

Middle Age 421

Chapter 421: The Boot Clan Takes the Field

After listening, Chen Wei quickly made arrangements, "An Zai and I will support them and clear the cabin as fast as possible. Lao Bai, take the pirate leader to the cockpit!"

"Roger that!"

"Roger that!"

After assigning the tasks, Chen Wei hurried to the cabin.

Twenty minutes later, they finished checking the rooms in the cabin and arrived directly beneath the bridge.

Here, the massive engine occupies most of the space, its roar numbing the eardrums, while the scorching exhaust pipes emit heat waves mixed with the pungent smell of engine oil and diesel.

Moreover, this engine room has many nooks where people can hide, making it difficult to search.

Chen Wei picked up the walkie-talkie and explained the situation outside to the captain hiding on the lower deck, asking them to come out and assist in the search.

Initially, the captain was skeptical, suspecting that Chen Wei and his team were held hostage by pirates trying to deceive them into coming out until Chen Wei personally reached the lower deck, after which the captain opened the fire door and stepped out.

"Oh! My God! You guys must be superheroes!" The captain excitedly moved in to give Chen Wei a bear hug.

Chen Wei, slightly put off by the smell from the captain's armpit, quickly raised his hand to stop him.

"I need you to send a few people to the engine room to assist my team in the search; we need to wipe out the pirates on board completely."

"The rest will follow me to the deck to handle the pirates outside."

The captain hurriedly nodded, "No problem, I'll arrange it right now!"

More than half an hour later, the deck was piled up with pirate bodies, roughly four or fifty at a glance.

There were also a dozen or so wounded captives, all kneeling on the deck with their heads bowed.

Pointing his gun at the mountain of corpses, Chen Wei directed his words at the pirate leader, "I will ask you some questions next. If you don't cooperate, you'll join them."

The leader shuddered, clutching his bleeding ear as cold sweat continuously dripped down his cheeks.

He glanced at the pile of corpses, fully aware that this was no mere threat.

With dozens of corpses, these people had proven their ruthlessness, and the excruciating pain in his ear reminded him that the outcome of non-compliance would be even worse.

"What's the purpose of hijacking the ship?" Chen Wei took a step closer, the barrel nearly pressing against the leader's forehead.

The leader trembled as he replied, "Don't... know... Someone hired us to hijack this ship and take it to our territory."

"Who hired you?" Chen Wei continued to press.

The leader's Adam's apple swayed violently, evading Chen Wei's gaze, "Don't... know exactly... only contacted through an intermediary!"

Concerned Chen Wei would be dissatisfied with his answer, the leader quickly added, "They offered a total of twenty million USD! They've already paid five million upfront! I can wire the five million to your account right now!"

Chen Wei pushed the gun forward, causing the leader's head to slam against the deck with a "thud," making him wince in pain without daring to make a sound.

"Call the intermediary. Use whatever means necessary; I need to know who the employer is." With that said, he handed over a satellite phone.

The leader shivered uncontrollably, clumsily taking the phone, dialing a number quickly.

Upon connection, an exchange with the intermediary ensued, who, unsurprisingly, refused to disclose any employer information.

Only after explaining the situation and threatening the intermediary's family did the intermediary finally yield.

"It's someone from China, name unknown, the money was transferred through a company in London."

Seeing no more information could be obtained, Chen Wei grudgingly gave up temporarily, calling for a speedboat and sending them all off the ship, including the bodies.

After dealing with the pirates, Chen Wei asked the captain to have people clean the bloodstains on the deck and in the cabin.

He also disabled the ship's Starlink network to prevent any premature disclosure of the incidents onboard, avoiding unnecessary trouble.

After care of these matters, he took the satellite phone into a room and called Qi Yun to brief him on the situation.

Upon hearing, Qi Yun was also somewhat surprised; the adversary's actions clearly targeted that batch of artifacts.

If the pirates aimed for other cargo or weaponry onboard, deploying so many forces wouldn't be necessary; a regular heist involved four or five speedboats at most.

Deploying so many forces indicates they are aware of Chen Wei's team's presence on the ship.

Knowing Chen Wei's team seized that batch of artifacts and could track their whereabouts accurately, who would that be?

Ji Liyang?

Does he possess such capabilities?

Considering Chen Wei's team had been out of London for nearly three days, it's remarkable the adversary pinpointed them on the cargo ship in the Red Sea - an extraordinary feat.

Besides Ji Liyang, who else could it be?

After pondering for a few seconds, Qi Yun checked his watch for time, then took out his phone to ring Brother Chen in Shanghai.

"Brother Chen, I'm sorry for disturbing your rest so late."

"Haha, not at all, not at all. I'm just finishing some work myself." Brother Chen's tone was polite, showing no slightest trace of annoyance.

"Good." Late at night, Qi Yun offered little small talk and curtly asked, "Brother Chen, have you heard anything about Ji Liyang lately?"

"Ji Liyang, huh? He was temporarily detained by the municipal bureau recently and might spend some time in the detention center. As for how he's sentenced later, it depends on the evidence from the prosecution." Brother Chen assumed Qi Yun's dissatisfaction lingered, hence elaborated thoroughly.

Qi Yun paused upon hearing this; Ji Liyang already detained?

Then who hired the pirates?

"Alright, got it. I won't intrude on you, Brother Chen. I didn't mean to ask much, just checking in."

"Haha, sure, I'll update you if anything new surfaces."

"Good, thanks, Brother Chen. I'll treat you to a meal next time I visit Shanghai."

...

Elsewhere, in a London apartment.

A middle-aged man furiously threw his phone to the ground, not satisfied even after stomping it several times.

"Worthless! All damned worthless!"

The man's name was Lu Zhijie, Ji Liyang's trusted ally in the shadows, executing most of Ji Liyang's illicit business.

Despite Ji Liyang's downfall, why does he remain steadfastly loyal instead of taking the money and fleeing?

Their love story must be mentioned...

It was a late autumn in Chengdu...

After venting his rage, Lu Zhijie lit a slender cigarette, forcing himself to calm down and consider other ways to reclaim the batch.

Even the infamous Somali pirates had failed, leaving him with no alternatives.

The sea is unlike land, with fewer capable factions for such an endeavor, aside from rogue pirates, official militaries won't assist in such matters.

