

Middle Age 481

Chapter 481: Renowned Throughout the World

Shanghai, inside the Maple Capital office building.

Dong Anyun knocked on the door and hurried into the office, placing a cell phone on Zhao Weilin's desk: "Chairman, look at this!"

Zhao Weilin cast a suspicious glance at her, then turned his attention to the phone screen, his expression turning to utter astonishment.

After a long moment, he withdrew his gaze and asked Dong Anyun, "Has he contacted you?"

Dong Anyun shook her head.

Zhao Weilin sighed, "Then give him a call, invite him to come over when he's free."

...

In the Xinghe Bay fruit store, Wei Yong was lounging on a chair, idly scrolling through his phone, when suddenly he heard a very familiar name on the TV hanging on the wall.

"Today we report on a figure—Youth patriotic entrepreneur, Bird City zx committee member, Bird City 2025 top ten outstanding youth, National Cultural Heritage Administration special advisor... Qi Yun."

Wei Yong jerked his head up, staring at the familiar face on the TV screen, his phone slipping from his hand to the floor with a clatter.

"Holy... Isn't this old Qi..." His eyes widened like saucers, muttering instinctively, then quickly turned around and shouted, "Honey! Come and see! Old Qi's on TV!"

His wife hesitated, temporarily not quite reacting, "Who's on TV?"

Meanwhile, someone had already dropped their basket and ran quickly to the television.

She gazed at the photo in the news, her face full of bitterness.

...

At the Old Sichuan Flavor Hot Pot Restaurant, a waiter who knew Qi Yun suddenly ran to the bar with his phone, excitedly shouting to Old Feng, "Boss! Look... Look at the news!"

Old Feng glanced at him, half smiling, "Are you getting a bit cocky, playing with your phone during work time and still daring to flaunt it before me?"

"No... Look! Boss Qi! Boss Qi is on the news!" The young man explained anxiously.

Old Feng took the phone and looked at it for a while, then his face also showed a hint of shock. After confirming that it was indeed his old friend on the news, he became excited, leaned out and shouted to the customers in the restaurant, "All tables get a fifty percent discount today!"

After shouting, he ordered the young man, "Go to the advertising shop now, make a big poster of this photo and hang it at the front door!"

...

In a suburban villa, Old Chen listened to the news broadcast from the radio, initially stunned, then a smile of appreciation appeared on his lips...

Including President Bi, Shi Feng, Manager Sun, and others who knew Qi Yun, all were extremely surprised upon seeing the news, while genuinely happy for Qi Yun.

Of course, for those who were happy, there were naturally those who were not.

For instance, Shen Wanting, who was waiting for takeout in her rental apartment, suddenly saw the news on a certain app, and she felt as if she were struck by lightning.

Her expression turned incomparably complex, her right hand clenched tightly without realizing her nails were digging into her skin.

She could not understand how, in just over half a year, Qi Yun suddenly became successful, even more so than before their divorce, even appearing on CCTV news.

"Why..."

A surge of regret filled Shen Wanting's chest.

Just months ago, when she was tricked out of her last cent by a guy she met online with abs, she already regretted her decision back then.

Later she tried to contact Qi Yun, but he completely ignored her, not even replying to messages, let alone meeting.

Now, seeing Qi Yun's news again, her mindset completely collapsed.

She could accept Qi Yun living slightly better, as it would at least provide a good living guarantee for their daughter, but she could not accept Qi Yun living this well! Not only being a company boss but also a zx committee member, outstanding youth, special advisor...

That long list of titles dazzled her...

An angry Shen Wanting fiercely turned her head, furiously looking at her new boyfriend laughing foolishly while scrolling through short videos on the bed.

"Can't you be a bit ambitious? Others are earning money outside on weekends, and all you know is lying at home playing!"

Her boyfriend was stunned by her scolding, "I worked all week; is it too much to rest at home on weekends?"

Seeing him dare to retort, Shen Wanting's anger flared up even more, and she threw a pillow at him: "You're over thirty and don't even own a house! How can you talk about rest?"

"Get up and go deliver food to me! If you don't save enough to buy a house by the end of the year, we're breaking up!"

...

Far away in Beijing, Qi Yun's phone was almost overwhelmed with messages, but he didn't have time to check them because he was on the way to meet the leader Wendong.

In the business car, Qi Yun held his phone and asked Zhou Hongchang on the other end, "How's the progress?"

Zhou Hongchang sighed, "Based on the statements from those few people, we've uncovered several related clues. However, to link those cases to him, we're still missing the most critical evidence. If we can catch that Brother Biao, there might be a breakthrough."

"Also, I've sorted through all the evidence on that USB drive, added supplementary materials, and sent everything to your email."

"Okay, I know." After hanging up, Qi Yun opened his phone's email and reviewed the materials sent by Zhou Hongchang.

He knew that depending on these things might not be enough, but if those above could intervene, many things would become much easier; even if the roots couldn't be completely cut off immediately, at least the branches could be cleared.

Thus, incidents like the last time Brother Biao was assisted by a car wouldn't happen again.

Ten minutes later, the car arrived at a residential complex. The guard at the gate approached the window, saluted, and asked, "Are you Mr. Qi?"

"Yes, it's me." Qi Yun nodded and handed over his ID.

The guard carefully checked before returning the ID and waved, signaling the way ahead was clear.

The car slowly drove deep into the complex, stopping in front of a two-story house covered in climbing ivy.

Qi Yun opened the car door and got out; a young man was already waiting by the entrance.

He bowed slightly, confirmed his identity, and then led Qi Yun to the study on the second floor.

"Leader, Mr. Qi has arrived."

Wendong put down the document and waved at Qi Yun, then moved to the sofa.

"Come, have a seat."

Qi Yun responded and walked over, sitting on the sofa. As they had met earlier in the morning, he was not so reserved at that moment.

The young man poured tea for them, then left the study.

Wendong sipped his tea, crossed his legs, and said, "Old Xiao said you have something important to discuss with me."

"Yes." Qi Yun nodded, taking out his phone from his pocket and handing it over, "Please take a look at this first, Leader."

Chapter 482: That Ginseng Can Run!

In the study, Wendong looked at the phone Qi Yun handed over, his brow furrowing tighter and tighter.

After a while, he finally put down the phone, his tone somewhat grave: "Where did you get these things?"

"The way I got them was somewhat accidental, but the content recorded in it should be real, a secret task force in Bird City has already verified it," Qi Yun replied thoughtfully.

He didn't make a definitive statement but left it for the other person to judge.

Since Xiao Hanguang did not refuse him to see this leader Wendong, it proved that the other party was certainly trustworthy, at least his stance wouldn't be an issue.

The room fell silent again, Wendong looked down at the tea leaves floating in his cup, lost in thought.

Qi Yun sat quietly on the side, patiently waiting, not disturbing the silence. From the other's expression, he could tell how serious this matter was, even demanding Wendong's careful consideration.

It took a full three to four minutes before he finally sighed, "What do you want me to do?"

"Haha, leader, you overestimate me, I wouldn't dare dictate to you, it's just that I happened to get hold of these things and thought it should be handed over to leaders to handle," Qi Yun smiled compliantly, answering smoothly.

Since he just earned recognition for his achievements, rashly offering opinions could possibly make him seem arrogant in the eyes of the other party.

Wendong glanced at him, with a meaningful question: "Is this the reason you got arrested a couple of days ago?"

Qi Yun was a bit stunned, surprised that the other party knew about his arrest.

This wasn't questioning Wendong's influence; rather, he was surprised that someone of his stature, busy with numerous affairs daily, actually had time to be concerned about a small individual like him.

Qi Yun pondered for a moment, then replied candidly: "Indeed, a couple of days ago I was invited by customs to assist with an investigation, but it was all cleared up later, just a misunderstanding."

Upon hearing this, Wendong stared at him for a while with a peculiar expression: "Old Xiao wasn't wrong about you, kid, you are quite interesting."

Qi Yun touched the tip of his nose, not responding.

It wasn't his first time dealing with important figures; he was well aware of the boundaries and manner of speaking.

Moreover, from Wendong's reaction, the matter seemed to be on track.

Wendong took a sip of tea, then stood up and called out: "Xiao Hang."

There was an immediate response from outside. The young man who led him in earlier opened the door and stood straight: "Leader."

Wendong pointed to the phone Qi Yun had placed on the table: "Make a backup of the data in here, encrypt it and send it to the technical department of the third bureau. I want a confirmation overnight, with results by dawn."

"Yes." Xiao Hang nodded to Qi Yun and took the phone, leaving the study.

Watching this scene, Qi Yun finally felt relieved.

Wendong's instruction defined the tone for this matter, with the upcoming investigation backed by national power.

He walked to the window, looking at the pomegranate tree in the courtyard under the moonlight, and slowly spoke: "This will not be easy to handle; it will take a process."

"You should go back first, I will report to the leaders tomorrow."

Qi Yun stood from the sofa, slightly bowing: "Alright, thank you for the trouble, leader."

As he reached the door, Wendong suddenly spoke again: "After you go back, take care and be more cautious yourself."

Qi Yun paused, turned back to respond: "Yes, I understand."

...

After leaving the heavily guarded compound, Qi Yun returned to the hotel.

As soon as he stepped in, his little girl ran up excitedly hugging him: "Daddy, I just saw you on TV!"

Qi Yun bent down to pick up his daughter, rubbing his nose against her chubby cheek: "Oh? You saw daddy?"

"Daddy had a shiny badge on!" The little girl waved her small hand around his chest, "The TV said daddy is a big hero!"

Saying this, she proudly lifted her head, continuing, "I'm going to let all the kids at the kindergarten know, my daddy is the best! Let's see who dares to bully me then!"

Qi Yun was amused by his daughter's gesture, laughing heartily, giving her a kiss on the soft cheek: "Alright! Daddy will personally take you to kindergarten and make sure no one bullies you again."

Zhao Qing, who had just finished organizing the little girl's dirty clothes, came out from the inner room, looking at Qi Yun with eyes full of admiration and little stars, clearly also not expecting her husband to have accomplished so much quietly.

"Have you eaten?"

Qi Yun shook his head, putting his daughter down: "Not yet, I've been busy until now."

Originally, a banquet was arranged by the cultural relics department, but since Qi Yun was going to meet Wendong, he only made a symbolic toast before leaving early.

"I ordered you some food; I'll have the waiter bring it up now. Why don't you have a shower first," Zhao Qing said considerately.

"Okay." Qi Yun responded, just as he turned to head to the bathroom, the little girl followed like a little tail, tugging at his clothes and looking up, "Daddy, where's your badge? Can I touch it?"

Qi Yun laughed loudly, pointing to the briefcase on the cabinet, and said, "Let sister Qing take it for you, Dad is going to take a bath."

The two, one big and one small, glanced at each other, then ran towards the cabinet at the door simultaneously.

...

The next day, Qi Yun was woken up by the ringing of his phone early in the morning. He picked up his phone and glanced at it. The caller was Liu Meng, who he hadn't been able to contact for several days, so he hurriedly got out of bed and went to the living room to answer the call.

