

Middle Age 611

Chapter 611: Times Have Changed

At Dawn Technology, Tao Ziming looked at the two billion USD lying on the company's accounts, feeling somewhat unreal.

The last time he saw so many zeros was back in Rongcheng...

From initially investing eight million to save the company from bankruptcy, to forking out over thirty million without batting an eye for concentrated equity, and last time spending ten million USD to buy test data...

This time it was even more ruthless, directly throwing in two billion!

It was as if each time money was used to refresh his understanding of this man...

Could he really be this powerful...

There are quite a few people with two billion assets in Province J, but those who can readily bring out two billion in cash can probably be counted on one hand, maybe even across the whole country.

Tao Ziming suddenly felt as if he never really understood that man...

"President Tao, so starting today I'll be working here, you can directly instruct me if you have any arrangements." A woman in her thirties said to Tao Ziming with a smile.

She was someone Qi Yun borrowed from Li Yaohua's side, temporarily responsible for the financial work at Dawn Technology.

Though Qi Yun trusts Tao Ziming, the amount invested this time is simply too large, he needs someone to overlook things, ensuring the two billion is spent correctly.

This matter was also communicated with Tao Ziming in advance, who not only didn't have any dissatisfaction but was rather welcoming.

Having an inspector not only reassures Qi Yun but also helps reduce a lot of work burden for him.

Furthermore, Qi Yun is now the company's largest shareholder, its sole financier, while Tao Ziming is just symbolically retaining a tiny bit of equity.

Hence, it's normal for him to control a few key positions.

"Director Su is too polite, we will cooperate with each other and strive to make the company successful."

"I'm flying to Berlin tonight to discuss equipment procurement; I'll leave things here to Director Su..."
Tao Ziming spoke with considerable courtesy.

Su Xiaoshan nodded with a smile, "Okay, please rest assured, President Tao. I will report to you at the first sign of any situation."

Tao Ziming said no more, leaving the finance office.

After he left, Su Xiaoshan called in a few subordinates she brought along and instructed them: "I need you to conduct a comprehensive check of the financial status of this company, no loopholes allowed."

"Report any non-compliance to me immediately."

"Yes! Director Su!"

...

On the other side, Qi Yun received the electronic version of the virtual currency approval procedure sent over by Brother Hui, the physical documents also already scheduled to be delivered by trusted courier on a plane.

With this document, any qualifying company can easily apply for a business license.

Qi Yun took out his phone, scrolling to find Young Master Liu's number. Initially, the lunar meteorite was supposed to be sold to him, they had brief contact.

At a club in the New District, Liu Xiaotao stared at the incoming call display before he pushed away the girl next to him and went to a quiet place to answer the phone.

"Hello, President Qi, how are you."

Qi Yun originally thought this guy might not even have his number saved, unexpectedly, Liu Xiaotao not only saved it but spoke in an especially friendly tone.

"Haha, Young Master Liu, sorry for disturbing."

"Oh, President Qi, what are you saying, I'm very happy to receive your call."

"Is there anything you need me for?"

Liu Xiaotao smiled, his attitude now starkly different from six months ago.

And the reason for it all, naturally came from Qi Yun's change in social status.

It can't really be said he's particularly opportunistic; ordinary people would not flatter or maintain useless relationships, let alone someone like Liu Xiaotao, who grew up in a wealthy family.

Seeing the other party ask directly, Qi Yun didn't bother beating around the bush, straightforwardly said: "It's like this, I want to meet your father, but I don't have his contact, I wonder if Young Master Liu could help convey this."

Want to meet his father?

The number of people in Province J wanting to meet Liu the Rich could stretch from East City to West City. Even government officials have to check his schedule to arrange in advance; ordinary folks certainly don't have the chance.

But Qi Yun, now rising in fame, certainly isn't ordinary, so Liu Xiaotao was only slightly stunned before he quickly agreed with a smile.

"No problem, President Qi, hang tight, I'll call my dad to see what time he finishes his meeting, and will get back to you shortly."

"Sounds good, thank you Young Master Liu."

"Haha, President Qi is too polite, I'll be in touch later."

After ending the call, Liu Xiaotao glanced at his phone screen, thought a bit, and dialed his father's private cellphone.

"Hello, Xiaotao." Liu the Rich's warm voice came from the other end.

Among people of his class, Liu Xiaotao's biggest advantage is that he isn't arrogant and doesn't cause trouble.

This is also what comforts his father the most.

Even though he occasionally likes to spend some money on luxury cars or something, for a business as substantial as theirs, it's practically a drop in the ocean; he can indulge freely.

Thus, Liu the Rich is quite satisfied with his son; their interaction is always gentle and soft-spoken.

"Dad, Qi Yun just called me, wants to schedule a meeting with you."

"Qi Yun?" Liu the Rich paused, "Qi Yun from the New District?"

Liu Xiaotao nodded, "Yes."

"Why does he want to see me?"

"He didn't say, nor did I ask."

There was a few seconds of silence from the other end, then Liu the Rich slowly said, "Alright, I got it, I'll have Secretary Zhang get in touch with him in a bit."

Liu Xiaotao then asked, "Dad, are you meeting him? Previously Ding Junkai had some conflict with him here, seems even Uncle Ding was involved."

"A meeting is fine, still need to give respect where it's due."

"His grievances with Ding Sanshi have nothing to do with us, we're just doing business, not getting mixed up in those."

...

At nine p.m., Yaxiang Building.

Qi Yun's Maybach had just parked when a secretary-like middle-aged man came up to greet him.

"Hello, President Qi, I'm President Liu's secretary; President Liu is already waiting for you in the private room, let me take you up."

"Alright." Qi Yun nodded, heading towards the entrance with Xiao Wu.

As he climbed the steps, he suddenly paused, looking up at the sign overhead.

Several months ago, it was here.