After chain-smoking five or six cigarettes, Lu Zhijie leaned back in his chair, letting out a long sigh.

He was out of options and could only try to win the Boot Clan's forgiveness and request their direct intervention.

Yet, agreeing to this means the batch and any further dealings with Ji Liyang will be severed, with no share of the remaining payment.

And this was still considered the best outcome!

Furthermore, the best outcome hinges on the Boot Clan retrieving the batch.

If the Boot Clan fails to acquire the batch eventually, their fury might very well end up on Lu Zhijie and Ji Liyang instead.

Lu Zhijie extinguished the cigarette butt, picked up another phone from the desk, and dialed James's number...

Elsewhere, in a Kensington Palace Gardens estate.

James, expressionless, hung up the phone, took a moment to ponder, then dialed a number for a family councilor.

"Alina, the agreed artifacts have been snatched. You know the significance of these artifacts pertaining to our family's roots in Wales..."

"The artifacts are currently on a cargo ship in the Red Sea. I need you to contact someone in the naval staff headquarters and request to send a warship..."

Chapter 422: The Supreme Treasure—Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl

London, Whitehall.

If Kensington Palace Gardens symbolizes the wealth of the United Kingdom, then Whitehall undoubtedly represents its power.

Around this street are not only government institutions like the Parliament Building and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, but also core departments like the Ministry of Defense that directly control national military power, making Whitehall synonymous with the UK's administration.

The gray stone buildings form a majestic and solemn facade, with an atmosphere so serious that it almost stands still.

In an office in the central area of the third floor of the Navy Department Building, a middle-aged man with the rank of Major General is conversing with another Lieutenant General.

The Major General is named Jesus, serving as the Deputy Chief of Staff of the UK's Naval Staff, while the Lieutenant General is an official from the Ministry of Defense.

The UK Navy only has fifty thousand personnel, yet there are over a hundred officers alone, making the rank of Major General rather common around Whitehall.

However, the position of Deputy Chief of Staff still carries some weight in authority; while he cannot directly maneuver the naval fleet, organizing small-scale training missions is feasible.

Jesus leaned back on his spacious chair, relaxed: "Alina wants to request us to dispatch a warship to help her family intercept a cargo ship near the Red Sea."

Upon hearing this, the Lieutenant General frowned: "You should know the situation over there near the Red Sea. Even the American aircraft carrier has been driven away; sending a warship there now is a very dangerous move."

"It is indeed a bit risky," Jesus nodded in agreement, then continued, "but if it's just intercepting a cargo ship, it shouldn't be a big problem, right? Without any conflicting interests, those guys might not necessarily fire at us."

The Lieutenant General spun the steel pen in his hand, still silent.

Unlike Jesus, who rose to his position by managing resources from the Boot Clan, the Lieutenant General was not entangled with the Boot Clan and was only loosely affiliated with Alina through the same faction, thus unwilling to take risks for her.

Seeing his demeanor, Jesus quickly understood and lowered his voice: "In the future, the Boot Clan is willing to offer two points of revenue from that new mine in Wales as compensation for this incident."

The Lieutenant General's eyes suddenly flickered with greed upon hearing this.

Although he is in the military, he is also a politician, thus naturally aware of the proposals about the Wales mine.

According to a professional agency survey, the coal reserves in that new mining area exceed one billion tons. At fifty British Pounds per ton, even just two points would yield over fifty million British Pounds annually.

The cake is certainly large, but there are many who want a slice, so two points are not small.

He understands that if it's merely dispatching one warship, the Boot Clan wouldn't pay such a high price; they mainly aim to tie him to this large ship.

After a long silence, the Lieutenant General knocked on the table with his pen, speaking slowly: "I heard that the proposal hasn't yet passed in the Lower House, and it seems the Childe family also has intentions for that mining area."

Recognizing the concern from the Lieutenant General, Jesus smiled indifferently: "Although Alina's family doesn't wield as much influence as the Childe family, the Childe family has always supported the Conservative Party, whereas... the land currently belongs to the Labour Party."

Saying this, Jesus glanced at the Lieutenant General, lowering his voice further: "Speaker John will also hold eight points of revenue in the new mining area in the future."

Upon hearing this, the Lieutenant General had no more qualms.

The Speaker is the second-in-command of the ruling party and the leader of the Lower House, unreservedly swaying a nation's development strategy.

Since even he is financially involved in the mining area, there is no reason for hesitation.

"You go make the arrangements."

Seeing the Lieutenant General's approval, Jesus smiled with satisfaction.

As for the Panamanian flag on the cargo ship, it had never been a concern for the two of them.

...

Amandukum Port, an important military base for Great Britain and America in the Indian Ocean, is the nearest base to the Red Sea exit, where the UK's Fourth Fleet is stationed year-round.

As the base alarm sounded, a piercing howl shattered the afternoon tranquility, soldiers rushed out from their quarters dressed in battle fatigues, heading urgently to their post.

Cranes moved ammunition supply boxes across the deck, and the radar screen suddenly lit up, flashing densely scattered dots.

"Duke of York Frigate emergency departure! Target Aden Bay area, coordinates N 15°23', W 42°07'!" In the command tower, Captain Cole swiftly responded to the order from the strategic command.

"Does intercepting a cargo ship require our frigate to depart? Why would the strategic command issue such an order?" A nearby lieutenant colonel questioned in puzzlement.

The naval fleet's routine missions usually involve counter-piracy or escort tasks, making interception of civilian ships highly irregular.

Moreover, the target is in the Red Sea, within the international escort route.

Cole checked his watch, explaining: "This isn't an ordinary cargo ship; there may be illegal items on board. The strategic command ordered that we must intercept and detain it."

"Illegal items? But we don't have an Interpol cooperation order?" The lieutenant colonel inquired.

The operation on the high seas requires compliance with international law; arbitrarily intercepting a foreign cargo ship could provoke diplomatic disputes.

"The order comes not only from the strategic command but also has approval from the Ministry of Defense's operational center." Cole glanced at him, fingers navigating the map on the screen: "Allen, just perform your duty and don't ask unnecessary questions."

Chapter 423: Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl, The Supreme Treasure

Lieutenant Colonel Allen opened his mouth, wanting to say something more, but was forced to hold back by Cole's icy gaze.