"Hey, Meng, what's the situation over there?"

"Huff~ Huff~ I just came out of the mountain, saw that thousand-year-old ginseng, but the situation is a bit complicated," Liu Meng answered breathlessly.

Qi Yun was somewhat skeptical: "How is it complicated?"

"That ginseng can run!"

Qi Yun's fingers tightened around the phone suddenly, thinking he misheard: "What did you say? Ginseng can run!?"

Even though he knew Liu Meng's character wasn't one to talk nonsense, hearing such a thing still felt somewhat incredible.

"Absolutely true!" Liu Meng's voice carried some excitement as he began to recount the details of the incident.

Originally, after meeting Old Zhao, he followed Qi Yun's instructions, saying he was there to ask if there were any top-grade ginseng recently. Old Zhao had previously been helped by Qi Yun, not only saving the old man's life but also giving an additional sum of money.

So, as soon as Old Zhao heard Qi Yun sent him, he didn't hide anything and immediately informed Liu Meng about the thousand-year-old ginseng, saying he'd take him into the mountain to prepare to dig up that ginseng the next morning.

Who knew it would rain heavily that night, and the rain turned the mountain muddy, making it impossible to move, so they waited an extra day.

It wasn't until the third day, when the sun came out, that they started heading into the mountain.

After walking in the mountain for most of the day, they finally reached the place where Old Zhao discovered that thousand-year-old ginseng, only to be surprised to find that the ginseng was gone!

"Old Zhao's face turned pale! He said the ginseng had become a spirit, calling it a ginseng spirit!"

"It appears every three hundred years, moves every five hundred years, and can run on its own after a thousand years!" Liu Meng's voice still huffed, "He said last time he still saw it lying withered on the slope. He even left a mark, but when he came back, not even the roots were left, just a fist-sized pit."

"And the edges were smooth, not like being dug out by a beast, with no animal footprints nearby either."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun frowned in disbelief and hurriedly asked, "What happened later?"

"Later, we searched around, looking for nearly a day, and finally found that ginseng in a pit about half a mile away!"

"Old Zhao immediately knelt down! He said this ginseng definitely became a spirit; he didn't dare to move it, fearing a big disaster."

"With no choice, I had him lead me back down the mountain, then quickly contacted you after coming out with Huzi."

Liu Meng, fearing Qi Yun would worry about the ginseng running away, quickly added, "Don't worry, I had Old Zhao tie a few ropes around the ginseng, it definitely won't be able to run now."

Qi Yun was dazed for a moment, thinking this whole affair too fantastical, then replied after a pause, "Okay, I got it."

"Tell Huzi to pick me up at the village below, I'm currently in Beijing, should be there by noon."

The road to the mountain base is complex; after the last village, there's still over two hours of small roads ahead, impossible to find without a guide.

After hanging up, Qi Yun glanced toward the bedroom, then picked up his phone to book a ticket, planning to have Chen Wei go with him to Changbai Mountain, while Niu Da and the others escort Zhao Qing and the daughter back to Bird City first.

He originally planned to accompany them for a good city tour in Beijing, but given the current situation, it had to wait till next time.

Though he still thought the running ginseng story seemed ridiculous, the appearance of a thousand-year-old ginseng was unprecedented; no one had seen it before, nor had it been recorded in history, so the true situation could only be known by seeing it in person.

After booking the ticket, Qi Yun went to the bedroom to gently wake Zhao Qing, explaining he had an urgent matter to deal with, asking her to return with their daughter that afternoon.

Zhao Qing pouted slightly but nodded in agreement; she wasn't the type to throw a tantrum.

At one o'clock, Qi Yun and Chen Wei took a train to Fusong County, rented a car nearby the station, and headed straight towards Changbai Mountain.

...

Meanwhile, at a Lyon estate.

De Gaulle got up early, and after breakfast, instructed the butler to prepare the car to head to the airport. Today, he was going to meet a very important guest, someone who would largely determine whether he could control the family's power in the future.

In the backseat of the Maybach, De Gaulle drank coffee while listening to his assistant's work report.

"Regarding the Marseille factory fire incident, the management team has proposed a compensation plan..."

"Hawes asked me to convey that your cousin has been getting close to some high-level group members recently..."

Though their family members don't directly participate in company management, any disturbances within the company would be known to them immediately.

Once the assistant finished the report, they pulled up a webpage on the tablet to hand over: "This is a notice released last night by Huaxia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs."

De Gaulle took the tablet, read the information on it, and his face gradually turned grim.

Chapter 483: Investing in the Netherlands' ASML

With the exposure of Genghis Khan's Tomb in Northern Mongolia yesterday, the foreign affairs department simultaneously disclosed a piece of news that more than a dozen foreign tomb raiders met their end in the traps of the upper tomb passage.

Although no identities were officially released, De Gaulle knew that those dozen or so people were the team he had sent out, who had been out of contact for many days.

"Additionally, this matter should be related to that Huaxia person named Qi Yun whom you asked me to pay attention to," the secretary added, then pulled up an interview video on his phone and handed it to De Gaulle.

After watching, De Gaulle's mouth involuntarily twitched, as if he had thought of something.

He put down his coffee and instructed his assistant, "Cancel all next month's arrangements. I need to personally go to Huaxia."

Originally, he had planned to visit Huaxia to meet with Qi Yun and discuss collaboration, but the family internal power struggle was at a critical stage, keeping him busy.

Now, having learned that Qi Yun most likely grasped another clue, he couldn't sit still and had to personally go to Huaxia to understand the situation.

"Alright." The assistant nodded, marking it on the tablet.

Over an hour later, the convoy arrived at Lyon Airport, a Gulfstream G700 slowly landed on the tarmac, and the cabin door opened, with a similarly blond and blue-eyed middle-aged man stepping out of the plane.

The visitor was Christophe Fouquet, the current CEO of Netherlands-based ASML Company, and he was also a compatriot of De Gaulle.

ASML, officially called Advanced Semiconductor Materials Lithography company, is the undisputed leader in the global lithography machine industry, holding overwhelming dominance over other companies in the same industry.

Fu Wentao's trip to the United States was to try to obtain a batch of lithography machines produced by ASML through the Blackstone Group...

Seeing the other getting off the plane, De Gaulle quickly stepped forward, extending his hand and warmly greeting, "Christophe, how long has it been since you last returned home?"

Christophe grasped his hand with a hint of a smile in his eyes, "Nearly two years, the air in Lyon is still so refreshing."

De Gaulle released his hand and motioned toward the convoy not far away, "Let's go. I specially had two bottles of wine fetched from the winery."

The two talked as they walked toward the convoy, sitting in the back of a Maybach. The assistant had already decanted the wine, pouring a glass for each of them.

Christophe raised his glass, sniffed it, with a face full of intoxication, "You know me well, I love this taste from the Burgundy region."

De Gaulle laughed heartily, clinking glasses with him.

As the convoy slowly started, Christophe glanced out the window and asked De Gaulle, "You specifically called me over from Eindhoven not just for wine tasting, right?"

De Gaulle nodded, putting down his wine glass, "You should know I'm in a very difficult situation now, and I need your help."

"How do you want me to help?" Christophe asked directly, without beating around the bush.

De Gaulle took a deep breath, speaking one word at a time, "I need you to convince the board to let me buy into ASML!"

Christophe's hand, holding the wine glass, stopped abruptly. He looked up at De Gaulle, his face full of disbelief, then broke into a low chuckle, "De Gaulle, have you been basking in the Lyon sun for too long?"

"The ASML shareholder list is not something anyone can easily join."

"I know it's hard." De Gaulle leaned slightly forward, seriously continuing to persuade, "But you might as well hear my terms first."

"I only want 8%, and will delegate the voting rights to you."

"In exchange, I can offer ASML the exclusive supply rights to rare earths from Africa, including the ion-type rare earth mine in Malawi, where the praseodymium-neodymium content is at least ten percentage points higher than what you're currently importing from Myanmar!"

Christophe listened, thought for a moment, then slowly shook his head, "Your offer is indeed tempting, but I might not be able to help."

"Do you know the board just rejected Mitsubishi's buy-in application last month? They were even willing to exchange semiconductor materials patents, but those people still didn't budge."

"No rush, we can talk later." De Gaulle smiled, utterly undeterred, knowing well that there are no absolutes in business, only whether or not the benefits offered are sufficient.

...

Meanwhile, at Bailong Village, at the foot of Changbai Mountain, Huzi and Liu Meng were sitting on the kang at Captain Fu's house, gnawing on corn on the cob.

"There's nothing else here, but plenty of liquor. Drink up!" Captain Fu smiled, bringing over a case of Niulan Mountain and placing it on the small table.

Huzi quickly waved his hand, "No, Captain Fu, we can't drink too much, we still need to take Brother Qi into the mountains later."

Captain Fu didn't insist, adding some firewood to the stove, looking at the pot of stewing goose, he asked, "Why are you back here again to gather medicinal ingredients?"

"Probably, but I don't really know." Huzi finished the last bite of corn, wiped his mouth and replied unclearly.

After a while, the pot released a rich aroma of meat, mixing with the thick scent of Northeast soybean paste, permeating the room.

Captain Fu lifted the lid, releasing a burst of white steam. The glossy pieces of goose rolled in the broth, while the potatoes had stewed to a soft texture.

The three men savored the meat and chatted, as the outside gradually darkened.

At 6 PM, Qi Yun and Chen Wei finally drove to Bailong Village. Under Huzi's reception, they all arrived at Captain Fu's house.

Northeast people are famously hospitable (except for those doing business in the south), and insisted that Qi Yun and his friends stay overnight at their place. Qi Yun thought that since they couldn't make it up the mountain anyway, he agreed.

That evening, Captain Fu somehow procured a sheep and treated everyone to a whole sheep feast, which made Qi Yun and the others feel quite embarrassed. This meal probably took a good chunk out of their half-month salary.

Just passing through and not only inconveniencing others but also making them spend so much.

During the meal, Captain Fu shared with the group that the poachers caught last time had been sentenced.

Since they were not only poaching but also involved in kidnapping and murder, the main culprit was given a life sentence, while the other two got twenty years each, unlikely to have any chance of returning in their lifetime...

The meal went on until late at night, and when Qi Yun and the others opened their eyes again, it was already broad daylight outside.

Captain Fu had already prepared breakfast in the pot and had gone off to work. Qi Yun and his friends had a quick bite and got into the car heading towards the mountain.

Before leaving, Qi Yun placed three thousand yuan on the kang. It's not that he's stingy, but giving too much to Captain Fu, who is a policeman, wouldn't be appropriate.

The group of four drove two cars, heading north for nearly two hours, until they finally reached the spot where they parked last time.

After getting out of the car, Qi Yun took a wad of bundled bills from his bag and stuffed it into Hu Zi's arms: "Hu Zi, you head back first. Brother Wei remembers the route; we'll follow the mountain side by ourselves."

"Take this money; it's a bit embarrassing to have delayed your business for so long."

Hu Zi's hand tightened around the money, and his face immediately turned red, as he pushed the bills back into Qi Yun's arms: "Brother Qi, this isn't right! We're buddies, how can I take your money?"