For that textile factory order, he and Brother Peng braved the cold waiting for Vice President Liu for over an hour.

Recall that the meal cost nearly ten thousand, which back then made Qi Yun flinch a little.

In just six months, he's back here, arriving in the highest-end Maybach.

Brother Peng has also left the garment factory behind, joining him in the trading company, now earning a few million monthly, living comfortably.

Times change, it's quite wistful to think about...

"President Qi, please." The secretary leading the way noticed Qi Yun hadn't moved, waited for a moment, then made an inviting gesture once more.

Qi Yun snapped back, following the person up to the upstairs private room.

Chapter 612: The Idea of Building Cars

Inside the private room, a man in his sixties sat at the head of the table.

His temples were mixed with a little gray hair, and he wore a very ordinary shirt without any large gold watches or similar jewelry, looking quite ordinary.

Anyone who didn't know him might never guess that this man is the biggest private entrepreneur in J Province.

However, his eyes were particularly sharp, giving an invisible yet strong sense of pressure.

"Boss, President Qi has arrived." The secretary reminded Liu the Rich, who was checking his phone with his head down.

Liu Guangxin looked up toward the door, his gaze landing on Qi Yun, observing this young man who had risen so rapidly.

Similarly, Qi Yun was also sizing up this business giant who shared the same impressive license plate as he did.

After their eyes met, Qi Yun took the initiative to extend his hand and greet him, "President Liu, hello."

"Hehe, President Qi, please have a seat here." Liu Guangxin stood up at the same time and came forward to greet him.

After a handshake, Liu Guangxin exclaimed, "I had heard before that President Qi is young and promising. Seeing you today, it's truly no exaggeration."

"You flatter me, President Liu. Compared to you, I'm just a newcomer in the industry, with much to learn." Qi Yun smiled humbly, courteously but with just the right touch.

Feeling comforted, Liu Guangxin laughed and waved his hand, "No need to talk about seniority or not—the young people today are much more daring and capable than we were back then."

"Come, President Qi, have a seat here." He gently pulled Qi Yun's arm, guiding him to the round table to sit down.

"I even made a point of reading the news about you. President Qi, to donate those precious national treasures without considering personal gain, that mindset is something even we elders cannot match, hahaha."

Qi Yun shook his head with a smile, "President Liu, you're overpraising me. Those artifacts rightly belong to the country; I was merely doing what should be done."

"Compared to your charitable work of building hundreds of hope schools and creating jobs for tens of thousands of workers over the years, my small efforts are nothing worth mentioning."

"Hahaha." Liu Guangxin laughed heartily.

Praising is a fundamental skill in business.

If it were anyone else, Liu Guangxin, as the richest man in J Province, naturally wouldn't say these things.

Firstly, he genuinely admired the achievements of the young man before him.

Moreover, at his level, he had access to information unknown to many, such as the friction between the young man and Old He, and the fact that Old He has not returned until now...

Not to mention that Qin Minghui has completed his detention and returned.

These all prove that the young man before him has considerable background and energy.

The secretary brewed tea and then consciously exited the room.

Liu Guangxin picked up the teacup and signaled to Qi Yun, "The doctor says my liver isn't in great shape, so I won't be drinking alcohol with you today. Let's use tea instead."

"I'm very happy to meet such an outstanding young person like President Qi today."

Qi Yun promptly picked up his teacup to reciprocate, "You flatter me, President Liu. It's my honor to chat with a senior like you."

After putting down the teacup, a server pushed a cart into the room to serve the dishes.

The two began to eat and chat, mainly focusing on business topics.

It must be said that after decades in the business world, Liu Guangxin had a sharp and pragmatic vision, and when discussing industry trends, he hit the key points with every word.

He picked up a piece of food, looked at Qi Yun, "The new energy business is developing rapidly now, but the competition is equally fierce. There's a new car launch every day, but all the products are similar. It's hard to make a technological breakthrough in the short term."

"Once the money runs out, those companies will be the first to bow out, and it's likely that a winner-takes-all situation will form."

Qi Yun put down his chopsticks and nodded in agreement.

The Guanghui Group controls the biggest sales business in J Province, managing hundreds of 4S dealerships.

For the past 13 years, it has been the largest car dealership group in the country, so as the owner, Liu Guangxin naturally has a clear view of everything.

"President Liu is right. Although the new energy sector seems lively now, many companies lack core competitiveness in their products, making it difficult to secure loyal customers. If faced with impact, they might not last."

"Indeed." Liu Guangxin sighed and looked visibly fatigued, "I have a few new energy car dealerships in my hands as well. In previous years, we could still make some money with subsidies."

"Now that the subsidies have been withdrawn, many car companies are slashing prices to seize the market, forcing us dealers into tough times."

"To put it simply, without core technology, everyone is just cutting prices, resulting in mutual destruction."

Guanghui Group has four core businesses: energy, logistics, real estate, and automotive services.

A few years back, the latter two were the most profitable segments of Guanghui Group and the key factors in growing to its current scale.

But now the situation has changed; the automotive service sector has mostly been in a long-term loss position, and even some subsidiaries have been executed due to debt issues.

As for real estate, it's even worse...

Thus, even a giant like Guanghui Group is now having a tough time, essentially surviving on the cash flow from energy and logistics.

This is one of the reasons Liu the Rich is willing to spend a fortune trying to enter the virtual currency business.

The conversation between the two continued to revolve around new energy, though mostly it was Liu Guangxin speaking and Qi Yun listening.

As they chatted, a thought suddenly arose in Qi Yun's mind.

Based on what Liu Guangxin said, the widespread presence of domestic new energy cars today is largely because any company can enter car manufacturing, primarily due to the low entry barrier and the ability to outsource core components.

Batteries can be bought from Ningde Era, motors from Huichuan, and even the chassis can be outsourced to third parties, like building with blocks.

It's all about assembling and marketing, with no real technological barrier.