As a soldier, following orders is above all, especially for a mission endorsed by both the Navy Staff Department and the Ministry of Defense Combat Center, involving interests far beyond what a lieutenant colonel can meddle with.

"Sir! The main engine is started, requesting permission to depart!" reported the communication officer beside him.

Allen took a deep breath, suppressing his doubts: "Set course for the southern Red Sea, speed 25 knots. Notify the shipborne helicopter to stand by for aerial reconnaissance!"

As the departure order was given, the Duke of York Frigate slowly left the berth...

...

On the other side, upon learning that his cargo ship was hijacked, Harris immediately called the Somali pirate leader to question what it meant, only to be told it was done independently by his subordinates, and he was unaware.

Harris naturally did not believe such a flimsy excuse.

However, he was also very clear that for these pirates, money is the only thing that matters, with no credibility whatsoever, only interested in profit.

"I don't care whether you knew or not, if you can't give me a satisfactory explanation, I guarantee you won't receive another bullet in the future!" Harris was very firm, directly making a clear threat.

The pirate leader was silent for a long time and finally made a concession: "I'm sorry, Mr. Harris, this was our mistake. We are willing to increase the price of the next batch by 30%!"

Under the current strong suppression from various countries, the business of Somali pirates has plummeted, with their survival at risk, and apart from the Harris brothers, others probably wouldn't dare to sell to them anymore.

Upon hearing this answer, Harris' mouth curled into a satisfied smile: "Alright, for God's sake, the cooperation continues."

After hanging up the phone, he immediately dialed Qi Yun's number, straightforwardly saying: "I'm sorry, my friend, I didn't expect such a thing to happen, endangering your people."

"Haha, it's not your fault, those pirates were after my goods," said Qi Yun over the phone courteously, frankly stating the reason.

Even if he didn't say it, the other party could find out what happened, so there's no need for any smart tricks.

"Oh! Qi, thank you for your generosity!" Harris exclaimed exaggeratedly, "Those pirates have already paid for their recklessness, and I'll have their compensation transferred to your account later."

Qi Yun repeatedly refused: "No need to send it to me, there wasn't much loss, you can keep it."

After some back and forth, Qi Yun ultimately declined this kindness.

After ending the call, he sighed and began reviewing today's intelligence reports.

[Current Intelligence Points: 18]

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Red): An hour ago, two suspicious men appeared at the entrance of the Golden Collar Villa, and they belong to the same group that killed Qiu Jiahao]

Upon seeing this report, Qi Yun immediately sat up from the recliner, his nerves instantly tensing.

They finally found him...

Even though he had anticipated this day, he couldn't help but feel a bit worried when they actually showed up, given their deep background.

After contemplating for about ten minutes, Qi Yun extinguished his cigarette and called Niu Da, giving detailed instructions.

"What if they keep their mouths shut?" Niu Da asked.

Qi Yun sneered: "If they keep their mouths shut, knock all their teeth out! Just don't kill them, and after you're done, I'll send others to pick them up."

"Alright, I got it."

"Yes, that's it," Qi Yun said and then hung up the phone.

Although civilians shouldn't fight with officials, they brought knives to him, so naturally, there's no reason to sit idly by.

[Today's Intelligence 2 (Green): A group of thieves stole a Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl from the Sangye Temple, then entered the region through the Qiangtang No-Man's Land, planning to sell the pearl in the black market of Bird City]

Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl?

Qi Yun paused, feeling the name sounded somewhat familiar.

He immediately looked it up online.

What he found was astonishing, he never imagined it would be so valuable.

The Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl is considered a treasure of Tibet, with each Purest Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl's totem carrying mysterious power, being the most mystical Buddhist artifact, extremely rare, obtainable only by those with deep Buddhist fates.

Historically, there's a saying that one pearl can be exchanged for fifty fine horses.

In the 15th year of the Zhenguan era, or 641 AD, when Princess Wencheng married Songtsen Gampo, she brought a statue from India as part of her dowry, encrusted with various jewels, including three Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearls on its forehead.

Later, something inexplicable happened, and the statue enshrined in Jokhang Temple's Shakyamuni Hall had its pearls reduced from three to one.

There are also public records stating that one of them was bought back by a certain international superstar at a great cost, while the other remains missing.

It turned out to be hidden in Sangye Temple...

Qi Yun stared at the Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl information on the screen, his fingers unconsciously tapping on the desktop.

He wasn't well-versed in Tibetan culture but had heard of "Sangye Temple", a temple known as one of Tibet's oldest, existing since the Tubo Dynasty of the eighth century.

Legend has it that this was the first monastery in Tibet where monks were ordained.

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The Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl is hidden here, which seems to have some significance...

As for the Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl itself, ultimately it's just a kind of natural shale, containing elements of jade and agate, not some divine treasure. The reason it's so renowned is due to the power of belief.

To those who believe in this thing, it's a priceless treasure that can bring mysterious powers to ward off evil and transform bad luck into good fortune.

Therefore, those who aren't short on money are willing to pay unimaginable prices for a Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl.

"If I can get my hands on this thing, it might be useful in the future..."

Reflecting on this, Qi Yun found bald-headed Hong Weize on Green Bubble and sent him a message, asking for help in making inquiries on the black market.

Hong Weize's profession is similar to that of Harris; he's a professional broker, though with a bit of a difference in scale. However, he knows people from all walks of life in Jiang Province, so handling this isn't a problem.

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Purple)]

[Purple 5/6: N 3°04', W 37°21']

Blue coordinates refresh again!

Qi Yun couldn't wait to enter the coordinates into the map software, and the resulting information brought a smile to his face.

The coordinates point to a location in northeastern Tanzania in Africa, precisely where Mount Kilimanjaro is referred to as the "Roof of Africa," also the only snow-capped mountain on the equator in the world.

However, this intelligence is useless to Qi Yun because the Louis Family took away Mount Kilimanjaro's clues hundreds of years ago.

After receiving today's intelligence, Qi Yun rubbed his face and returned to his bedroom to sleep.

...

The Mand Strait, here is the southernmost part of the Red Sea, exiting this strait leads directly to the Aden Bay, officially entering the Indian Ocean.

At night, the sea becomes less calm, with waves starting to surge, causing the Desert Fox ship's hull to sway gently with the waves.