"Besides, my business is just busywork; it's not a matter of delay or not!"

Qi Yun held his hand, leaving no room for refusal: "Take it, it's not easy making a living to support your family, and accompanying us for a trip takes several days." He patted Hu Zi's arm, "Go back, when we're out, we'll find you for a drink in Fusong County."

Hu Zi opened his mouth to say something more, but Qi Yun directly pushed him towards the car.

"Alright, hurry up and leave, you can still make it back before dark."

Hu Zi stumbled a couple of steps, looking at Qi Yun's expression that left no room for argument, swallowed the words back down.

He bowed his head and squeezed the money in his arms, finally nodding his head: "Okay, Brother Qi, take care, call me if anything comes up."

"Yes, I understand. Hurry on now." Qi Yun waved him off and turned to lead Chen Wei and Liu Meng into the mountain.

They'd walked this path several times and had already familiarized themselves with the route.

By around three in the afternoon, Da Zhu Zi's cabins finally appeared ahead.

Summer is the best time for herb gathering, so Da Zhu Zi wasn't home but had gone up the mountain to pick herbs. The three of them didn't stop but continued on to Old Zhao's place.

After walking for another ten minutes, a dog barked from the yard ahead, and on closer look, a small black dog was bouncing around the yard.

Old Zhao was sitting on the doorstep smoking a pipe, and upon seeing Qi Yun arrive, he slapped his bottom and stood up, walking two steps to greet them.

"Haha, old man, you look well?"

"Not bad, not dead yet." Old Zhao, still with his peculiar temper, puffed twice on his pipe. "You guys came quickly; I thought it would be tomorrow."

He stepped aside to let them in, and the small black dog trotted over, sniffing around Qi Yun's pant legs.

Old Zhao glared at the dog, kicking it lightly with some annoyance: "Useless thing, move aside."

Qi Yun glanced at the little dog, smilingly asked: "What, still thinking about Hu Zi?"

Old Zhao said nothing, just brought a plate of pine nuts to put on the stove.

Qi Yun grabbed a handful, steering the conversation to the main topic.

"Old man, tell me about that thousand-year-old ginseng? Why are you afraid to dig it up?"

Old Zhao stuffed some fresh tobacco into his pipe, blue-grey smoke rings slowly spreading through the room. He puffed twice, then slowly opened his mouth: "It's not that I'm afraid, it's that I can't."

"Why can't you dig it up? If that thing is really a thousand years old, I'll offer a good price, and you can enjoy a peaceful life by selling it."

Old Zhao sighed: "That ginseng has become a spirit! It's the earth vein clue that the Mountain God keeps on the mountain!"

"It appears once every three hundred years, moves once every five hundred, and at a thousand, it carries the mountain's vigor, going wherever there is spiritual energy."

"Would you dare dig it up? Aren't you afraid the Mountain God will take you?"

Qi Yun listened, unimpressed, and smiled as he asked back: "Then when you first saw it, why didn't you notice it had become a spirit?"

Old Zhao was stumped by the question, and glared at Qi Yun with irritation: "I didn't believe it before either, until I saw it actually move. That's when I realized all the ancestral stories were true!"

Chapter 484: It's Really Gone! (Third Update)

For someone like Old Zhao, a professional mountaineer, they are somewhat superstitious about legends like mountain gods. So, even though Qi Yun visited him personally, his heart was still uneasy, unwilling to dig up that thousand-year-old ginseng.

"How about this, why don't you find Big Zhuzi? I'll tell him the location, and you can have him do the digging."

"As for money... I know you're generous, just give me a little something and that'll suffice."

Qi Yun shook his head after listening and didn't say a word.

The method Old Zhao suggested wasn't impossible, but from a cautious standpoint, he still didn't want the matter of the thousand-year-old ginseng to be known by anyone else.

It's not that he doesn't trust Big Zhuzi, it's simply for confidentiality. After all, the more people who know, the greater the risk of information being leaked.

One can't blame Qi Yun for being cautious—rumors about this thousand-year-old ginseng in the folklore are too bizarre, tales of immortality and resurrecting the dead abound. If some big shot hears about it, the items in his hands might catch their attention.

Currently, the only ones who know about the thousand-year-old ginseng are himself, Chen Wei, and Liu Meng, all of whom he trusts greatly. Even Huzi, who escorted Liu Meng into the mountains, doesn't know.

Seeing Old Zhao disagree, Qi Yun didn't persuade him further, just signaled Liu Meng with a look.

The latter nodded and picked up the backpack by his feet, opened it, and started pulling out things.

"Dong dong dong dong~"

Four crisp sounds, several bottles of Maotai were placed by Liu Meng on the nearby small wooden table.

This was specially prepared by Qi Yun before coming, fearing the old man wouldn't relent, planning to use these good bottles of liquor to lure him.

Sure enough, Old Zhao's eyes went straight, staring at the Maotai bottles on the table, his Adam's apple uncontrollably bobbing.

The people who frequently run in the mountains generally like a drink or two, because of the cold temperatures, drinking some alcohol can ward off the chill.

Especially in winter, when snow blankets the land, sometimes half a pot of liquor can save a life.

"You... what are you doing?" Old Zhao's voice wavered, his hand reaching halfway and shrinking back, as if afraid of getting burned, "I'm not doing it for this..."

He certainly recognized Maotai, but the times he drank it could be counted on one hand, only having a few sips earlier when leading the county leaders on a tour, the taste memorable till now.

Later, conditions improved a bit, and it wasn't that he couldn't afford a bottle of liquor, but he was reluctant.

His son needed a house, his grandson needed education and a wife, so even though he earned some money from mountain herb collection, he was reluctant to spend it on such luxury.

Qi Yun smilingly shoved a bottle into his hand, "This is a gift from me."

"You see, it's not like I must dig up that ginseng, I just want to see what kind of treasure it is with my own eyes. How about you take us on another stroll in the mountains tomorrow?"

The wine bottle felt heavy in his hand, as if the aroma of the liquor could seep out through the bottle's opening, making Old Zhao swallow eagerly.

"Dear me..." Old Zhao fondled the bottle, suddenly placing it on the table, "Fine, fine! Just because of this bottle of liquor, I'll take you there!"

Qi Yun secretly chuckled inside, looks like the old man's resolve wasn't that solid either...

When they find that ginseng tomorrow and open another bottle, won't the old man obediently start work?

Old Zhao spat on his hand, rubbed his hands together, grabbed the bottle and twisted off the cap, taking a hefty swig.

The fiery liquor went down his throat, making him grit his teeth, yet his face flushed red.

"Darn it, this liquor is smoother than mountain spring water!" Setting the bottle down, he smacked his lips, glancing at Qi Yun, "We agreed to just take a look, you better not have me dig!"

"Also, that ginseng is smart, if you have intentions to dig it, it can smell you from three miles away..."

Qi Yun nodded while laughing, continuing to peel pine nuts, wondering if the old man was starting to get drunk from such ramblings...

That night, Qi Yun and the others didn't go to Big Zhuzi's house; they just made do spending the night at Old Zhao's place on the floor.

The next morning, at dawn, after breakfast, they set out towards the mountains.

The route was the same as last time, heading towards Wild Wolf Gully, but they turned midway, drilling into the denser forest on the higher eastern side.

The morning dew in the woods hadn't dried, water droplets on the grass clung to their pant legs, chillingly.

Old Zhao led the way, holding a polished wooden staff, occasionally tapping it on the ground.

A small black dog followed at his feet, nose to the ground sniffing around, occasionally stopping to bark fiercely at some tree.

"Grandpa, what does that thousand-year ginseng look like?" Qi Yun asked from behind.

"Not much different from ordinary mountain ginseng, just..." Old Zhao paused as if searching for the right words, "just looks more lively, whiskers white like snow, roots are yellow, sprouts turn with the sun like a little kid."

"Anyway, you'll see yourself when we get there."

Qi Yun nodded with a smile, stepping on thick rotting leaves, making a soft rustling sound.

They walked for over five hours until just before noon when Old Zhao finally came to a halt.

He struck the ground heavily with his wooden staff, panting and pointing ahead, "Just... just behind that mountain, let's catch our breath before we go over."

Qi Yun and Liu Meng were also exhausted. They found a flat rock to sit on, while Chen Wei cautiously moved to higher ground, observing the surroundings.

The mountain breeze passed through the forest, carrying the fresh scent of pine needles, dispersing some of the heat from their bodies.

Qi Yun unscrewed his water bottle and drank a couple of sips, then asked Old Zhao, "Uncle, if we go over there and find the ginseng, does that mean it wasn't running away at all?"

"Could it be you remembered the wrong place last time, or was it caused by the heavy rain the day before yesterday?"

Upon hearing this, Old Zhao was a bit unhappy and tapped his tobacco pipe loudly against the stone.

"You kid, don't you trust these old bones of mine?" He spat on the ground, continuing, "I've roamed the mountains for fifty or sixty years, I could tell you blindfolded which grass grows in which patch of forest, and which stone covers a spring! How could I remember the wrong place?"

The little black dog seemed to understand too, barking twice at Qi Yun, as if agreeing with Old Zhao.

Qi Yun wasn't offended, smiled, and said no more.

After resting for about ten minutes, the group ate some rations and continued on their way.

After another half hour, they finally crossed over that mountain to reach a hollow.

This hollow was like a treasure basin embraced by mountains, with a patch of strange plants growing in the center, their leaves dark red and stems shimmering with a silver light, resembling a scene from a game brought to life.

"It's right in the dirt pit among those red grasses," Old Zhao lowered his voice as if afraid of scaring the ginseng, "Don't step on those red grasses, the sap is hard to wash off and attracts bugs."

Qi Yun and the others followed him, stepping through the gaps among the red grasses.

The closer they got to the center, the more the air was filled with a faintly sweet fragrance, like wild honey mixed with the freshness of plants. Qi Yun took a few deep breaths, feeling refreshed.

Upon reaching the spot, Old Zhao stopped, a puzzled expression on his face.

Liu Meng, behind him, was equally perplexed.

They saw several pieces of red rope scattered beside the dirt pit, and what had been tied with the rope was long gone.

Old Zhao's wooden staff fell from his hand as he stumbled to the edge of the pit, his fingers trembling as he picked up a piece of the red rope, the knot he had tied by himself now loosening.

"It... it ran away again!?" Liu Meng murmured in disbelief.

Old Zhao turned and handed the piece of red rope to Qi Yun, his tone somewhat excited: "Look! Didn't I say this mountain ginseng became spirited? It must have smelled us and knows we are looking for it."

Qi Yun frowned, didn't say a word, but gave Chen Wei a look.

Even at this point, he still found it hard to believe a plant could just move by itself.

Understanding, Chen Wei stepped forward and began to carefully examine the marks at the edge of the pit.

He squatted down, dipped his hand in some dark red soil, rubbed it with his fingers, and brought it to his nose to sniff, his brow gradually furrowing.