Whoever can secure cheaper core components and excels in marketing can survive for a while...

The core aspects of new energy vehicles, the three electrics—battery, motor, and electronic control—where the most crucial is battery technology.

And his Dawn Technology has just developed a groundbreaking ace battery...

So, is it possible to look further ahead?

Selling batteries couldn't be as profitable as making cars, could it?

Throw in some sofas, TVs, refrigerators, and add a water-surfing function, and you could sell for millions...

Sitting next to him was a man who held the strongest sales resources in the country; he himself had the most advanced battery technology, so putting it all together...

The more Qi Yun thought about it, the more excited he became, feeling that this had potential.

He calmed his excitement, took a sip of tea, and seemingly casually asked, "President Liu, you just said that making cars is like building blocks, with all the core components available for purchase, lacking crucial technical cores."

"So if a company mastered the most advanced battery technology, could it dominate in this field?"

Chapter 613: Collaboration with the Wealthiest Entrepreneur

Faced with the question posed by Qi Yun, Liu Guangxin nodded decisively: "Of course, the advancement in technology development not only requires burning money but also requires a lot of time, which cannot be replaced by those refrigerators and color TVs."

"If any car company truly possesses technology far superior to its competitors, consumers will definitely buy it."

After speaking, he paused and looked at Qi Yun, asking, "So, is President Qi also interested in car manufacturing?"

Qi Yun smiled and waved his hand: "Haha, I'm just an outsider. I just took this opportunity to learn more from you."

He did not voice his thoughts, as it was still too early to discuss this when even a battery production base had not yet been established.

Liu Guangxin laughed twice and did not pursue further questions.

Seeing that they had almost finished eating, Qi Yun steered the conversation back on track to today's agenda: "President Liu, actually, the reason I invited you today is, firstly, to learn from you directly."

"And secondly, to discuss a business deal with you."

Liu Guangxin put down his chopsticks, a look of interest on his face: "Oh? President Qi, please tell me more."

In truth, he was also curious about the purpose of meeting this emerging talent, but people at his level are very composed and never initiate conversations to avoid losing the upper hand.

Qi Yun took out a tablet from the briefcase on the chair next to him, unlocked it, and pushed it in front of Liu Guangxin: "President Liu, please take a look at this first."

The content displayed on the tablet was the approval document for Hong Kong Island's virtual currency business license.

Liu Guangxin picked up the tablet, and when his eyes fell on the document title, he clearly paused, then turned his head and gave Qi Yun a surprised look before continuing to browse the content.

Upon seeing the seal of the President of the Hong Kong Island Financial Authority at the end, he was completely taken aback.

"This... this document..."

Qi Yun smiled at him: "I have some friends on Hong Kong Island. I heard that President Liu has been researching this recently, so I wanted to ask if you're interested."

"Everything is arranged with the Hong Kong Island Financial Authority. As long as you have this document, you can seamlessly apply for the license."

Liu Guangxin put down the tablet, his gaze returning to Qi Yun's face.

Only he knew how difficult it was to obtain this VASP license.

The title of Asia's financial center is not for nothing. There are countless conglomerates on Hong Kong Island, and there are more than ten large conglomerates eyeing this license, so the competition is fiercely predictable.

Even as the richest man in J Province, he hadn't found a way to get this thing.

In order to establish a connection with a deputy director of the Hong Kong Island Financial Authority, he had flown to Hong Kong Island more than once, with gifts worth tens of millions, and he couldn't even give them away.

Yet this young man lightly placed the approval document in front of him, as if it were not a coveted item for which countless conglomerates would vie, but an easily obtainable token from a bathhouse.

Liu Guangxin took a sip of tea to suppress his shock and asked, in a somewhat complicated tone: "Do you know the value of this document?"

Qi Yun shook his head: "Whether or not I know its value is not important, what's important is whether President Liu needs it."

These words were also a test for Liu Guangxin.

Anyway, he already knew from the intelligence that the latter was even willing to spend five billion to buy this license. If the offer was too outrageous, he would drop the idea of collaborating on car manufacturing.

A brief silence fell in the private room before Liu Guangxin finally exclaimed again: "President Qi, you really opened my eyes."

"Thank you, I do need this approval document."

Some things cannot just be bought with money; to get this on Hong Kong Island, you need not only money but also very strong top-level connections.

Otherwise, you wouldn't even have a chance to bid.

Moreover, there are many powerful conglomerates outside fighting for this lucrative opportunity, and their financial power is no less than that of him, the richest man.

So the fact that Qi Yun is willing to discuss this deal with him is indeed something to be grateful for.

"President Liu, you're being too polite. We're fellow countrymen, and if I can assist you, I'm naturally more than happy to do so."

Liu Guangxin nodded, genuine in his words: "Alright, then I won't say things like how I'll remember it in my heart. If you need help in the future, just ask."

"Let's discuss this approval document. What kind of price do I need to pay?"

"Cash or resources, we can discuss it all."

"Cash, then. May I ask what price President Liu is willing to offer?"

This question was something Qi Yun had considered deeply. He still had nearly 3 billion in cash on hand and wasn't in immediate need of funds. Though the Guanghui Group's industry was vast, it wasn't something he was interested in.

So the best choice was to take some cash and dabble a bit in the virtual currency business.

Since Liu the Rich was willing to take the risk to spend six billion on the license, he must have prepared thoroughly; after all, he had countless professional analysts supporting him. Going along for the ride might even bring unexpected returns in the future.

Liu Guangxin thought for a moment, extending two fingers: "Six billion, what do you think?"

Seeing that the other party did not haggle and even added an extra billion to the expected price, Qi Yun was quite satisfied with this. At least it proved that Liu the Rich was a sincere person.

If in the future he wanted to venture into car manufacturing, he could possibly collaborate with him.

Thinking of this, a broader smile spread across Qi Yun's face, and he nodded: "I agree with the price of six billion, but I have another idea."

