two pirates who narrowly escape the shots are startled and instinctively turn to flee.

Though they appear ferocious, at their core they are merely ragtag mercenaries, who don't even measure up to regular army standards, let alone the elite special forces of Chen Wei and his team.

As soon as the fight started, they noticed something amiss, with their ranks collapsing swifter than the tide.

But Chen Wei was not about to give them a chance to escape.

With a sharp push of his toe against the deck, his body springs out from the cover like a leopard, using the AK47 he's just picked up, "Bang bang bang" firing a burst of bullets right into the pirates' calves.

"Thump! Thump!" The two scream as they fall, struggling to get up, but Chen Wei is already upon them, smashing the gun butt viciously against their heads, knocking them out in an instant.

After dealing with these two, Chen Wei scans the deck, confirming there are no other pirates present, and without stopping, quickly moves to the railing and leans over the edge to look down.

On the sea below, several speedboats are still circling, with seven to eight pirates clutching four steel cables to climb upward, the closest less than a meter from the deck.

Chen Wei switches the AK to single-shot mode, raising his hand to fire several shots, "Ping! Ping! Ping!" bullets hitting the steel cables, sparks flying.

Though the steel cables don't break immediately, they're shaken violently, causing the pirates to cling desperately to the ropes, swaying like they're on a swing, yelling in terror.

The top pirate is only half a meter from the deck, just about to reach out for the railing when Chen Wei aims a shot at his wrist.

"Ah!" The pirate screams, letting go and falling straight into the sea.

Pirates on the speedboat realize what's happening and start shooting at Chen Wei's location. Although these small-time shooters have limited accuracy, with more than ten people on the speedboats below, there's still a risk of stray bullets hitting him, so Chen Wei doesn't dare be careless and quickly ducks for cover.

He moves forward along the railing about ten meters and exposes his gun once more.

This time, instead of targeting the cables, he directly aims at the pirates on the ropes, "Bang! Bang!" and a pirate crumbles back into the sea with a shot to the chest.

The remaining pirates hesitate, frightened of Chen Wei's shooting, and begin jumping into the sea.

On the port side, the battle goes more smoothly, with An Zai and Old White pushing forward from the right and left.

Their marksmanship is exceptionally accurate; in just four to five minutes, they clear more than twenty pirates on the deck, including their leader, whom they capture alive.

"Tell your men to cease fire!" Old White seizes the leader by the neck, thrusts his upper body over the railing, and presses a handgun against his head.

The leader's body trembles, his clothes soaked with cold sweat, never imagining his crew of dozens would be shattered so quickly.

Not hearing a response, Old White slightly shifts the gun towards the leader's ear and pulls the trigger.

"Bang!" The gunshot rings out, the bullet grazes the leader's ear, drawing a spurt of blood, and blowing off half the ear.

The leader howls in agony, clutching his ear, wailing as blood seeps through his fingers, an overwhelming terror in his eyes replacing any remnants of defiance.

"Cease fire! I order you to cease fire!" The leader convulses in pain, shouting to the speedboats below, "All speedboats, retreat immediately! Leave the ship! If anyone dares come closer, I'll skin them alive!"

He then grabs the walkie-talkie on his chest and yells the command several more times, worried his men didn't hear.

In truth, the pirates on the speedboat are also afraid; if they hadn't feared their leader's cruel methods, they would have escaped long ago. Now, receiving the retreat order, they dare not linger.

The pirates maneuver the speedboats around, their engines roaring as they flee in haste, quickly becoming black specks on the horizon.

Chen Wei watches the speedboats disappear at the edge of the sea, finally leaning against the railing and sighing in relief.

Although the battle wasn't prolonged, the tension remained high throughout. Now relaxed, he realizes that his clothes are soaked through with sweat.

"Da Pao, how's the situation on your side!"

The earpiece quickly crackles with Da Pao's response: "We've advanced to the third level, killing nine pirates in total."