After about four or five minutes, when Chen Wei finished examining the surrounding area for dozens of meters, he shook his head at Qi Yun: "I didn't find any obvious traces. It can only be concluded that it wasn't caused by humans, and no large wild animals have been around."

Qi Yun was stunned, this was strange as hell, could it really run on its own?

"It's only been a day, it shouldn't have gone far, right? Uncle, could you help look for it?"

Old Zhao glanced at Qi Yun, hesitatingly said: "Maybe we shouldn't look for it, this ginseng must have become spirited, if we really dig it up, the mountain god will be angry!"

Qi Yun looked around and clapped his hands in response: "Just help us find it first. Whether we dig it or not, I've come all this way, I should at least take a look to broaden my horizons."

Seeing Qi Yun insist, Old Zhao didn't argue further, immediately bending down to search nearby: "Ginseng likes to grow where the spiritual energy is abundant; where the spiritual energy is abundant, there is more moisture, so observe the distribution of these leaves..."

Qi Yun listened while glancing around occasionally. Just as he was engrossed in the search, something suddenly fell from the sky, landing right at his feet.

He pushed aside the grass to see it was a pine cone, so he looked up to find a gray-black squirrel perched on the pine branch above, its round eyes staring at him, with half a pine cone in its mouth, as though demonstrating its dominance.

Apparently, the fallen pine cone was its doing.

"This little thing, quite bold." Qi Yun laughed, shook his head, and was about to step aside when he noticed with the corner of his eye a few tender green leaves growing on the small slope ahead.

Excited, he quickly walked over, brushed aside the covering weeds.

These leaves did indeed resemble ginseng leaves, almost identical to those he had seen before, except they were extraordinarily large! Each leaf was as big as a grown man's palm, several sizes larger than those of ginsengs aged tens or hundreds of years.

"Old Zhao!" Qi Yun immediately turned his head and shouted, "Come see if this is it!"

Hearing the call, Old Zhao rushed over in three steps at once, and upon seeing those leaves, he fell to his knees excitedly, bowing his head several times to them.

"Oh my..."

"It's it! It's it! It's definitely it!"

Chapter 485: The Foremost of the Nine Immortal Herbs!

After confirming that the plant in front of them was indeed the thousand-year-old ginseng, Qi Yun exchanged a glance with Chen Wei, who then carefully inspected the surroundings again, but the results were the same as before, with no obvious traces.

The only suspicious aspect was that the soil around the ginseng was very loose, as if a hole had been freshly dug and the plant placed inside.

Qi Yun voiced his doubts to Old Zhao, who pondered for a while before finally giving a very reluctant explanation.

"When the ginseng spirit relocates, it uses its roots to carve out a passage in the soil like a worm, only more precise, moving along and filling the pit behind it with new soil, fearing it might leave traces for others to see."

"Look at this raised circle; it's formed by the spirit using its roots to gather new soil."

Qi Yun found this explanation too mystical, especially since no one had seen this thousand-year-old ginseng before, and Old Zhao's imagination seemed quite significant.

But judging from the surroundings, there were indeed no human traces, coupled with Liu Meng's testimony, proving that Old Zhao hadn't gotten the location wrong last time.

So the matter carried a touch of mystery...

After finishing a cigarette, Qi Yun couldn't be bothered thinking about it any more. After all, the ginseng was found; whether it would relocate or not, let's dig it out and take it away first.

"Brother Meng, let's get some food first, I'm hungry."

Liu Meng naturally understood his meaning and immediately took off his backpack, pulling out some provisions, peanuts, and most importantly, two bottles of Maotai.

Qi Yun spread the oil paper-wrapped sauce beef on a rock, twisted open a bottle of Maotai, the rich aroma of the liquor mingling instantly with the mountain greenery.

Old Zhao's eyes immediately glued to the bottle, his Adam's apple moved involuntarily, but he maintained a stern face: "What are you doing... trying to lure me with this stuff? I really don't dare touch this ginseng spirit."

"I, an old man, roam the mountains every day; if I offend the mountain spirits, I'm afraid I won't be able to touch even a single medicine anymore..."

"Grandpa, have a bite first." Qi Yun laughed, stuffing a piece of beef into his hand. "Whether to dig or not, let's eat something first."

"Look at how far and high these mountains are; if you don't eat well, where will you get the energy to return?"

Old Zhao's hand holding the beef was stiff, but his gaze involuntarily drifted toward the open bottle of Maotai.

Liu Meng didn't keep him waiting long, quickly pouring a small half-cup and handing it over: "Here, Grandpa, take a little drink."

Old Zhao eventually couldn't resist the temptation in his stomach, accepting the cup, his rough fingers stroking it twice, as if making a last struggle.

Finally, he threw back his head and downed the half cup of Maotai in one go, the spicy liquid sliding down his throat and even brightening his eyes a little.

"Damn it, this liquor... packs a punch!" He smacked his lips, handing the empty cup to Liu Meng, "Fill it up again."

Liu Meng squinted, refilling with another small half-cup.

This time, Old Zhao didn't rush to drink, instead putting a piece of sauce beef in his mouth and chewing slowly, his eyes drifting uncontrollably toward that thousand-year-old ginseng, muttering who knows what.

The bottle was distributed among the three, and it was soon empty.

Qi Yun wiped his mouth and stood up, saying to the somewhat unsatisfied Old Zhao: "Grandpa, lend me your ginseng digging tools."

Old Zhao, hearing this, put down his cup, his eyes widening: "You... you really want to dig?"

"We've found it, can't just go back empty-handed, can I?" Qi Yun patted his arm, "Don't worry, if the mountain spirits blame, I'll take it all on myself, won't involve you."

Old Zhao's lips trembled with hesitation, finally reaching into the cloth bag around his waist, pulling out an oilcloth package, inside was a palm-sized small trowel, its wooden handle polished, with a horn-made head.

"Digging ginseng is a skill; you haven't practiced, easy to ruin such a fine treasure!"

Qi Yun chuckled, taking the horn trowel from Old Zhao's hand, weighing it a couple of times: "Why don't you watch and guide me then?"

Old Zhao didn't reply verbally but walked over to squat down, inserting a twig into the soft soil around the ginseng, drawing a circle on the ground: "Dig along this circle, depth mustn't exceed an inch, the roots are as fragile as hair, breaking one will lessen its spirit."

He spoke, taking out a red cloth package from his bag, inside were several rusted Copper Coins, placing one at each corner outside the circle, he fell silent.

Qi Yun also squatted down, glancing at Old Zhao, then aimed for a spot outside the circle, and instead of hesitating, he forcefully dug down with the trowel.

The action immediately startled Old Zhao, who grabbed Qi Yun's wrist with a trembling voice: "Goodness! I said the depth mustn't exceed an inch! With just one dig, these roots will break into threads!"

Before finishing his words, he suddenly snatched the trowel, spat into his palm and rubbed: "Fine, fine, I'll do it! You youngsters can't handle this; don't spoil such a fine treasure!"

Qi Yun and Liu Meng exchanged a glance, seeing amusement in each other's eyes.

"Yes, this work is yours, we're clumsy; besides, the first dig was mine, if the mountain spirits blame, it'll surely be on me!"

Old Zhao didn't respond to him further. He first bowed three times to the ginseng, murmuring, "Spirit of the ginseng, forgive us, spirit of the ginseng, forgive us..."

Afterwards, he sat down heavily on the ground, gently stuck the tip of the spade into the ground, rolled up his sleeves, and started working.

Digging for ginseng is not only a technical job but also a test of patience. Impatient people can't handle it because each dig can take at least an hour or so.

Old Zhao's hands were steady, and the horn shovel in his hand moved with incredible dexterity. Before long, he had cleared away most of the surrounding soil, revealing the main root of the ginseng.

"See that?"

"This spirit of the ginseng just moved its home, and its root hairs haven't had the chance to dig deep. It saved us some effort; otherwise, just clearing these hairs would have taken a couple of hours."

Liu Meng nodded repeatedly in agreement from the side, "It's mainly because your hands are so skilled."

Qi Yun squatted nearby, observing, and the main root of the ginseng was as thick as a child's wrist. Its earthy yellow skin shone with an oily luster, with dense concentric rings swirling upwards, too many to count.

The most mystical part was the silvery root hairs, dense like silkworm threads. If fully stretched out, they'd probably be two to three meters long.

Just from its size alone, this ginseng was several times thicker than those centennial ginseng roots Qi Yun and the others had dug up before.

According to the Taoist classic "Daozang," the thousand-year-old ginseng, *Dendrobium officinale*, Tianshan snow lotus, Centennial He Shouwu, aged-fu-ling, cistanche, deep mountain Ganoderma, seabed pearl, and cordyceps are the nine celestial herbs.

This thousand-year-old ginseng ranks first among the nine celestial herbs, so its significance has long surpassed that of ordinary medicinal materials.

As Old Zhao finished clearing the last root hairs, he wiped the sweat off his face, put down the horn shovel, and cautiously held the ginseng in his hands, examining it thoroughly under the sunlight.

"Is this ginseng really a thousand years old?" Liu Meng couldn't help but ask from the side, his fingers suspended in mid-air, wanting to touch but not daring to.

"A thousand years?" Old Zhao snorted, pointing to the main root, "Count these rings, each year is a ring. I reckon it's at least twelve hundred years!"

"Do you see this bump? It's called Baoshan knot. It grew from the ginseng absorbing the essence of the mountains and earth, a treasure that cures all ailments!"

"I also heard about it from the older generation when I was young. This is the first time I've seen it..."

Qi Yun leaned in for a closer look. The bump was indeed round, with some particularly sturdy silver hairs wrapped around it, like a small hand tightly hugging the main root. The whole root looked vaguely like a child's body, which made for a peculiar sight.

No wonder there are rumors that a thousand-year-old ginseng can transform into a child—its resemblance is uncanny.

"Grandpa, how do you preserve the medicinal properties of this thousand-year-old ginseng?"

Old Zhao took out a piece of red cloth over a meter wide from his cloth bag, laid it flat on the ground, carefully placed the ginseng on it, then arranged the small root hairs neatly and slowly folded the red cloth.

After wrapping all the ginseng up, he sighed and handed it to Qi Yun, his eyes filled with evident reluctance.

"To keep this treasure for long, you must use sand storage techniques."

"Find clean river sand, dry it, sift it three times with a bamboo sieve to remove impurities, bury the ginseng in the sand, then place it in a clay pot, seal the pot's mouth with yellow clay, and store it in a cool, ventilated place. This way, it can last three years."

"But if stored too long, its vitality weakens. It's best not to keep it too long."

Qi Yun accepted the ginseng wrapped in red cloth with both hands. It felt heavy, around three to four kilograms in weight, whereas those hundred-year-old ginseng roots weighed at most just a few hundred grams.

It felt as though he was holding a warm breath in his hands, which might just be psychological.

According to some experts, wild ginseng grows 3 grams per year, so a twelve-hundred-year-old ginseng should weigh about this much.

"Brother Wei, pack it up," Qi Yun called to Chen Wei, who was keeping watch nearby. Chen Wei quickly came over, took the empty pack from his back, and gently placed the ginseng inside.