Liu Guangxin gestured with his hand: "Please go ahead."

"I'd like to take out half of the six billion to exchange for equity in your virtual currency business. As for how much of a percentage you're willing to give, we can negotiate. I trust President Liu's character."

"The virtual currency market is hot now and has great potential for the future. I'm not short of cash flow at the moment, so I was thinking it might be beneficial to learn some experience from you."

"If there's a suitable opportunity in the future, we can venture into other fields together."

Qi Yun spoke sincerely and added: "Of course, my shares would only earn dividends. I won't be involved in daily operations or interfere with your decisions."

"If you think it's not appropriate, we'll stick to the cash transaction, and I won't have a word to say against it."

After listening, Liu Guangxin tapped his fingers on his thigh, looking at Qi Yun with a hint of surprise.

He hadn't expected Qi Yun to propose this kind of suggestion.

The fact that he managed to acquire the approval document means he has strong connections at the top level of Hong Kong Island, which is quite appealing to him. It would play a significant role in future business expansion and in dealing with top-level regulatory bodies.

Moreover, Qi Yun's non-involvement in management means he could fully control the pace, leaving him no reason to refuse.

"Alright! I agree!"

Liu Guangxin accepted almost without a second thought and extended his hand to Qi Yun with a smile: "I'm also very eager to connect with young people like President Qi."

With this, the two officially reached a cooperative agreement, a mutually beneficial win-win situation.

This was also Qi Yun's first time partnering with such a top business magnate, on an equal footing.

Chapter 614: The Suddenly Appearing Team

In the no-man's land beside Highway 219, An Zai was squatting with his big rear end in the dry toilet.

This place is nothing like the city; life here is extremely harsh, with not only dreadful climate conditions but also almost no signal—days are terribly dull.

Moreover, now it's off-peak tourist season, and you can go two or three days without seeing a single car on the road.

Even this old soldier, who can endure a lot, was finding it hard to bear...

"Ah, just five more days until I'm free, hang in there..." An Zai comforted himself while pulling out some toilet paper from his pocket and folding it a few times.

Just as he finished wiping and was about to pull up his pants, suddenly in the distance on the dirt road appeared dots of light, exceptionally noticeable in the pitch-black night.

An Zai's hand froze at his waistband, causing the roll of paper he was holding to slip to the ground.

He poked his head out along the iron sheet wall of the dry toilet, squinting towards the direction of the shining lights.

Those were headlights from cars, and judging by the looks of it, there were quite a few cars!

This sudden appearance of the convoy aroused An Zai's alertness instantly.

Anyone who has traveled on Highway 219 knows that the road conditions here are extremely poor; some sections are difficult to traverse even during the day, let alone at night when you can't see the road.

So regular self-driving tourists would find a place to camp before dark, nobody would drive at night.

An Zai pulled his head back, quickly yanking his pants up with two or three tugs, not bothering to fasten the belt as he jogged out.

Returning to the herder's tent, he quickly dug out his satellite phone and tucked his equipment into his waistband, then ran outside to continue observing the situation.

Qi Yun entrusted him with the task to stay here and see if anyone recently would head towards Kunlun Mountain.

And to go in that direction, the small path beside the yurt is a necessary route.

If these suddenly appearing convoys were heading that way, he had to report immediately.

The wind at night was strong, the chill seeped in through his collar into his body, An Zai shrank his neck, his eyes deadlocked on the distant lights.

After five or six minutes, the convoy got closer and closer, the headlights of the lead car were too dazzling to see anything clearly.

The only judgment he could make was that they were slowly decelerating.

Creak~

Successive braking sounds rang out.

An Zai, hiding behind the haystack, instantly became tense!

He retracted his upper body, only poking out half of his head to observe the opponent's actions.

Leading the convoy was a dark gray Toyota Land Cruiser, the body covered in thick mud, followed by four enclosed pickups, equally dirty, it's clear they traveled a long way.

The driver's side door of the Land Cruiser opened, and out stepped a tall man.

He wore a jacket and a bandit hat on his head, under the car lights you could roughly make out his features but couldn't tell if he was Uighur or a foreigner.

After getting out of the car, he glanced towards the yurt, jabbering something unintelligible.

Soon after, another person came out from the back seat, considerably thinner, holding a tablet, pointing around.

This person looked like a Han Chinese, but the wind was strong and scattered the sound, indistinctly heard.

An Zai buried his face in the haystack, leaving only his eyes exposed.

From the strange behavior of the other side, he deduced that these people were most likely heading towards that passage.

After discussing for a while, the two men walked towards the yurt.

This herder's home had a total of three yurts, the largest one was where the master lived, the other two smaller ones were vacant, An Zai temporarily lived in one.

The herder's main occupation was cattle and sheep raising, often venturing far to pasture.

Today coincidentally, the male head was driving the herd to a distant pasture, leaving only his wife Zhuoma and the child at home.

After these days of interaction, An Zai could communicate simply with them, of course not through language, but gestures.

Earlier he had instructed Zhuoma to not come out upon hearing any commotion.

The guide Lo Sang had once told the family that An Zai was from the government, so Zhuoma trusted An Zai thoroughly, even when hearing car noises approaching, she did not come out to check.

The wind was making the felt on the yurt rustle loudly, and the two men walked straight towards the large yurt where Zhuoma lived.

An Zai watched their footsteps, his hand quietly reaching for his waist.

As long as they make any dangerous move, he wouldn't hesitate to shoot.

"Hello! Is anyone there?" spoke the thin man.

This time, hiding behind the haystack, An Zai heard clearly. The man spoke Mandarin.

"Hello! Is anyone here?!"

He asked twice, but there was no response from the yurt.

The tall man saw no activity from the yurt, jabbered something, with a tone slightly impatient.

The thin man nodded, the two turned around and returned to the convoy, getting into the Land Cruiser, the convoy started again.