Inside the cockpit, the Black captain had recovered from the afternoon turmoil and stylishly lit up a cigar.

An Zai, feeling bored, engaged in small talk with the captain, listening to amusing stories of seafaring adventures.

Suddenly, a faint light blinked on the edge of the radar screen, moving rapidly from the southwest direction towards them, at a speed far exceeding average cargo ships.

"What's that?" An Zai asked, pointing at the light.

The captain glanced at the screen and calmly replied, "Judging by its speed, it's likely a warship. Warships frequently patrol the Aden Bay, including your Chinese warships."

"Oh." An Zai responded without further questioning, and the two continued chatting about other topics.

After five or six minutes, An Zai's gaze swept over the radar again, noticing the light approaching nearer and its path almost overlapping with theirs.

Cargo ships on the sea turn slowly, with significant inertia, so they usually maintain a safe distance. The current situation seemed unusual.

"What's this warship up to? Trying to cozy up with us?" An Zai joked, not taking it seriously.

The captain paused his cigar-smoking action and looked at the radar screen again, realizing that the light was indeed heading straight towards them!

The captain immediately sensed something amiss and picked up the radio, ready to call.

At that moment, outside the cockpit windows, two bright searchlights suddenly shone through, and the faint sound of helicopter rotors could be heard.

Shortly afterward, a crackling radio transmission came through, "Desert Fox, stop the vessel immediately! Repeat, stop immediately! We are the Duke of York of the Royal Navy of the United Kingdom's Fourth Fleet; non-compliance will be considered resistance!"

Royal Navy of the United Kingdom?

The Black captain was baffled, unable to understand why they were being intercepted. Despite years of seafaring, it was his first encounter with a warship stopping them.

Beside him, An Zai's eyes focused sharply, and his brow furrowed instantly.

"Stop the vessel immediately! Stop immediately!"

"We are a Panama vessel, maintaining a normal sailing status, with legal route documents. Why are you intercepting us, Royal Navy of the United Kingdom?"

The helicopter hovered continuously ahead of the cargo ship, its searchlights shining through the cockpit glass, unreservedly illuminating everyone's face.

"Once more! Stop immediately for inspection!" A final ultimatum came from the radio, with an exceptionally firm tone!

The captain, realizing this was a serious situation, grabbed the ship's satellite phone to report to his boss Harris.

At the same time, An Zai used a walkie-talkie to report the situation to Chen Wei.

Upon receiving the news, Chen Wei rushed to the cockpit, where another warning from the escort ship was heard over the radio.

"Desert Fox! Last warning! Immediately decelerate and halt the ship!"

The captain, sweating profusely, put down the satellite phone and began maneuvering the controls to brake.

"I've reported the situation here to Mr. Harris, and he's instructed us to cooperate for now, saying he will try to contact his people in Britain."

Chen Wei nodded in agreement, similarly taking out a satellite phone to call Qi Yun.

Domestically, it's still four or five in the morning when Qi Yun, who's in deep sleep, is awakened by the phone ringing. He glances at the caller ID on the screen, his sleepiness dissipating.

Knowing Chen Wei wouldn't call him at this hour unless it was urgent, Qi Yun glanced at the still-sleeping Zhao Qing beside him, quietly getting out of bed and heading to the study to answer the phone.

Chapter 425: Nine-Eyed Celestial Pearl, The Supreme Treasure

"Brother Wei, what's going on?"

"We've been engaged by the British Navy..." Chen Wei quickly explained the situation and added, "Now the ship has stopped, and soldiers from their helicopter are descending by rope."

Qi Yun's brows furrowed immediately upon hearing this, and he instantly thought that they were definitely after the shipment.

Although he wasn't sure who exactly was after the cargo, the opponent's power was indeed frightening. They had just repelled pirates, and now a warship had come.

"Forget about the shipment! You all hide for now and ensure your own safety!" Qi Yun quickly decided, with no time to ponder further.

Since they were targeting the shipment, they wouldn't give up until they had it. If Chen Wei and the others insisted on holding their ground, the result could only be losing both people and goods—after all, that frigate was no joke.

"Understood."

Chen Wei responded briefly and, after hanging up, picked up the walkie-talkie to instruct Eagle and the others to retreat to the lower deck.

As soon as Qi Yun finished the call, Harris rang in.

"Qi, I assume you already know about the situation on the ship."

"Yes, my people just informed me."

"Alright, this is a bit of a sticky situation," Harris sighed, continuing, "I just contacted a friend in London, but he told me this was a direct order from the Ministry of Defense. He couldn't do anything about it."

Qi Yun was silent for a moment, pondering his options.

If Harris couldn't handle this, then he might have to inform the higher-ups about the existence of those artifacts...

But even if the state knew, it might be difficult to intervene because it's international waters, and the freighter is from Panama, not China, so the state hasn't much of a reason to meddle.

The only possibility...might be to use the presence of nationals on board as an excuse...

As Qi Yun was mulling over this, Harris's voice came again over the receiver after a long silence: "Qi, if those goods really matter to you, I can offer some advice."

"Near the Red Sea, there's an armed force afraid of no country!"

Qi Yun paused, instantly thinking of it: "You mean..."

"Exactly! It's them!" Harris deliberated a little and added, "However, if you do that, the British military might hold a grudge against you from now on..."

Qi Yun didn't consider this issue first but sighed helplessly: "I have no dealings with that power; they probably won't intervene."

"Salaman!" Harris firmly stated this name, "Although I don't like the guy, I must admit, his family wields extensive influence across the Middle East. If he's willing to help you, getting that armed group to act shouldn't be much of a problem!"

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun pictured the silhouette with a white cloth on his head...

Indeed, as Harris said, Salaman is the Crown Prince of the Oil Country, a man of extraordinary status, and the supporter behind that armed group secretly includes one from the Oil Country.

If they could step in to help, it would indeed be possible to protect the cargo on the sea, considering that armed group possesses weapons like hypersonic missiles, even the American aircraft carrier strike group would steer clear.

But Qi Yun didn't have much acquaintance with Salaman; they merely completed a transaction once in Africa, with no guarantee of their help.

Even if they agreed to assist, it wouldn't be without a cost, it's just a matter of whether it's worth the price...