The ginseng was dug up, and seeing it was getting late, the group packed up their things, preparing to head back.

Before leaving, Old Zhao solemnly bowed a few more times to the deep pit they had dug, his expression extremely complex.

If Qi Yun and the others hadn't saved his life and extended him favors, Old Zhao might have preferred to let this thousand-year-old ginseng remain in the mountains forever.

After all, he truly believed this ginseng had turned into a spirit...

That night, tired and dusty, the group returned to Old Zhao's wooden cabin. After a quick face wash, they set a pot on the stove to stew indescribable meat.

Qi Yun poured Old Zhao a cup of wine, raised his glass, and asked, "Grandpa, this thing has no fixed price. You name a number, and I'll transfer the money to your account tomorrow."

Old Zhao paused while holding the wine cup, looked up at Qi Yun, glanced towards Chen Wei's backpack, his throat moving as he slowly spoke. "The money you gave last time was already enough. My older grandson is married and has a house now."

"My old bones won't last many more years, even if you gave me money I wouldn't spend it all, so for this spirit of ginseng... I won't take your money."

Chapter 486: Promotion—Security Advisor!

Qi Yun immediately shook his head upon hearing Old Zhao wouldn't accept money: "That's not right, the item is too valuable, I can't take advantage of you like this."

Old Zhao raised his hand, took a sip from his glass, and then sighed: "I don't want your money, but I do want to ask you for a favor."

Qi Yun accompanied him with his own drink and, putting down the glass, responded with a smile: "The bond between us, you can just tell me directly, if I can do it, I surely will."

"Alright." Old Zhao wiped his mouth and pondered for a moment, "I know you're a capable person. I'm just thinking, that when I pass away, if my grandson ever falls on hard times, I hope you'll lend him a hand out of respect for our friendship."

Qi Yun stopped his hand mid-air as he was about to grab a cigarette, then looked up at Old Zhao. Under the dim oil lamp, the wrinkles on the old man's face seemed to embody a lifetime of hardships.

The eyes that usually exuded shrewdness were now filled with pleading.

Without another word, Qi Yun took out his bag, pulled out a small notebook, tore off a page, wrote down Zhong Rui and Chen Wei's phone numbers, then added two addresses before handing it to Old Zhao.

"You have my phone number, if you can't reach me, call these two numbers and you'll find me."

"These are my home and company addresses. Remind him to come find me directly whether he's short of money or facing a hurdle."

"Also, the money I'm giving you isn't a penny less. Tomorrow, when I leave, I'll wire ten million to your account. Spend as you see fit."

The mention of ten million seemed to strike Old Zhao like lightning, leaving him shocked and waving his hands repeatedly: "No, no, no! Ten million? That kind of money could bury my house!"

He grabbed the paper with the phone numbers and addresses, folded it carefully, and tucked it into his clothing lining. "I'll accept this, and remember the kindness in my heart, but I absolutely can't accept the money. What you gave me last time was already plenty; to take more would be shameless, even the mountain gods would punish me!"

Qi Yun lit a cigarette, patted Old Zhao's arm, and said earnestly: "Sir, you were right about one thing, ten million isn't much to me. The value this ginseng brings me is worth ten times that."

"Take the money with peace of mind, even if you just bank it for interest, it's better than scratching a living from the mountains."

"With this sum of money, your descendants won't have to suffer anymore."

Ten million isn't a small sum.

For the vast majority of ordinary people, it's a fortune that can change their destiny. It means you can truly experience life in this world without having to leave your hometown and hustle everywhere just to survive.

Old Zhao opened his mouth to say something, but Qi Yun didn't give him the chance, immediately picking up the bottle and refilling Old Zhao's glass...

At dawn the next day, the three of them started their path out of the mountains. By noon, they reached their parked car and continued without stopping, finally arriving in Fusong County by evening.

That night, under the guidance of Huzi, the three found a good place and had a nice bath. The next day, they parted ways once again.

After a long and tiresome journey, by the time they returned to Bird City, it was already afternoon.

Right after leaving the airport, Qi Yun took Chen Wei directly to National Security.

...

Nanjing Road No. 28, inside the National Security office building.

Director Duan greeted Qi Yun with a big surprise.

"You've really got some connections now, managing to get gun permits issued," Director Duan leaned back in his chair, glancing at Qi Yun with a hint of teasing in his tone.

Qi Yun beamed: "Director, has the approval process been completed?"

Director Duan pushed a document on the desk over: "The latest approval from above. Tell those nine people on the list to come over tomorrow, the organization wants to conduct an evaluation review."

"If they pass the review, they'll all be enrolled as National Security external investigators, specially authorized to carry service guns, but must abide strictly by the regulations, and use them solely for protecting you and your family's safety."

Enrolled as National Security external investigators!?

Qi Yun was overjoyed at the news. He initially just wanted a few gun permits to ensure his and his family's safety, but he didn't expect they'd even grant him official status!

He picked up the document and quickly scanned it. Listed were the names of Chen Wei, Niu Da, Duan Pingyu, Eagle, An Zai, Da Pao, Old Bai, Bingzi, Gao Min among others.

"Thank you, Director! Thank you, organization!" Qi Yun expressed his gratitude with a wide grin.

"Don't thank me," Director Duan waved his hand, "I don't have that kind of influence. It's all specially approved by Minister Lan, a reward for your achievements."

Minister Lan?

Before Qi Yun could process this, he saw Director Duan pull another document from the drawer and stand up to come over.

"Originally, it should have been announced by Chief Wan, but he's ill and undergoing treatment, so I'm announcing it on his behalf." Director Duan's tone became serious, "Now announcing the appointment for National Security external investigator - Comrade Qi Yun!"

The air in the office seemed to freeze instantly, Qi Yun stood upright, his breathing became quick as his gaze fixed on the document in Director Duan's hand.

Director Duan cleared his throat, his voice steady and powerful: "After **** meeting deliberations, it has been decided due to the outstanding performance of external investigator Comrade Qi Yun on multiple special events involving national interests, demonstrating exceptional adaptability and a sense of responsibility, he is hereby appointed as the reins safety advisor for National Security!"

"Directly report your work to Comrade Wan Lingchuan."

"Yes!" After listening, Qi Yun promptly stood with his legs together and saluted formally.

Ever since he saluted in that office a few days ago, he suddenly realized that he might often use this gesture in the future. So he intentionally asked Chen Wei to provide him with professional guidance, and now his movements were much more standard.

After the appointment was read out, Director Duan's expression softened, and he patted Qi Yun on the shoulder, smiling warmly, "But for now, since Director Wan is not here, your work will still be under my supervision in the future."

Seeing this, Qi Yun immediately relaxed, hurriedly bent down to pick up the teapot on the table, and poured a cup of tea for Director Duan, handing it over with both hands and grinning, "That's wonderful! I'm willing to work under your wise leadership, Director!"

Although he wasn't quite sure what a security advisor specifically does, it sure sounds a lot more prestigious than an external investigator—a small step forward for the little guy!

Director Duan took the teacup, sat back in his chair, his smile unfading, "You, with that mouth of yours, would be wasted if not in diplomacy." He sipped his tea and put down the cup, then changed the subject, "From now on, your identity in national security can be disclosed."

"Don't assume that a security advisor is just a nominal position; it carries quite a bit of authority." As he spoke, he pulled out a black leather box from the drawer and pushed it over. Upon opening it, inside was a silver badge, with the national emblem on the front and some of his personal information printed on the back.

"With this, you will be able to receive support from National Security liaison points nationwide, access documents below third level secrecy without approval, and temporarily call upon local assistance in emergencies."

Qi Yun held the badge in his hand and examined it closely, overwhelmed with emotion.

This badge weighing less than two hundred grams felt as heavy as a thousand pounds...

Although this position of security advisor indeed grants more authority than that of an external investigator, with it comes greater responsibility...

"If I ever get carried away and misuse it, would I be charged with abuse of power?"

Director Duan was amused by him, tapping the table with his hand, "You certainly have self-awareness; the authority is given to you for work, not for showing off, and you must strictly adhere to relevant regulations."

"Every action you take will be recorded, so it's best to think carefully before using the authority in your hands. And that goes for me as well."

Qi Yun understood that the other party was concerned about him getting ahead of himself, hence the special reminders. Just these two sentences showed that Director Duan truly regarded him as his own.

"Yes, Director, I got it."

Director Duan, satisfied with his attitude, nodded approvingly, "Alright then, that's all I wanted to talk to you about. Generally, there's no need for you to report for duty; I'll contact you when there are assignments."

"Okay, then I'll take my leave, Director."

Qi Yun pocketed the black leather box from the table and took his leave from National Security.

Back home, he gathered Chen Wei and the other nine in the gym on the first floor and informed them about the external investigator positions at National Security.

"Tomorrow, you'll divide into two groups, taking turns to complete the assessments at National Security. From then on, you'll be external investigators, with firearms issued simultaneously."

The nine were visibly excited, their faces lighting up.

They were all former special forces soldiers who constantly dreamed of serving the country again. Although this status wasn't part of the formal setup, they were finally back on the path to serving the nation.

"Firearms!?" Niu Da's voice was the loudest, exclaiming excitedly, "Boss, we can legally carry guns!?"

Qi Yun nodded with a smile, "Yes, but firearm use must strictly adhere to regulations; the specifics will be explained to you tomorrow."

"Additionally, I've already asked Zhong Rui to handle the entry formalities for the newly established security company, with an annual salary of two million for everyone! I'll also allocate a portion of the bonus for special assignments!"

The gym fell silent for half a second, then erupted into even more fervent excitement.

"Thank you, boss!" An Zai was the first to shout.

"Boss, you're generous!"

"..."

The excitement hadn't yet dissipated when Qi Yun threw in another bombshell.

"Quiet down, I haven't finished yet."

"Seeing everyone's hard work this period, I've decided to reward each of you with a two-million bonus. Tomorrow I'll have Ah Jiao deposit the money into your accounts."

This matter had been decided before Qi Yun left for Beijing, but it hadn't been announced at the time, so only Chen Wei and Ah Jiao knew.

The atmosphere in the gym seemed to freeze, everyone motionless, even forgetting to breathe.

"B... Boss, could you say that again?" Da Pao rubbed his ears, doubting what he had heard, "Two million... bonus?"

Chapter 487: All Purple Intelligence Points Gathered!

Once the announcement was made, everyone dispersed.

Qi Yun stood in the yard smoking a cigarette, and after a while, Zhong Rui pulled up in a van at the door.

"Boss, I've prepared everything you asked for." Zhong Rui got out of the car, opened the back door, and inside the van were a snakeskin bag filled with fine river sand, a large ceramic jar used in rural areas for storing rice, and two plastic bags.

Qi Yun came to the car door, effortlessly lifted the heavy ceramic jar with one hand, as if it were weightless.

"Move everything to the upstairs balcony," Qi Yun instructed, carrying the ceramic jar upstairs.

The second-floor balcony was quite spacious, about seven or eight square meters, with a sunshade overhead. It usually had a set of tables and chairs, perfect for relaxing with some tea, and it was well-ventilated too.