Watching this, An Zai breathed a sigh of relief.

He didn't know how many people were in the following pickups and whether they carried weapons; if conflict really erupted, he was worried about the safety of Zhuoma and her child.

But this sigh was only half relieved, although the people left, they made a turn, heading along the path into Kunlun Mountain.

Now it was confirmed beyond doubt, he promptly took out the satellite phone, reporting the situation here to Qi Yun.

"Hello, Boss..."

On the other end, Qi Yun was leaning on the sofa watching cartoons with his daughter. After listening to An Zai's account, he immediately stood up and walked to the study.

"Can you identify who these people are?"

"All unfamiliar faces, unable to determine for now, there might be foreigners among them."

Upon hearing the word foreigners, Qi Yun's expression instantly turned serious.

One name just popped into his mind—De Gaulle.

The opponent personally went to Shambala, so they know the exact location and route.

The main reason Qi Yun sent An Zai to keep watch was largely to guard against this guy's insistence on coming back again.

Recalling last time at the airport parting, De Gaulle had vowed to him that he wouldn't go to that place anymore, yet just a few days later, he sent people again.

"Got it, adapt to circumstances yourself, be safe, I'll send people over immediately!"

After instructing, Qi Yun pondered for a couple of seconds, then proceeded to dial De Gaulle's number.

It should be morning in Europe now, the call quickly connected.

"Qi, calling me is about the shares affair? Christophe is already negotiating over there."

"Not about the shares for now, just now a team went towards Kunlun Mountain, I want to know did you send them?" Qi Yun asked expressionlessly.

On the phone, De Gaulle paused for two seconds, the casual tone vanished.

"If I say those weren't sent by me, would you believe it?"

Qi Yun squinted, replied in a deep voice: "Whether I believe isn't the point, only you and I know that place, and now someone is heading there."

Chapter 615: The Bodyguard Squad Sets Out

Confronted with Qi Yun's interrogation, De Gaulle remained silent on the other end of the line for a long time.

Qi Yun didn't rush him, instead, he raised his wristwatch to check the time and quietly waited for an answer.

After a while, a sigh finally came through the receiver: "I'm sorry, I failed to fulfill my promise."

"Some among the elders want to explore that place to recover some compensation for the family's years of losses."

De Gaulle's tone was somewhat helpless as he continued to explain, "As a member of the family, I can't completely go against the wishes of the elders."

"You know, our family has sacrificed too much for that secret. Last time, I didn't bring back anything valuable, and the elders were already displeased. This time, they went behind my back and secretly sent people over..."

Seeing the other party admitting to the leak frankly, Qi Yun, though looking displeased, did not explode immediately.

"Now that I've informed you of the situation, I want to know if you're going to call those people back."

Another brief silence followed, with De Gaulle weighing the matter for a good half-minute before speaking again: "I'll try to contact that team, but they aren't my people, so I can't guarantee they'll follow my orders."

"Please understand this point."

Despite this guy sounding very sincere, Qi Yun wasn't buying it. He put on a stern face and hung up the phone, unwilling to say more.

Can De Gaulle really not command that team?

Qi Yun found it hard to believe.

If he couldn't even handle such a small matter, he likely wouldn't be in line to succeed the leadership.

The implication was just an excuse; after all, he was just a fair-weather ally at best, bound to put family interests first when it came to benefits.

From Qi Yun's perspective, although he could understand the other party's actions, he couldn't accept such behavior.

This was Huaxia's territory; he couldn't allow outsiders to take anything from Shambala.

Moreover, like Ignacio, he didn't want to see that pristine land being desecrated.

After some consideration, he picked up his phone, found a number labeled "Dragon Palm" in his contacts, and called it.

As soon as the call connected, a rough voice came over: "Hello, young Qi."

"Palm, sorry for calling so late, hope I'm not disturbing your rest?" Qi Yun said with slight apology.

Dragon Palm laughed heartily: "No worries at all, what's up? Need something from me?"

"Yes, I actually need to trouble you with something, though I'm not sure if it's appropriate."

"It's like this, I have an urgent matter, I need to get to West Z Ritud County quickly, and I wanted to ask if you could help with contacting the local J military airport..." Qi Yun explained concisely.

"Is that all? No problem, I'll get it arranged for you right now!"

Hearing this, Qi Yun quickly thanked him: "Great, thanks a lot, Palm. I'll personally visit you in Beijing next time to express my gratitude!"

"Haha, it's nothing, no need to be so formal."

"Alright, I won't keep you any longer then."

After ending the call, Qi Yun let out a breath and headed outside.

The person he just spoke with was none other than a bigwig at the Kongjun Base in the eastern outskirts of Beijing.

The last time he borrowed that airport to receive a lithography machine, Qi Yun had a brief interaction with the person, and thanks to his persuasive skills, he managed to build a rapport, exchanging contact details with the bigwig.

Of course, charm was part of it, but the crucial element was Qi Yun carrying official documents and being accompanied by Fu Wentao at the time.

Otherwise, how could the bigwig be so chummy with just anyone?

...

Ten minutes later, in the villa's main hall next door.

Brother Quan, Chen Wei, Niu Da, and others were fully dressed, standing in a line.

"Emergency mission!"

"An Zai reported in earlier, a group of people is heading for Kunlun Mountain. You need to set off immediately. The plane will land at the nearby J military airport, where vehicles have already been arranged..."

"This is a non-government operation, it has to be kept strictly confidential."

"I have one requirement: no one is allowed to take anything from that place!"

Everyone stood up straight upon hearing this: "Yes!"

"And once again, stay safe, there's nothing more to say, Brother Quan will lead this mission, set off now."

"Yes!"

As everyone started to leave, Qi Yun called Brother Quan aside and whispered a few instructions.

Brother Quan listened with a serious expression, nodding in agreement, then got into the car to lead the team to the airport.