Now, Qi Yun stands at a crossroads: to contact Salaman or report the matter to the higher-ups.

Bringing back the national treasures intact himself, compared to informing the country and finding a governmental way to retrieve them, would surely bring very different outcomes for him.

Chapter 426: Salaman's Strength

Riyadh, a city located in the central Arabian Peninsula, on the Hanifa Valley Plain.

Surrounded by desert, it was historically an oasis in the desert, although that touch of green has now long been buried by yellow sands.

Elgar Palace, located at the center of Riyadh, is a massive palace complex exceeding 300,000 square meters, with over a thousand rooms, representing the luxurious residence of the Oil Country's Crown Prince.

In this country where water is more precious than oil, the outdoor swimming pools of this super mansion number over ten, and the indoor decor is lavish to the extreme.

In an office, the large crystal chandelier refracts warm yellow light as Salaman plays with a ruby-studded lighter, listening to his subordinate report the latest progress of the future city project he personally pushed forward.

"According to the conclusions from the planning department, we need to add another two billion US dollars this month, or else the project timeline will be delayed again..." the subordinate spoke carefully, sneaking a glance at Salaman for fear of displeasing him, unable to remember how many times the project's budget had been increased.

However, Salaman showed no reaction, as if the subordinate mentioned twenty dollars instead of two billion.

Although the future city project is truly a gold-devouring beast, with daily construction costs exceeding hundreds of millions of US dollars, it doesn't pose much of a burden for a family with tens of trillions in wealth.

There are continuous rumors outside claiming that due to the international oil price decline, the Oil Country is facing financial strain, and Salaman will soon struggle to sustain the city's spending pace, with some reports directly stating that the future city is going to drag the Oil Country's economy down.

But only Salaman himself knows exactly how wealthy his family is, even if the national treasury runs dry, he could single-handedly fund the city.

Only after he completely takes over the family wealth, and the nation's authority...

"How is the progress on the Eye of God project?" After hearing the report, Salaman made no response, instead inquiring about the progress of another project.

The "Eye of God" is another aerospace project Salaman championed after entering the political scene, aiming to completely eliminate dependency on certain American technological fields.

For instance, missile launches require highly precise navigation satellite support, and this area of technology has always been the Oil Country's shortfall, unable to achieve autonomy.

The subordinate responded: "Currently, we're in contact with companies from Russia and China, but Russia is somewhat resistant due to domestic issues."

"Meanwhile, China's Beidou Company, although ostensibly a private enterprise, selling such sensitive technology requires national approval, making progress rather slow."

Salah frowned slightly: "Isn't there any other option?"

The subordinate shook his head, speaking helplessly: "Indian companies have indeed approached us for cooperation, but their technology lags far behind both China and Russia, so our best option is China."

"We have prepared a negotiation group, planning to accompany the diplomatic delegation to China next month, where we'll hold detailed negotiations with Beidou Company's executives and official representatives."

Salah nodded slightly: "Discuss this matter with the advisory team. I need to see progress soon. Tomorrow, I have to go to Spain to negotiate the acquisition of a football club."

Although his current official status is Prime Minister, many matters large and small do not require his personal handling, with a professional advisory team providing counsel.

This Crown Prince, obsessed with European culture, is more active in front of the cameras nowadays, conducting activities that highlight the Oil Country's influence.

At that moment, the assistant outside the office pushed the door open and walked in, holding a phone.

Salaman took a glance after receiving it, then waved to the two individuals in the room.

Once both the subordinate and assistant left, he pressed the answer button, switching to English.

"Hello, Mr. Qi."

On the other end of the phone, Qi Yun stood by the window, speaking with a tone of apology: "I'm sorry Mr. Salaman, for calling so late and disturbing your rest."

It was already midnight in the Middle East, making it quite impolite to call at this hour.

"No need to be polite, Mr. Qi, we are friends, so I'm happy to receive your call." Salaman laughed generously, "Mr. Qi, calling this late, is there something you need from me?"

This statement reveals Salaman's distinct approach from traditional politicians, if it were an old fox, they surely wouldn't take the lead to ask.

However, this doesn't mean Salaman is naive, it simply indicates that this person has his own style.

If he truly were without shrewdness, he wouldn't have traversed that tumultuous path to finally sit on the Crown Prince's throne.

In this world, nothing seems more complex or brutal than the struggle for a throne.

Seeing the other party taking the lead to inquire, Qi Yun didn't hold back, and immediately recounted the event briefly, adding: "The items on the freighter are extremely vital to me. I know Mr. Salaman has significant influence in Yemen, so I would like to request your help in protecting that freighter."

After listening, Salaman fell silent for a moment, his eyes shifting before suddenly chuckling lightly: "Mr. Qi, I know what you want me to do, but this matter is a bit tricky."

Chapter 427: Salaman's Strength

"If I help you with this, and the news gets out, my father will definitely scold me."

Although the Oil Country covertly flirts with the Houthis, on the surface, they are adversaries.

Despite both believing in Islam, this involves factional relations. The Oil Country is led by Sunnis, while the Houthis are primarily Shiite, the root of their open hostility.

Furthermore, the Oil Country's external propaganda is pro-American, whereas the Houthis are the leading anti-American vanguard, so fundamentally, they are not in the same camp.

In past years, there were even fierce military conflicts.

But these are old debts. In this world, there are no eternal enemies, only eternal interests.

When the Salaman family accumulated enough wealth, they no longer wished to be controlled by the US, especially after Salaman took over, this resolve became even stronger.

Thus, their diplomatic attitude gradually changed, outwardly still appearing to be a US ally, but frequently engaging with major countries like China, Russia, and Japan.

Simultaneously, they secretly reconciled with the Houthis, providing support covertly to gain crucial benefits from major powers.

Qi Yun listened to Salaman's response, not showing disappointment. The other party said it was difficult, not impossible, meaning there was still room for negotiation.

"Mr. Salaman, my request is merely to protect that freighter, without the need to directly attack the United Kingdom's warship. Furthermore, the act of deploying a warship to illegally hijack a merchant ship is likely a private action by certain individuals, so the situation should remain controllable and not escalate."

"That cargo is very important to me. If Mr. Salaman is willing to help, I would be immensely grateful."