Qi Yun placed the ceramic jar in the corner, gave it a cursory glance, and then instructed Zhong Rui, who followed him up: "Tomorrow, find someone to weld a protective railing around this corner to secure this jar."

The ceramic jar was, of course, meant to hold that thousand-year-old ginseng. Even though it was in his own home, Qi Yun didn't feel it was safe enough.

It wasn't that he feared theft, but mainly because the little girl was at a mischievous age, and if she accidentally broke the jar, it could damage the sealed environment inside.

Zhong Rui put down the snakeskin bag, not quite understanding the boss's intention but still nodded quickly in response, "Okay, boss."

The two returned inside to wash their hands, and after Zhong Rui had finished reporting on the company's affairs, he left first.

Qi Yun took out the backpack containing the ginseng from his study and headed to the balcony to start working.

"Why did you get such a big jar?" Zhao Qing, curious, also came to the balcony to peek, with a face mask on.

"Planning to pickle some vegetables for you," Qi Yun replied with a smile.

He didn't mention the ginseng, not because he didn't trust Zhao Qing, but because women generally aren't great at keeping secrets, and she might accidentally spill the beans one day during a conversation.

This legendary medicine, rumored to bring the dead back to life and grant immortality, was too precious, and couldn't even be measured in terms of money.

The pursuit of immortality has been the ultimate goal for countless people since ancient times, including emperors like Qin Shi Huang and Genghis Khan.

So even if it didn't possess such exaggerated effects, should the news reach certain interested parties, they'd undoubtedly go to great lengths to acquire it.

And those types of people were beyond Qi Yun's current capability to contend with...

Thus, no amount of caution regarding this matter would be excessive. If it were a more ruthless person, old Zhao might already have been ready to strike...

However, that doesn't mean that the thousand-year-old ginseng would only bring trouble. On the contrary, if used wisely, whether consumed personally or brought out at the right time, it could bring unimaginable benefits.

"Pickle vegetables? How come you suddenly want to do that? Need help?" Zhao Qing walked over with a smiling face to ask.

"No need, you go rest in the bedroom." Qi Yun put down the backpack in his hand, turned and scooped Zhao Qing up, carried her to the bedroom without another word, and threw her on the bed. He even specifically reminded her, "Stay put, it's going to get dusty, don't come out."

Zhao Qing pouted but didn't think much of it.

Back on the balcony, Qi Yun lit a cigarette and started working.

...

The next morning, Qi Yun, as usual, practiced with Chen Wei for an hour, then took a shower and began to receive the day's intelligence. Lately, he'd been caught up with continuous issues, and it had been four or five days since he last checked any intelligence updates.

[Current Intelligence Points: 27]

[Today's Intelligence 1 (Red): Luca, head of Panasonic's new energy technology, parted ways with the company a week ago and is currently vacationing on the Yili grasslands. Due to a non-compete agreement, he can't engage in new energy materials research in the short term and plans to secretly sell a highly confidential material experimental data.]

Luca?

Qi Yun immediately searched online for information on this person, and after a quick glance, found that this person indeed had some weight.

Graduated from Stanford University with a degree in Materials Engineering, studied under Professor Martin, a luminary in the solid-state battery field during his PhD, published several papers in authoritative journals, and remains an industry benchmark.

He worked at Panasonic for eight years, significantly advancing their research on new energy materials, which was most prominently evidenced by their near-monopoly of battery supplies to Tesla's overseas models, including the extended-range versions in China, which mainly use Panasonic batteries.

It's said that patent transfer fees alone have earned Panasonic tens of billions.

If he could extract the valuable insights from this person, it might help Tao Ziming's research progress.

With that thought, Qi Yun immediately made a call.

"Hello, President Qi."

"How's the company been lately?" Qi Yun cleared his throat and asked.

He currently holds 51% of Dawn Technology's shares, making him the principal decision-maker.

However, Qi Yun didn't meddle in the company's specific affairs. His biggest strength was having a clear understanding of his capabilities. In areas where he wasn't skilled, he left it to the professionals and didn't interfere.

Upon hearing this, Tao Ziming couldn't help but feel tense, afraid that Qi Yun was dissatisfied with their research progress.

"We just completed an experiment a few days ago, and the data is already very close to our target, rest assured, President Qi, at most..."

After listening to the report, Qi Yun cheerfully explained, "Alright, I just wanted to check on the company's status and also consult you on something."

Hearing Qi Yun's relaxed tone, Tao Ziming's heart eased significantly, and he hurriedly replied, "Of course, President Qi, go ahead."

Qi Yun stood up and went to the window, leisurely asking, "Have you heard of Luca, a technical director from Panasonic?"

"Luca? Of course, I've heard of him," Tao Ziming's voice carried a hint of surprise, "He's quite a technical expert at Panasonic, very accomplished in the solid-state battery field. I even researched some of his papers when I was in the United States."

"President Qi, why are you suddenly asking about him?"

"Well, a friend told me something..." Qi Yun briefly explained the situation to Tao Ziming, and then continued, "This guy is currently vacationing in Yili. My idea is for you to contact him and see if you can establish some cooperation."

"Moreover, he has a highly confidential materials experimental data that my friend says he plans to secretly sell. Investigate if it's beneficial for our project; if so, discuss buying it."

"I'll handle the funding issues."

Upon hearing this, Tao Ziming was overjoyed, his voice full of unrestrained excitement, "Alright, President Qi, I understand!"

"We're currently stuck on the compatibility issue between cathode materials and electrolytes, having tried over a hundred solutions with no breakthrough. If we can get his assistance..."

After hanging up the call, Qi Yun let out a long breath.

If Dawn Technology's new materials could be successfully developed soon, he wouldn't mind investing more money.

[Today's Intelligence 2 (Purple 6/6): 41°90'262"N, 12°45'403"E]

After many days, a purple intelligence finally appeared again!

Moreover, this was the last of the six locations on the shipwreck map!

Qi Yun immediately opened the map software and tried entering the coordinates. As the screen rotated, the view finally settled on the northwest corner of Rome, Italy, which was the Holy See of the Catholic Church, the smallest country in the world — Vatican.

Looking at the screen's pop-up prompt on the right, it impressively read "St. Peter's Basilica."

Though Qi Yun wasn't well-versed in European history, he'd heard about this largest church in the world.

As the name suggested, St. Peter's Basilica was built to commemorate Saint Peter, whose Latin name was Peter, and he had another name, Saint Petros.

As Jesus' foremost disciple and the leader of the twelve apostles, Saint Petros is regarded by many as the first pope in Catholic history.

It is said in his later years, he also pursued immortality, but the ending wasn't good, as he was persecuted and martyred on the cross.

"I didn't expect the final clue to be hidden here..."

Chapter 488: Meeting with De Gaulle

France isn't far from the Vatican, judging by straight-line distance, it's not as far as Bird City to Kashi. It's unknown if the clues hidden here have been discovered by De Gaulle...

So far, all six locations on the map have been identified: Loulan Ancient City, Genghis Khan's Tomb, Khufu's Pyramid, Mayan Ruins, Mount Kilimanjaro, and finally, St. Peter's Basilica.

There seems to be... some subtle similarities...

[Today's Intelligence 3 (Green): Room 601, Building 8, Qingyuan Community, Dongfeng Road, houses a large amount of gold antiques and other items, valued over twenty-six million; the homeowner was imprisoned three years ago, and Secretary Ji used this property as a place to stash stolen goods]

Twenty-six million worth of golden antiques!

Secretary Ji has already cooled down by now, I guess no one knows about these things anymore...

Twenty-six million, plus the 120 million laundered to his mistress a few days ago, that's close to 150 million. Quite a big appetite.

However, Qi Yun believes this certainly isn't all.

"Forget it, seeing as you've cooled down and contributed so much money to me, let's call it even between us..."

After a sigh, Qi Yun picked up his phone and sent a message to Old Ghost, instructing him to quietly retrieve the items with Old Black.

Such treasures are a pity to just gather dust indoors; it's better to hand them over to do charity on behalf of Secretary Ji...

After receiving today's intelligence message, Qi Yun went to the kitchen and prepared breakfast. Once the family finished eating, he personally drove his daughter and Zhao Qing to kindergarten.

Not yet at the kindergarten gate, Nuannuan's head was already held high, almost skyward, with two little hands on her hips, looking at everyone with her nostrils.

"Tang Zixin, did you see? My dad! You've seen him on TV, right?"

"Liu Mingyu, my dad is here!"

"..."

Qi Yun couldn't help but laugh, watching his daughter like a proud little peacock, strutting around the crowd with her chest out.

Zhao Qing tugged at his arm: "Look at how you've spoiled her, now the whole kindergarten knows Nuannuan's dad appeared on the news broadcast."

"It's just fame, only fame." Qi Yun modestly said, though his eyes held a smile.

The director at the entrance, welcoming students, recognized Qi Yun and jogged over, his face brimming with enthusiasm: "This must be President Qi, welcome, welcome."

Qi Yun glanced at him curiously, then turned to look at Zhao Qing.

Before Zhao Qing could speak, the director smoothed his shiny hair and extended both hands proactively: "Hello, President Qi, let me introduce myself, my name is Wang Baichuan, and I'm the director here at the kindergarten. Welcome, President Qi, to inspect our work."

From these few words, Qi Yun roughly understood what kind of person this guy was...

His official status externally is only that of a zx member, so calling it an inspection is a bit too much.

But as the saying goes, don't hit a smiling face, with such enthusiasm, Qi Yun didn't put on airs and shook hands with the director.

"Haha, Director Wang, you're too generous. I'm just here to drop off Zhao Qing and the child."

"President Qi is too modest." Wang Baichuan shook Qi Yun's hand up and down, his eyes nearly twitching, "President Qi, you've made great contributions to the country. Your visit to our kindergarten is our honor."

Qi Yun managed a smile, slightly pulled his hand back: "Director Wang, you're too kind. Did you have something to discuss with me?"

Generally, upon hearing such words, insightful people would leave on their own, but Wang Baichuan seemed oblivious, showing no sign of embarrassment on his face: "Oh, the principal mentioned yesterday about inviting you to our kindergarten to give a speech to our students and parents, encouraging everyone to learn from you, President Qi."

"You happened to be here today, so I came to ask if you have time, maybe we could go to the office for some tea?"

Qi Yun checked his watch, then smiled apologetically: "Sorry, Director Wang, I have something to do today, how about next time I invite you for tea."

"As for the speech, it's unnecessary, please thank the principal for the kind offer. I'm not great with words, can't say much profound."

After speaking, he patted Zhao Qing's back, "Zhao Qing, I'm heading to the company first."

Zhao Qing blinked: "Okay, you go ahead."

Qi Yun softly replied "hm", nodded to Director Wang, and turned towards the parking lot.

He barely took two steps when Wang Baichuan caught up again, handing over a business card: "Haha, President Qi, here's my card. Feel free to contact me anytime, I enjoy making friends."

"Sure, no problem." Qi Yun politely took the card, answered, then quickly left.