...

Meanwhile, after An Zai finished reporting the situation to Qi Yun and saw the convoy of that group moving away, he stepped out from behind a haystack and called out Zhuma's name outside the yurt.

The felt curtain was lifted, and Zhuma came out holding a child.

She looked around first, and after seeing the tail lights of those cars were gone, she breathed a sigh of relief.

An Zai gestured and spoke, assuring her it was okay now, and then pointed to the horses tied not far away, miming a riding gesture.

Zhuma understood his meaning, nodded, and went back into the yurt, bringing out a cloth bag containing a water pouch and some barley cakes.

An Zai took them, thanked her, and quickly went to the post where the horse was tied.

The local herders usually had two types of transportation tools: motorcycles or horses.

In many parts of the wilderness, the roads are rocky and bumpy, where vehicles often get stuck, making horses sometimes more reliable.

An Zai untied the reins, patted the horse's neck, and jumped onto its back, waving to Zhuma before disappearing into the night.

The small road was in poor condition; that group in cars might not necessarily go faster than riding a horse, so An Zai planned to follow them closely and observe the situation at all times.

Horses are among the night-vision animals, as their eye structure is unique, allowing their retinas to amplify the light they see, enabling them to see their surroundings clearly at night with just very faint moonlight.

And the horse seemed to be familiar with this road, galloping quickly, soon catching sight of the convoy's taillights ahead.

An Zai pulled the reins slightly to slow the horse's pace a bit, keeping a moderate distance from the convoy.

Following them took several hours, and the convoy slowly came to a stop.

Turning to look, on the right was the canyon leading to Ritu Peak.

The group disembarked from their vehicles, starting to organize their equipment.

With the help of lights, a rough count showed that the team had at least twenty people, most of them with robust builds, clearly not ordinary individuals.

Once they packed their gear, without lingering, they plunged into the canyon with their searchlights on.

"Damn it, they really are headed here."

An Zai muttered under his breath, finding a hidden spot to tie up his horse before also heading into the canyon.

By the time they arrived at the foot of Ritu Peak, it was already close to six in the morning.

The group halted at the foot of the mountain to rest, seemingly preparing to ascend at daylight.

Hiding in a distant spot, An Zai exhaled into his palm to keep warm and continued his vigilant observation of the adversaries.

Chapter 616: Fully Prepared

Three hours ago, southeast of Ritu County, about more than two hundred kilometers away, a Gulfstream G700 slowly landed on the runway.

As soon as the cabin door opened, Brother Quan led Chen Wei, Niu Da, and two others as they quickly descended.

The cold wind hit their faces, and without pausing, they headed straight for the two military off-road vehicles parked nearby.

"Hello!" A lieutenant beside the off-road vehicle saluted them and then pointed to the vehicle behind him, saying, "The vehicles are fully fueled, and everything you need is inside."

"The dashboard is equipped with remote radio; if there's an emergency, you can call for support on our channel."

Brother Quan returned the salute, his eyes quickly scanning over the vehicles. These were Dongfeng Warriors, which looked somewhat like the Hummers often seen in movies, originally modeled after Hummers.

These vehicles are made of one word - durable, adaptable to all sorts of rough roads, perfect for their needs.

"Alright, thank you for your hard work."

Time was of the essence, and without further words, they each got into the two vehicles and drove toward the gate.

...

On the other side, at the foot of Mount Rick.

An Zai was already shivering from the cold.

He shrank behind a protruding rock, huffing warm air into his palms continuously, the white mist instantly swept away by the cold wind.

Fortunately, the leather water bag Zhuma had given him before their departure contained hot milk tea. Sipping on it now and then, he managed to endure; otherwise, it would have been quite unbearable.

Over half an hour passed, and the eastern sky had a faint hint of dawn, with pale blue light gradually creeping over the snowy peaks.

Those people in the distance also extinguished their fire and were preparing to ascend the mountain.

Actually, the path from the foot to the mid-mountain wasn't very steep; the key was to choose the right path.

Some ice caps looked dangerous but weren't exactly unsafe.

However, these people obviously had no such concerns and boldly began climbing up, their pace surprisingly fast.

After a while, An Zai, who was following behind, realized something unusual. The route these guys took was exactly the same as the one he traversed last time.

It took them about three hours last time to get from the foot to the mid-mountain position.

But that was because the team included non-combat personnel from Ignacio and De Gaulle, who needed to be cared for, slowing the pace.

This time was different; upon reaching the cliff in mid-mountain, An Zai checked the time and found it took just under two hours.

He lay in the shadow under the cliff, watching the group rapidly approach the cave entrance.

Given the circumstances, he couldn't help but suspect these guys had something to do with De Gaulle's group from last time, otherwise, they wouldn't be so familiar with the path.

Rubbing his slightly frozen hands, he quickly took out his satellite phone, dialing Brother Quan's number multiple times before getting through, lowering his voice to say, "They've already reached the entrance. How much longer do you need?"

"These guys probably have weapons and aren't bad. I don't have the confidence to stop them alone."

The roar of engines could be heard over the phone as Brother Quan shouted, "We're almost at the foot of the mountain. Stay where you are, don't approach, and wait for us to join you!"

"Received!" An Zai replied, putting away the satellite phone, and stopped pursuing further.

He wasn't worried about those people easily getting into the passage because when they left last time, Qi Yun had instructed him to blow up the entrance. Now, it was full of collapsed rubble, not easily cleared.

However, that thought just lasted for a mere ten minutes.

"Boom!"

Suddenly, an explosion sounded in the distance, followed by snow and debris tumbling down from the mountain top, with fine snow grains drifting in the air like mist.

An Zai's heart sank, quickly turning his head to look toward the passage entrance.

Only to see a plume of grayish-white dust rising there,

Those people were using explosives to clear the path!

"Damn! Aren't you afraid of getting yourselves buried alive with such a big commotion!"