Qi Yun did not quote a price directly as usual in a transaction since the other party definitely doesn't lack money.

It is said that Salaman once spent 500 million US Dollars at an auction to buy a Da Vinci painting...

And this matter is quite special, so it's important to understand the other person's attitude before discussing anything else.

Salaman stood up and walked to the window, gazing at the stars in the desert night sky, remaining silent for half a minute before sighing and replying: "Alright, since this matter is so important to you, for the sake of our friendship, I can attempt to contact them, even if it means being reprimanded by my father."

Qi Yun immediately showed a look of joy: "Thank you for your help, Mr. Salaman!"

Salaman chuckled softly: "Between friends, there's no need to be so formal."

"Okay, then I won't be formal with you." Qi Yun pondered for a moment and cautiously asked, "I wonder if Mr. Salaman needs any help from me?"

Although Salaman's words were smooth, Qi Yun wasn't naive enough to believe that the help was purely out of friendship.

Moreover, the two don't even count as friends, having merely interacted before.

Before contacting Salaman, he had even prepared for a possible rejection; succeeding in the task would be best, but otherwise, he would just report it to the state, earning slightly less benefit.

"Haha, I don't need your help for now. If there's anything in the future, I'll let you know, but then I hope you won't refuse me on account of our friendship." Salaman jokingly replied, a flick of his thumb lighting his lighter, a calculating gleam in his eyes.

This answer somewhat surprised Qi Yun.

Originally, he thought his only leverage might be the relationship with the Fu Family, conveyed through Li Yaohua.

Yet the other party didn't ask for anything...

But he knew there's no such thing as a free lunch; this matter is like a loan, though no interest is collected now, it will be someday.

However, the future can wait... Qi Yun sighed inwardly, focusing first on resolving the immediate issue to bolster his own position.

With this thought, Qi Yun laughed heartily: "Of course! As long as it's something I can do, I will give it my all!"

"Haha, great, I'll have someone handle this matter now." Salaman also showed a satisfied smile.

Qi Yun nodded, expressing his gratitude once more: "Alright, then I'll rely on you, Mr. Salaman!"

"You're welcome! Goodbye."

After ending the call, Salaman asked his assistant to bring him another phone, and then he dialed his representative's number in Yemen.

"Tell them..."

"Primarily use deterrence! If that warship doesn't retreat, sink it directly!"

Holding the phone, Salaman's face showed determination, and from his tone, it seemed the relationship between the Oil Country and the Houthis might be far more complex than seen by the outside world.

...

Aden Bay.

Two helicopters hovered over the deck of the Desert Fox freighter, while two nautical miles away, the Duke of York Frigate blocked the way, its main cannon aimed directly at the freighter!

As the freighter's speed gradually slowed, two ropes were lowered from the helicopters, and over twenty armed soldiers descended onto the deck.

As soon as the soldiers landed, they swiftly formed a tactical formation, their dark muzzles aiming at the bridge.

The leading captain shouted through a loudspeaker: "Everyone, come out immediately! Hands on your head, squat on the deck!"

Inside the cabin, notified crew members came out one by one, all squatting with their hands on their heads in fear, including the black captain and first officer; these armed men looked even more terrifying than the pirates seen at noon.

Chapter 428: Salaman's Strength _3

After everyone squatted down, the captain held a powerful flashlight, sweeping it across everyone's face. Then he frowned, stepped away a bit, and began using the communicator to contact the ship's commander.

"Report, no Asian faces found among the gathered crew!"

After a burst of static, the communicator quickly relayed the order from the ship.

"If there are none, forget about it! Continue with the mission!"

"Yes!" The captain responded, walked back to his previous position, and instructed the other soldiers: "Squad one, guard these people. Squad two, take over the control room. The rest, search the cabin for the target!"

"Yes!" The soldiers who received the orders immediately sprang into action.

Deep in the cabin, Chen Wei pressed against the outer wall of a ventilation duct, listening to the footsteps and clashing metal sounds outside, without any expression on his face.

After the ship's engine stopped, the cabin noise reduced significantly, but it was still possible to hear some movements.

Next to him, An Zai swallowed nervously: "We don't have weapons here. What if those bastards find us later on?"

Eagle and a few others wore grave expressions, but none responded.

An Zai looked at Chen Wei and hesitantly asked again: "Should I go get the gun? We can directly take them on later! We've tussled with the Brits before, their skills are like that, last time I alone..."

Before he finished speaking, Eagle smacked him on the head: "Can you be quiet? You think you can take on a frigate?"

An Zai shriveled after being hit by Eagle and stayed silent.

Chen Wei glanced at him and said calmly, "Follow the boss's plan. If we do get discovered, don't resist. The boss will find a way to get us out."

"Understood." They all nodded after hearing this.

...

Meanwhile, on the sea surface, two black shadows were swiftly approaching from the north. In the blink of an eye, they were less than ten nautical miles from the British warship.

These were Houthi's Yafa drones, with a maximum flight range of 1,600 kilometers, capable of carrying high-explosive warheads or 150 kilograms of explosives.

This drone was an improvement from Salaman's Sammad-3, which once caused the Templar's Iron Dome system to lose face.

The two shadows on the sea surface drew increasingly closer, about to confront head-on.

At this moment, the radar on the Duke of York Frigate finally detected the drones, and the screen suddenly burst with a sharp alarm sound!

"Beep! Beep! Beep!"

The red warning lights flashed wildly inside the command tower. The radar operator stared at the two emerging blips on the screen, first pausing in surprise, then quickly reported: "Captain! Two unidentified drones are rapidly approaching!"

"They are Houthi's Yafa drones!"

Upon hearing "Houthi," Captain Cole's spine trembled, and his hairs stood on end!

"Damn it! Why were they detected only just now!"

The radar operator opened his mouth, about to explain, when an alarmed report came from the side again: "They are armed with air-to-ground missiles!"

Cole was almost scared to tears. He thought intercepting a merchant ship would be easy, never expecting to provoke the Houthis.

Those maniacs even drove away the American carriers, and who knows how much Western maritime wreckage lies buried on this seafloor.

He had no intention of dying so ambiguously.

Cole lunged at the console, shouting excitedly: "Lock on with anti-air missiles! Prepare close-in weapons for interception! If they dare to open fire, shoot them down directly!"