After returning to the car, he let out a long breath, casually tossing the card aside.

This Wang Baichuan, he had met before when dropping off Nuannuan, but back then Qi Yun wasn't worthy of attention, and he didn't know who Qi Yun was.

Even though this is just a neighborhood kindergarten, it's quite large, with many local families sending their kids here, so among the parents are quite a few department heads, directors, and deans, and Wang Baichuan remembers them incognizantly.

But this sudden enthusiasm indeed left Qi Yun a bit unaccustomed, though he understood that such situations are inevitable moving forward.

After all, in today's society, currying favor is a basic skill of adulthood.

Some people naturally love this approach, while others are forced by responsibilities to engage accordingly.

Qi Yun couldn't determine if Wang Baichuan was the former or the latter, but regardless, he wouldn't befriend such individuals.

After leaving the kindergarten, Qi Yun visited the hotpot restaurant, jewelry company, and his two businesses, meeting a group of old acquaintances.

Firstly, to thank everyone for their congratulations, and secondly, to check the status of various businesses, fortunately all proceeded smoothly.

The hotpot restaurant and Wei Yong's two fruit supermarkets had dividends of over 1.4 million last month, the spark plug factory had orders with over 500,000 profit, and the trade company was the biggest, amounting to nearly 7 million.

Summing it up, his dividends last month were roughly 9 million, over ten times more than before his bankruptcy, and this doesn't even include the jewelry company's dividends, which presumably will be in the billions this year.

After this round of visits, the time reached the afternoon, Qi Yun was about to head to National Security to check on Niu Da's investigation, but a phone call interrupted his plans.

"Hello, Mr. Qi."

"Haha, Mr. De Gaulle has some business with me?"

Indeed, the call was from De Gaulle, regarding whom Qi Yun neither harbored strong antipathy nor favorable sentiments.

Logically speaking, although De Gaulle previously sent people to investigate Qi Yun, as soon as those agents landed on Hong Kong Island, Qi Yun seized them.

Later, Qi Yun sent people to France, where Ah Jiao and others were captured by De Gaulle, but the latter released them casually and even proposed cooperation.

From the outcomes, there wasn't deep conflict between the two, but during their dealings, Qi Yun felt De Gaulle was unpredictable, thus maintained deep caution against him.

Firstly, because during their conversations, De Gaulle continuously tried to conceal key information, if Qi Yun hadn't already identified several specific locations and with Ignacio discovering clues in historical documents, he would have certainly been deceived by him.

Secondly, De Gaulle has a formidable background, not only does his family wield great power, but he's also an affiliate of the Louis Family, quite an intimidating background...

De Gaulle didn't waste words, directly asking: "Mr. Qi, do you have time tonight? I'd like to meet you."

Qi Yun was slightly taken aback: "You're already in Huaxia?"

"Haha, yes." De Gaulle chuckled, "I arrived in Bird City not long ago, if you have time, please give me a location, after attending a talk with the trade department later, I'll head over to meet you."

Qi Yun thought briefly and replied: "Sure, then let's meet at ten tonight, I'll send you the address shortly."

"Alright, see you tonight."

After setting down the phone, Qi Yun's lips subtly curved, thinking this guy certainly isn't fearless, deliberately mentioning the trade department meeting to remind him not to act rashly...

That afternoon, Chen Wei and the other nine successfully passed National Security's internal review, thus they all became external investigators for National Security, granted with specially approved licenses allowing legal firearm possession.

This eased many of Qi Yun's concerns, ensuring that Duan Pingyu, Gao Min, and the others no longer had to sneak around with weapons.

All owing to their absolute trust in him as their boss, otherwise, no bodyguard would dare act this way.

Chapter 489: Jackpot Gold Coin Burst

At ten o'clock in the evening, a black Maybach stopped at the entrance of a tea house in the New District. Three people got out of the car, led by a person who looked to be about forty years old, with blond hair and blue eyes, exuding an elegant aura in every movement.

Behind him, the two people had tall statures. Compared to those muscular foreign men, these two were not particularly robust, but their presence was powerful enough to make a passing child cry at a glance.

From the moment these three appeared, Niu Da's gaze was locked relentlessly on one of the bald men, with battle readiness surging in his eyes.

He had once confronted this bald man in France, and because of a careless move, he suffered a setback. However, because Ah Jiao and others were present, Niu Da's attention was somewhat divided.

So although he acknowledged the opponent's strength, he still felt somewhat unconvinced in his heart.

The three of them walked up the steps, and Niu Da and Duan Pingyu stepped forward to block their way: "Only one of you is allowed to enter." Niu Da nodded towards De Gaulle at the forefront, his tone unyielding.

Upon hearing the words, the two subordinates of De Gaulle instantly had their gazes turn cold, looking at Niu Da with undisguised hostility.

Niu Da and Duan Pingyu were not to be outdone, coldly staring back at them with a demeanor suggesting they were ready for a fight at any moment, instantly intensifying the atmosphere.

At this moment, De Gaulle gently raised his hand to restrain his subordinates' actions. He glanced over at Niu Da and Duan Pingyu, the corners of his mouth curling into a slight smile: "It seems Mr. Qi is very cautious."

Niu Da didn't care what he was saying, still refusing to yield an inch: "Our boss only agreed to meet you alone."

De Gaulle nodded slightly and instructed the two behind him in French.

The bald man frowned, seemingly wanting to say something, but meeting De Gaulle's gaze, he ultimately restrained himself and stepped back along with the other subordinate, standing at the bottom of the steps.

"Is this satisfactory?" De Gaulle raised his chin towards Niu Da, his tone remaining composed.

Niu Da snorted, stepping aside to make way: "Go inside."

De Gaulle adjusted his shirt cuffs and walked up the steps.

As he passed by Niu Da, he suddenly stopped and smiled in accented Chinese: "It's a pleasure to see you again."

These words seemed to imply something, but Niu Da didn't respond, his gaze filled with even stronger battle readiness. If something were to happen later, he would first confront that bald man.

De Gaulle didn't pause further and pushed the door open to enter the tea house.

The bamboo door slowly closed behind him, sealing off the tense atmosphere outside.

At the bottom of the steps, the gazes between the bald man and Niu Da clashed silently in the air, thickening the atmosphere to the point where even the passing breeze seemed to carry a hint of gunpowder.

Duan Pingyu quietly edged closer to Niu Da and whispered: "Don't act rashly, wait for the boss to speak."

Niu Da clenched his fists tightly, the joints cracking audibly: "I know."

Inside the private room, Qi Yun leisurely sipped his tea. As the door of the private room opened, he raised his head to scrutinize this French noble he was meeting for the first time.

De Gaulle entered the private room, exchanged looks with Qi Yun for a moment, then nodded slightly with a polite smile on his lips, hiding an undeniable pride in his gaze.

"Mr. Qi, you are younger than I imagined."

Qi Yun couldn't help but smirk. This foreigner was indeed rather inept when it came to social manners, making even compliments sound so stiff. Surely this guy has investigated his ancestors back eight generations, so it's impossible he hasn't seen a photo of him.

But even thinking that, he maintained enough politeness on his face, raising his hand to gesture towards the other: "Mr. De Gaulle, you flatter me. Please, have a seat."

De Gaulle nodded and sat down on the opposite armchair.

Qi Yun picked up the teapot and poured a cup of tea for him: "We Huaxia people like to drink tea, so we didn't prepare coffee for you. Hope you don't mind having tea?"

De Gaulle raised the teacup to his nose and sniffed: "West Lake Longjing, Mr. Qi has good taste."

Qi Yun raised an eyebrow in surprise: "It seems Mr. De Gaulle is quite knowledgeable about Huaxia tea."

"I know a bit." De Gaulle took a sip and gently placed the teacup down, "This is my sixth visit to Huaxia. Previously, a friend specifically introduced me to Huaxia's tea culture."

Qi Yun heard it and nodded with a smile, recognizing it as a way of saying "I have friends in Huaxia too."

The brief probing ended, and Qi Yun continued to sip his tea calmly. Although he couldn't discern how this three-thousand-yuan-a-pot tea was worth its price, he had to put on a good show.

Both of them were aware of the purpose of this meeting, but cooperation is about bargaining chips.

The Gwen Clan had been pursuing the secret of that map for centuries, undoubtedly they had more information. Compared to Qi Yun, they unquestionably held more bargaining power.

That's why Qi Yun couldn't afford to hurry. He projected an air of nonchalance, intending to show the other party that he wasn't as obsessed with the so-called secret of "eternal life" as the Gwen Clan, who would go to any lengths to explore it.

Within the private room, a brief silence ensued. Seeing that De Gaulle didn't speak either, Qi Yun suddenly had a faint idea, as a familiar-looking light screen appeared before him.

[Available Intelligence Categories: Red (costs 3 intelligence points), Green x2 (costs 9 intelligence points)]

Qi Yun's heart warmed with joy at the unexpected surprise.

[Intelligence points -3...]

[Intelligence Level (Red): De Gaulle's uncle, George, is gravely ill. Even after undergoing a heart transplant, he doesn't have long to live. The battle for the leadership of the Gwen Clan has reached a fever pitch;

George wishes to pass the position of clan leader to De Gaulle because he knows his son isn't biologically his, nor is he even of the Gwen Clan's bloodline.]

Hmm?

Qi Yun looked at De Gaulle, who was sitting opposite him, with a surprised glance, inadvertently catching some gossip.

For an ancient family like theirs, the purity of bloodline is of utmost importance.

It's even absurd to the point that when a king dies without an heir, a distant relative from another country might be brought over to become king...

Such incidents are not uncommon in European history.

If De Gaulle learned of this news, once he announced it, there'd be no need for competition; he could just lie back and secure the leadership position.

"Perhaps... this could be a good bargaining chip..." Qi Yun silently mused to himself.

[Intelligence Points -9...]

[Intelligence Level (Green): To compete for the position of family leader, De Gaulle reached an agreement with the CEO of the Dutch ASML Company, Christophe. By offering a benefit fee of two hundred million euros, he secured their assistance in helping his private company acquire 8% of ASML's shares. If this scandal were exposed, Christophe would likely lose his position as CEO.]

ASML!?

Qi Yun's heart trembled. He hadn't expected De Gaulle to be so capable, managing to connect with the CEO of this company.

ASML, as an absolute dominator in the lithography machine industry, once had a market value exceeding a trillion, second only to Microsoft, knocking Apple from the second position.

Though its market value has dwindled due to certain policies, it remains a giant company.

Qi Yun wasn't very interested in who became CEO, but he suddenly recalled some intelligence from a few days ago, that Fu Wentao was tasked by superiors to find a way to acquire some ASML equipment.

Could he use De Gaulle to secure some equipment?

It's not that the Fu Family's influence is less than De Gaulle's. Even without considering whether ASML's upper management would agree, the EU certainly wouldn't allow Huaxia funds to meddle with such a sensitive company as ASML...

Otherwise, there'd be no need for the superiors to have asked Fu Wentao to attempt this.

[Intelligence Points -9...]