An Zai cursed softly, but luckily the mountain was solid enough, and there was someone in the group who obviously knew explosives well, so the disturbance wasn't too huge, only triggering a minor avalanche.

Though he was tempted to go and check the situation, Brother Quan's orders to remain in place made him hold back his impulse, keeping his eyes glued to the passage entrance from behind the rock.

After about two hours, a rustling sound of footsteps came from behind, and An Zai turned back to see Brother Quan's five-man team hurrying over.

After regrouping, Brother Quan asked with a stern face, "Was that commotion earlier caused by those bastards?"

"Yeah." An Zai nodded, pointing toward the cave entrance. "The boss asked me to stay behind and blow the entrance last time we left."

"I reckon they've blown it open again with explosives, and most of them are probably inside now."

Brother Quan glanced that way, then studied An Zai's face, flushed from the cold: "Can you hold up? Or do you want to stay outside to cover us?"

"No need, nothing too serious." An Zai dismissively shook his head, then reminded again, "They have quite a few people, around twenty."

Brother Quan nodded, looking back to ask, "Who among you would go ahead to scout and check if they left anyone on watch?"

"I'll go." Niu Da stepped forward.

"Alright, be careful."

Upon receiving the order, Niu Da lightened his footsteps and slowly approached forward.

Within five minutes, the radio reported "All clear."

Brother Quan gestured and led the group toward the passage entrance.

The area in front of the passage was a mess, littered with rubble, clearly the handiwork of the earlier group.

It seemed these people were well-prepared.

"Let's go!" Brother Quan took the lead into the cave.

Being about two hours behind the others, they moved quickly, almost jogging through.

They didn't know how long they traveled before their flashlights began flickering again, losing effectiveness.

They had reached the eerie energy field area once more.

The group took out the glow sticks they had prepared from their backpacks and continued forward.

Without encountering any trouble, they arrived smoothly at the other end of the passage.

It was still the familiar sight of vines entwining the cave entrance, exactly the same as when they came last time.

As soon as they stepped out of the passage, Brother Quan immediately looked at his watch, his expression somewhat complicated.

An Zai squatted down, carefully observing for a while, then stood and said, "Judging by the footprints on the ground, they seemed to have headed to the lake."

Brother Quan didn't immediately give instructions, pondering for a couple of seconds before handing over the backpack: "There are tools inside, set up a couple of remote-controlled charges around the entrance."

An Zai took the equipment and swiftly set everything up, finishing in no time.

"All set."

"Move out!" Brother Quan stowed the remote, leading the charge.

The team advanced into the forest ahead in tactical formation.

Chapter 617: Unknown Scale

The trees in the forest were lush and full, with a thick layer of fallen leaves on the ground, which made a faint rustling sound when stepped on.

Brother Quan walked at the front, occasionally observing the traces on the ground.

The direction of that group hadn't changed; they were still heading towards the lake.

They traversed three or four kilometers through the woods.

Suddenly, Brother Quan abruptly stopped, raised his hand into a fist, signaling them to halt.

The people behind him immediately stopped, held their breath, and swept their vigilant gazes around.

Their weapons were already in hand, ready to fire at any moment.

But after a careful check, they didn't seem to find anything unusual around. An Zai couldn't help but ask, "Instructor, what did you find?"

Since Brother Quan joined the team, he had been conducting special intensive training for them, so everyone was used to calling him the instructor.

Brother Quan's face was solemn, his nose slightly twitching as he said in a low voice, "There's a scent of blood!"

Upon hearing this, the others immediately tensed up, continuing to observe the surrounding environment.

"Over there!" Brother Quan pointed in one direction and took the lead to move forward.

The group treaded lightly, dispersed in a fan shape, their eyes firmly fixed on the bushes ahead.

As they gradually approached, they also smelled a faint scent of blood, seemingly wafting from there.

"Whoosh~"

A flock of birds resembling vultures suddenly flitted out from behind the bushes, as if startled, scattering in all directions.

The group paid no attention and continued forward, only to come across an extremely unpleasant scene behind the bushes that made everyone frown in unison.

It was a human corpse!

In fact, even the term "corpse" was inadequate; "partial remains" would be more accurate.

The dead leaves on the ground were stained a dark red from blood, littered with indescribable details... the scent in the air was several times stronger, stinging their nasal cavities.

Even for those who had been in battles, this scene felt a bit nauseating.

"It's one of their people!" An Zai said, staring at a piece of clothing on an arm.

Brother Quan squatted down, carefully examining a part that hadn't been gnawed by birds, his expression growing more severe.

It's known that human bones are quite sturdy, so how much strength would it take to break bones without tools?

"Could there be lions or tigers here?" Brother Chen, who entered here for the first time, questioned.

Last time, just upon reaching the special energy field, Qi Yun had sent him back to prepare for rescue, so he didn't know much about the situation inside.

Moreover, Qi Yun required everyone to keep quiet about what happened inside, so they rarely talked about it outside.

An Zai nodded, "There probably are. Last time, a herd of elephants twice or three times bigger than those outside chased us..."

"But elephants shouldn't tear people apart like this..."

This sudden change cast a shadow over everyone's hearts.

"I found something over here!" Niu Da shouted softly from the right side.

Everyone immediately moved towards him.

"Look," Niu Da said, pointing to a drag mark on the ground.

The drag trail was deep, with blood around it, stretching into the depths of the forest.

Nearby, equipment and handguns had fallen, yet there wasn't a single shell casing on the ground.

Those people had weapons but didn't fire a single shot...

Was it because they were too scared to shoot and just ran?

Or was there another reason...

"What kind of thing could do this to them?" Brother Quan asked himself silently.

He suddenly recalled when he left this space last time, Xiao Wu, who was covering the retreat, mentioned something seemed to be watching them, giving him a very dangerous feeling...

Could it be that thing?