As soon as he spoke, the two incoming drones suddenly climbed in altitude, their tail flames leaving two orange-red trails in the night sky, beginning to circle overhead.

Shortly after, an Arabic voice suddenly came over the communication channel: "Warning! Leave this sea area immediately!"

"Warning! Leave this sea area immediately, or your warship will be sunk!"

Cole stared intently at the circling drones on the radar, inwardly breathing a sigh of relief.

At least it was just a warning...

He had no doubt about the opponent's resolve to open fire. After all, their country was already fragmented; there's nothing left to lose.

"Main cannon locked!"

"Sea Interceptor Missile locked!"

As the soldier's voice sounded, the main gun of the Duke of York Frigate swiftly rotated, aiming at the circling drones, while the hatch doors of the missile launch wells beneath the deck slowly began to open.

The atmosphere inside the command platform instantly became extremely tense, with everyone's breathing syncing with the rhythm of the radar's alarms.

Yet, Cole didn't issue the command to fire, instead, he shouted to the communications officer: "Patch me through to the Navy headquarters!"

Upon hearing this, the communications officer quickly established the encrypted line: "Captain, line is connected!"

Cole snatched the receiver, though extremely nervous internally, he maintained a facade of calmness: "Commander, we encountered Houthi drones in Aden Bay armed with missiles, threatening us to leave immediately or they will open fire!"

After speaking, he felt his words seemed slightly timid, so he added, "The Duke of York's missiles have already locked on the enemy! Should we shoot them down?"

There was a brief silence over the receiver before the Chief of Staff's grave voice came through: "Cole, withdraw immediately! London does not wish to engage in direct conflict with the Houthis in the Red Sea. Your operation wasn't formally authorized; don't escalate this!"

Upon hearing this, a gleam of delight flitted across Cole's face, though he quickly masked it.

Leaving safely was ultimately the best outcome. If they did fire on the two drones, they could indeed shoot them down, but what then?

With the Houthis' vengeful nature, in the next moment, two hypersonic missiles would likely be headed their way.

Even the Templar's Iron Dome wouldn't withstand them, let alone the firepower on the frigate...

"Retreat! Return immediately!" Cole ordered through gritted teeth, "Notify the boarding team to abandon the mission and evacuate at once!"

Chapter 429: Stop Buying Baisha, It Burns Your Throat

On the sea, with the British frigate and helicopter departing, this turmoil finally came to a temporary end.

Inside the freighter's cargo hold, Chen Wei and a few others headed to the room on the fourth floor where the goods were stored. Along the way, they found that several doors on the second and third floors were open and had been ransacked, causing them to worry silently.

Upon reaching the fourth floor, they were relieved to see the lock on the door of the largest warehouse intact and undamaged.

Eagle took out a key and opened the door; the room was just as it was when he left.

"Fortunately, our boss is strong enough to even drive away British warships. Otherwise, all our efforts these days would have been in vain," An Zai smacked his lips and sighed.

Da Pao and the others also had smiles on their faces. In their line of work, finding a boss with strength and loyalty is more important than anything else.

"Everyone get ready. Tomorrow the freighter will dock at Abu Dhabi's port, and we won't sail anymore. The boss has arranged a plane for us to return," Chen Wei said to the group after closing a box.

After this incident, Qi Yun was concerned about further trouble at sea. So, after discussing with Harris, the freighter changed its course, no longer going to Hong Kong Island, and instead heading directly to Abu Dhabi, where Salaman had already smoothed things over with customs—this batch of goods wouldn't be inspected.

In London, inside the Kensington Palace Gardens estate.

James received the news and flew into a rage, throwing the wine glass in his hand onto the ground.

"F**k!"

"These stupid pigs!"

The subordinate beside him glanced at him and said quietly, "I've already arranged for people to investigate the identities of those individuals in China. I'm confident there will be results soon."

James, with a sullen look, remained silent for quite a while before speaking sinisterly, "Keep an eye on that freighter. Once they reach Southeast Asia, have people over there take action. We must seize the goods back!"

"Alright."

...

On the other side, Qi Yun put down the phone and went to the bathroom to wash his face.

By now, it was already getting light outside, but he wasn't sleepy, so he went to the gym on the first floor to start training.

After practicing the boxing techniques taught by Chen Wei several times, it was eight in the morning, and Zhao Qing had also woken up.

She rubbed her eyes and asked Qi Yun in confusion, "Why are you up so early today?"

Qi Yun didn't explain much, just lovingly patted her head, "Couldn't sleep."

"Alright, I'm going to wake up Nuannuan," Zhao Qing hugged him and then turned to head upstairs.

"Hey, wait a minute." Qi Yun grabbed her hand from behind and hesitated for a moment before saying, "The company has been quiet lately, why don't I take you and our daughter on a trip?"

"Hmm?" Zhao Qing was a bit surprised, blinking her big eyes at him, "What made you suddenly think of going on vacation?"

Qi Yun chuckled, "I've been busy lately and haven't spent enough quality time with you. Now that I have some free time."

Zhao Qing was tempted but, after thinking about it, she pouted and replied, "I can take time off from work, but Nuannuan has to go to school. Traveling might disrupt her studies."

"She's starting first grade next semester. It's important to focus on her studies."

"So let's wait until the summer vacation..."

Qi Yun opened his mouth but didn't insist, smiling and nodding, "Alright, we'll wait until summer vacation to take you both."

"Okay, I'm going to wake up Nuannuan." Zhao Qing smiled as she turned to go upstairs.

Watching her back, Qi Yun took out his phone and called Duan Pingyu.

"How's it going?"

"No progress yet. The opponent's skills are not simple; they seem to have had specific training. Lao Niu is dealing with them," Duan Pingyu responded over the phone.

Qi Yun could vaguely hear faint wails through the phone and furrowed his brow as he instructed, "Come back first, and wait for me at the door."

"Alright." Duan Pingyu didn't ask for reasons, simply replied, and hung up.

Qi Yun took a deep breath, put away his mobile, and went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast.

...

Over half an hour later, in the business car, besides Duan Pingyu, Gao Min had also been called over by Qi Yun.

With a very serious expression, he said to the two, "Recently, a group is trying to deal with me, and they might target Zhao Qing and Nuannuan too. So starting today, Pingyu and Xiao Min will act together."