[Intelligence Level (Green): Regarding the secret of the sunken ship map, the Gwen Clan currently holds clues to four locations: Khufu's Pyramid, Mayan Ruins, Mount Kilimanjaro, and they've also acquired knowledge of the Loulan Ancient City through special means.]

Qi Yun sighed inwardly, so this guy knew about it after all...

There are a total of six places corresponding to six clues. Currently, both parties know the Loulan Ancient City's stele; the other party has three of the clues, while he holds the Bronze Mirror from Genghis Khan's Tomb...

So that just leaves the last place, the St. Petersburg Cathedral...

Spending these 21 intelligence points was worth it! Each piece of information is crucial!

Across the table, De Gaulle's teacup was almost empty, and he finally couldn't resist speaking first: "Mr. Qi, shall we discuss cooperation?"

As Qi Yun predicted, the one anxious was the other party.

He only wanted to cooperate to find the truth and didn't genuinely believe there's some longevity involved.

But De Gaulle was different. His family had already invested too much in this endeavor, and it had become a mission they must strive to complete.

"Well, how does Mr. De Gaulle propose we cooperate? Why don't you tell me?" Qi Yun sipped his tea, feeling entirely different from before.

To him, De Gaulle now seemed like a golden boy.

With the three pieces of information obtained earlier, even if he couldn't uncover the map's secret, he could certainly extract a lot of gold coins from him.

De Gaulle straightened, looking Qi Yun straight in the eyes: "First, allow me to ask a question, and I hope Mr. Qi can answer truthfully."

Qi Yun picked up the teapot to pour more tea, motioning for him to continue.

"Did you get the item from Northern Mongolia?"

Qi Yun smiled at him: "Mr. De Gaulle, your sources are indeed quite impressive."

Though he didn't confirm it, De Gaulle could read the meaning from his smile, and his eyelid twitched involuntarily.

He had dispatched several groups of people and spent a huge amount of money and time searching for the location in Northern Mongolia, only to have Qi Yun beat him to it in the end.

After a short silence, De Gaulle quickly adjusted his mindset, showing a warm smile again: "Since Mr. Qi is willing to cooperate, it doesn't matter whose hands the item ends up in."

"Hmm, you make a good point." Qi Yun nodded in agreement, even though he noticed the hint of insincerity in De Gaulle's words.

"Then let's discuss the previous proposal. I'm willing to buy the complete map from you, Mr. Qi." De Gaulle paused, looking sincerely at Qi Yun, "You name the price."

Chapter 490: How Do You Know Everything!?

Qi Yun did not answer immediately after listening, playing with the teacup in his hand, pondering something.

After a good two or three minutes, he finally looked up at De Gaulle, slowly speaking: "The map marks a total of six locations. You, or rather your family, already know the information for four of those locations. Am I right?"

Although Qi Yun's words were calm, they hit De Gaulle's ears like a thunderclap!

He suddenly clenched his fist and stared at Qi Yun with a look of loss of composure for the first time.

"How do you know this!"

This was the Gwen Clan's most core secret, known to no more than five people, and De Gaulle could not understand how Qi Yun knew.

Qi Yun did not answer this question, but continued to speak leisurely: "These four locations are Khufu's Pyramid, the Mayan Ruins, Mount Kilimanjaro, and the Loulan Ancient City that I discovered some time ago."

This bombshell caused De Gaulle to stand up in excitement, his breathing became rapid, and he stared at Qi Yun again, demanding, "How do you know these things!"

"Don't be so agitated." Qi Yun smiled, calmly gesturing for him to sit down, "You want to buy the map in my hand just to find out the location of the last place."

"I can give you the map for free, even directly tell you where the last location is."

"Moreover, I can assure you that the clues at that location are still there, I haven't taken them."

"Are you serious!?" De Gaulle's half-seated position was lifted again as he incredulously stared at Qi Yun.

Despite the many doubts in his mind, he was now being led by the nose by Qi Yun.

Qi Yun nodded: "Naturally, it's true."

"Since you've found out the last location, why didn't you retrieve the key clues like with Northern Mongolia and Loulan Ancient City?" De Gaulle's tone was somewhat skeptical.

"That's a good question." Qi Yun took a sip from his teacup, responding sincerely, "If we cooperate, having one key or two keys in my hands doesn't make much difference to me."

"I just need to ensure that one of the keys is unique, wouldn't you say?"

De Gaulle, hearing this, almost spat out a mouthful of old blood, feeling unspeakable frustration but helpless.

He took a deep breath, sat back in his chair, calmed down for a few seconds, and spoke again: "What do you want from me."

Everyone was smart, he naturally knew that Qi Yun would not give him the map for no reason.

"Just one condition." Qi Yun extended one finger, speaking with intent, "I heard that you, Mr. De Gaulle, have a good relationship with Christophe from ASML."

"I hope you can help me get a batch of the most advanced EUV lithography machines, and it would be even better if they can be shipped directly here."

When De Gaulle heard the name "Christophe," his face twitched violently, as if a sensitive nerve had been struck, leaving him staring dazedly for a long time.

Before the last meeting, he was not well acquainted with Christophe, and even that meeting was arranged through introductions by fellow countrymen from France. Thus, Qi Yun saying that he had good relations with the person meant he knew something, or he wouldn't say such things.

Looking once more at Qi Yun's ambiguous smile, he gradually began to feel fear, as if nothing could escape this man's eyes.

He wished he could bind Qi Yun and thoroughly interrogate him, figuring out how he knew these things.

The people aware of his meeting with Christophe, apart from Christophe's entourage, were only his assistant and driver. Could there be a traitor among them?

After a long silence, De Gaulle hoarsely spoke: "I can attempt to communicate with Christophe, but I can't guarantee this will succeed."

"Mr. Qi, you should know how strictly the EU controls ASML, and with the United States' interference, it is difficult for companies not on their trusted list to purchase EUV lithography machines."

Qi Yun knew he was speaking the truth, but only about the second part.

Certain countries' blockade against Huaxia is quite tight, especially for high-end equipment like lithography machines, which can only be obtained through official channels.

Even if the equipment is obtained through grey channels, there would be double investigations by the EU and the US, and the subsequent maintenance and parts supply of the equipment would also be problematic.

Moreover, ASML's lithography machines require exclusive calibration technology and consumables, without official authorization, the equipment is no different from scrap iron.

This is why Fu Wentao sought interest exchange from the Blackstone Group to find a way.

But speaking of this, if you could get them to agree to help you obtain ASML shares, wouldn't they find a way to supply you with a batch of lithography machines?

Qi Yun pulled out a cigarette from the box on the table, lighting it and taking two deep drags: "Sorry, this is my only condition. If the lithography machines can't be obtained, I'm afraid we can't continue to cooperate."

De Gaulle gritted his teeth, knowing he was being cornered by Qi Yun.

Qi Yun was not negotiating terms but forcing him to make a choice, either abandon the family's centuries-old pursuit of secrets or spare no expense to get a batch of lithography machines.

But the risk of this matter was even greater than bribing Christophe!

If it was known by the European Union and the United States, he would face the most severe sanctions, and even the Gwen Clan would be implicated.

Even though he is French nobility.

After weighing the situation for a while, De Gaulle asked, "Doesn't Mr. Qi want to explore the secrets behind the map?"

Qi Yun shook his head seriously and said, "To be honest, I'm not someone with a strong sense of curiosity."

De Gaulle was infuriated by these words, but he had no choice.

After thinking for two minutes, he stood up, "Please wait a moment, Mr. Qi, I will contact now."

Qi Yun raised his hand, gesturing for him to proceed.

...

On the other side, London, Kensington Palace Gardens.

A family meeting was taking place in James's manor.

Sitting at the long table were more than a dozen core members of the Boot Clan, some holding important positions in the government, others dominating the business world.

In short, there were no simple roles at the table.

Sitting in the prime position, James held an unlit cigar, his gaze scanned over the tense faces across the table, the atmosphere on the table was icy, no one dared to break the silence first.

"Losing that batch of Huaxia artifacts, the authorities want to tear up the previous agreements." James finally spoke, a note of fatigue in his voice, "All our efforts for that mining area will be in vain."

The middle-aged man sitting on the left side slammed the table, full of anger, "Those guys are just greedy! They've taken so many benefits from the Boot Clan, and now just because of losing a batch of insignificant artifacts, they want to turn against us?"

The speaker was James's brother, Llewellyn, who managed the Boot Clan's core business in Wales.

Elina, a parliamentarian, took over the conversation, "A new round of elections will start soon, the authorities want to win over voters, showing the strength of Great Britain, so they attach great importance to those Huaxia artifacts."

"The Prime Minister has even asked The Times to prepare a promotional article in advance."

"Now that things have turned out like this, it's expected for the authorities to tear up the agreement."

On the right side, James's uncle also spoke, "I attended a banquet at Buckingham Palace yesterday, the Duke of Westminster looked at me like I'm someone who can't even guard my own warehouse!"

"There are more than just us eying that mining area, the Childe family has been smoothing relations with the higher-ups, we must act immediately, otherwise Wales will be occupied by outsiders!"

"Also, the Huaxia person who took our stuff must pay a painful price! Otherwise, more people will dare to target the Boot Clan in the future!"

James sighed, "The assassin we sent failed, the kid's security power is very strong."

"Moreover, he has just returned those artifacts to his country and has become a hero in Huaxia, surely he will have more powers protecting him."

"Send our own people, those wastes are unreliable." Llewellyn suggested with a tense face.

...

Here, Qi Yun had not finished a cigarette when De Gaulle pushed the door and came back, looking extremely sullen, no longer having the noble grace as when he first arrived.

He sat back into his chair heavily and said in a deep voice, "Christophe has agreed to find a way, but the number cannot exceed five, and this matter requires time to be operated, there might still be some resistance in the later stages."

Qi Yun nodded with satisfaction, five are already good, the annual output is less than fifty, most are divided among several shareholder enterprises.

"I understand, I appreciate Mr. De Gaulle's help, as soon as the equipment enters Huaxia, I will immediately hand over the map, and reveal the final location to you."

"Additionally, if there is anything you need my efforts for in this matter, please feel free to tell me."

De Gaulle raised his eyes to look at Qi Yun, still carrying a few traces of undisputed gloom in them, he remained silent for a few seconds before continuing, "Mr. Qi, I've already shown my sincerity, now could you answer my previous question."

"How exactly did you know about the locations controlled by my family?"

Qi Yun smiled at him, "Sorry, Mr. De Gaulle, I cannot answer this question, you might want to ask another."

De Gaulle's fingers clenched tightly, he stared at Qi Yun's smiling face and gritted his teeth hard.

He anticipated this answer long ago, yet he couldn't help feeling annoyed.

Qi Yun, like a gambler who tightly holds his cards, would only reveal the chips that benefit him, but would not disclose any of his bottom cards.

De Gaulle no longer wanted to stay, he stood up and said, "Today's meeting ends here, in the coming period, I will be in Huaxia, and I hope that next time, we can truly reach a cooperative relationship."

"Safe journey." Qi Yun stood up gracefully and saw him to the door, smiling as he watched the Maybach disappear into the dark night.