"Your only task is to protect their safety at any cost!"

"Don't have any scruples! If something happens, I'll use all my resources to protect you. Even if you can't stay in China, I'll arrange for you to go abroad!"

"Do you understand me?"

Duan Pingyu and Gao Min exchanged a glance and replied solemnly, "Understood!"

Seeing their serious expression, Qi Yun nodded, "Go find Ah Jiao; she's prepared some things for you. Use them at your discretion."

"Alright." The two naturally knew what was being prepared.

"Hmm, that's all. Call me immediately if there's any situation," Qi Yun said and then opened the car door to get out.

Actually, his arrangement carried certain risks, because those things are too sensitive domestically. Even though Ah Jiao went disguised to the black market to buy them, causing a big commotion might lead people to trace back the clues.

But Qi Yun was forced to make this decision because the style of those people clearly showed they had no scruples—they'd kill without hesitation.

Although Duan Pingyu and Gao Min have great skills, if the opponent is well-armed, no matter how good the kung fu, it's hard to fight a knife, so Qi Yun dared not risk his woman and child's safety.

"If only we could get a few gun permits, it would be much easier..."

...

At ten in the morning, West Mountain.

Chapter 430: Stop Buying Baisha, It Burns the Throat _2

In a very secluded bungalow, the light was extremely dim. All the windows had thick curtains, and the only bulb hung in the center of the beam.

In the corner, two unremarkable middle-aged men were tied up in chairs, their mouths stuffed with rags, blood oozing from their foreheads, and their clothes stained with blood all over, clearly having suffered quite a bit.

Niu Da stood in front of them, playing with a baseball bat wrapped in iron wire in his hand, the tip of the bat pressing against one man's cheek, his eyes gloomy: "I'll give you one last chance. Who sent you? What's your purpose?"

The man on the left abruptly turned his head, producing a low growl from his throat, his expression fierce, obviously not intimidated.

The man on the right was slightly trembling, but his eyes showed no sign of compromise either.

At this moment, there was a knocking sound from the iron gate outside the courtyard. Niu Da put down the baseball bat and turned to open the door.

The person who came was Qi Yun. After entering, he asked Niu Da, "Have they talked?"

Niu Da wiped the sweat from his forehead and said in a muffled voice, "They're really tough, their mouths are like they're welded shut. Been asking for hours, only got grunts, nothing more."

"The calluses on their hands show they're not just ordinary thugs."

Qi Yun nodded, walked up to the two tied men, scanned them once with his eyes, then reached out to remove the rags from their mouths, asking in a gloomy tone, "Can we talk now?"

Both men looked at him. Although they appeared extremely weak, their words were still firm: "There's nothing to talk about."

Qi Yun wasn't angry. He pulled over a chair from the side, sat down, took out a pack of cigarettes, lit one, took a puff, and then said in a flat tone, "The ones who killed Qiu Jiahao were your associates, right?"

"You guys are pretty ruthless. Not long after offing the old man, you turned around and offed him."

After hearing this, the two's expressions clearly froze for a moment, but they remained silent.

Qi Yun sneered, took out his phone and snapped a photo of each man, then sent them to Ma Baoguo.

Before finishing a cigarette, a message came back.

Qi Yun looked at the content on the phone and slowly started speaking, "Liu Jinshan, born in 1988, went abroad to Laos in 2016..."

As he continued to provide information, the expressions on the faces of the two tied men finally began to change.

After finishing reading their information, Qi Yun stood up from the chair and extinguished the cigarette butt, "Indeed, I'm not going to kill you myself."

"However, I can hand you over to the police's task force."

"Oh, you might not know, officially, Qiu Jiahao's case is closed, but secretly, someone's been digging to get to you."

"Guys like you, doing the dirty work, know what happens if you go inside. I don't need to spell it out, do I?"

After Qi Yun finished speaking slowly, a clear struggle and panic appeared in the eyes of the two.

Just as Qi Yun said, they didn't believe Qi Yun dared kill them. After all, the information they gathered indicated Qi Yun lived a very clean life, nothing like Luo Yang, that kind of crime boss.

Other than having a streak of good luck and making lots of money, he was also a city committee member.

A successful person like him, as long as they weren't crazy, wouldn't want blood on their hands.

Yet, Qi Yun's last words pierced deeply into their hearts.

If they were really handed over to the task force, they'd end up just like Qiu Jiahao, after all, silencing them was much easier than getting them out.

There's even the possibility they'd end things themselves, as they all have families...

At this thought, the man on the right was already pale, large beads of sweat rolling down his face.

Qi Yun glanced at his watch and added, "Given the ruthless style of your superiors, even if you stay stubborn and uncooperative, as soon as news of your capture gets out, your families probably won't fare too well either."

"If you talk now, maybe you can still ensure their safety."

This sentence completely broke down the psychological defense of the man on the right. Everyone has their own weakness, and his was his family.

In the next second, he jerked his head up, his lips trembling, voice choked with sobs, "Save... save my family! I'll talk! I'll tell everything!"

Liu Jinshan on the left was so angry his eyes turned red, and he shouted, "You fucking..."

Before he could finish, Niu Da grabbed him by the back of the neck and then swung the baseball bat right at his mouth, "Stay down!"

With that swing, Liu Jinshan lost two front teeth, blood flowing from his mouth smearing his whole face.

The man on the right no longer cared about him and cried out to Qi Yun, "Brother Biao! Brother Biao sent us! The purpose was to monitor you round the clock!"

Qi Yun's eyes narrowed, as he sat back on his chair, placed a cigarette into the man's mouth and lit it for him, only then did he speak lightly, "Tell me about this Brother Biao."

The man took two deep drags on the cigarette, calmed down, and slowly started speaking, "Brother Biao's real name is Li Biao. We used to know each other from doing jobs overseas, last... last year, he called me, said he had connected with a big shot here, and all we have to do is work for this big shot."

"Not only does it pay well, but it's also easy, sometimes you go months without having to do anything, but... but the methods have to be specific, it must look like an accident..."

Qi Yun nodded and continued asking, "How many people does this Brother Biao have under him?"

"There are seven of us like me working for him! There were nine originally, but two of them just disappeared."

"Where are Brother Biao and the other five people?"