"Should we go check the front?" An Zai asked, pointing to the depths of the forest.

After a moment of thought, Brother Quan shook his head.

They only had a few handguns; if it turned out to be the lair of that unknown creature, it would be troublesome. A few handguns might not be enough to handle it.

Just as he was about to stand up and give the order to proceed towards the lake, he thought he caught a glimpse of something shiny from the corner of his eye.

Brother Quan immediately squatted down again, his gaze quickly scanning the fallen leaves at his feet.

He carefully brushed aside the surrounding leaves, revealing a silver metal piece.

It was only called a metal piece because of its unique, shiny material.

In fact, this thing looked more like a large fish scale, about the size of a Laoganma bottle cap, with fine serrations on the edges and a silver sheen on the surface.

It didn't feel smooth like a fish scale but rather had a texture similar to frosted metal.

Holding it, Brother Quan flipped it over, seeing a few very fine lines on the backside, like some naturally formed pattern.

"What is this thing?" An Zai curiously leaned forward.

"It's hard to say for now, but it seems to be unlike the scale of ordinary creatures."

Brother Quan laid the scale in his palm, and the group examined it closely.

Apart from the material feeling particularly special, they didn't notice anything unusual.

"If this really is a scale, just how large must the creature be that has scales like this?" An Zai clicked his tongue in amazement.

No one answered the question.

Perhaps it was because they didn't want to consider that possibility.

But just after a two-second silence, Niu Da uttered something that sent chills down their spines.

"Do you think... the corpse on the ground could have been done by that scaled creature?"

Upon saying this, the surrounding air seemed to freeze instantly.

An Zai instinctively took half a step back, disbelief in his eyes, "Can't be, right? Even though this scale looks impressive..."

He wanted to find a reason to dismiss this speculation, but the words caught in his throat.

Brother Quan put away the scale, interrupting, "Let's go, forget about this place. Head towards the lake."

The rest said no more, immediately following in his footsteps.

However, after only a few hundred meters, they encountered yet another patch of blood on the ground.

And the closer they got to the lake, the more frequent the dismembered limbs and severed arms became.

Based on a rough count of the arms, at least eight or nine people had met their end here...

"Damn... this place isn't like it was last time..."

A sense of unease spread through everyone's mind.

Brother Quan, leading the way, stopped and refrained from advancing further.

After some thoughtful consideration, he turned and gave the order to retreat.

"Forget the lake, we'll return the way we came and intercept them at the exit!"

The group felt a sense of relief at this decision, undoubtedly the correct one.

Based on the traces on the ground, it was likely even more dangerous ahead.

If they had heavy weaponry, they might have had the confidence to investigate, but with only a few handguns, could they really handle that unknown creature?

Chapter 618: Decision 2 and Moga Rao

Meanwhile, at the headquarters of Guanghui Group on Changsha Road in the New District.

Dozens of reporters were crowded at the entrance of the company lobby with cameras and microphones, the flashlights clicking incessantly, questions flying one after another.

"President Zhang, was Guanghui Group reported to have misappropriated project funds to cover overseas losses, is this true?"

"There are rumors that Guanghui plans to sell its car service business to Net One Company, is there any truth to this?"

"There's a whistleblower from Guanghui Group saying last year's bonuses haven't been paid..."

At the front of the crowd, the director of the corporate PR department held a loudspeaker, trying to maintain control of the situation.

"Media friends, please calm down! The rumors on the internet are false, everything at Guanghui Group is operating normally, please do not believe unverified information!"

"Also, please cooperate with our arrangement, we have gathered here today for an important announcement, unrelated questions can be addressed in a one-on-one interview afterwards."

But the reporters weren't buying it; instead, they pushed forward more aggressively, microphones almost shoving into his mouth...

Guanghui Group, as the largest company in J Province, and with Liu Guangxin's name as the wealthiest, naturally attracted full attention. Even asking a couple of questions and adding a "slight" twist to his answers could land them in trending news.

"Bang!"

Just as the situation was about to get out of hand, the door to the venue was suddenly pushed open.

Everyone turned to look and saw Liu Guangxin walk in with a calm expression, followed by several senior executives...

As soon as Liu Guangxin entered, his commanding presence instantly subdued the noise in the hall.

The reporters, seeing the main figure arrive, all rushed towards him.

However, before the security personnel could step forward, Liu Guangxin merely raised his hand in a gesture, and the crowd instinctively stopped in their tracks.

The deterrent power of a business tycoon far surpassed that of the PR director's calls.

"My media friends, I know you are very concerned about Guanghui Group and have many questions, but that is not the focus today."

Liu Guangxin's voice wasn't loud, but it reached everyone's ears clearly, "I have gathered you here today to announce an important decision about the development of Guanghui Group, which I call — Decision 2..."

The hall fell silent, everyone holding their breath, waiting for his next words.

Given his position, anything labeled as an important decision was likely to make big waves in J Province's business world or even wider fields.

"The content of Decision 2 is that a subsidiary of Guanghai Group on Hong Kong Island is about to launch a virtual currency business."

"And we have already passed the virtual currency business license review in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region!"

This news was like a bomb dropped into the sea, and the flashes in the hall flared up into a continuous blaze, while the reporters who were whispering moments ago suddenly erupted into a frenzy.

Everyone knows how vibrant the development of virtual currency has become, and Hong Kong Island was like a testing point, securing a compliant license there likely signifies a future ticket into the mainland market.

Moreover, the fact that a traditional industrial giant like Guanghai is crossing over into this field is news made for trending.

"President Liu!" A reporter in the front row almost fought their way to the front, "Why is Guanghai not developing its industrial business, and instead suddenly decides to cross into virtual currency?"

Liu Guangxin shook his head: "This is not a sudden decision; we have planned for this for quite some time."

"Guanghai has many cross-border businesses overseas, and traditional cross-border settlements need to go through three to four banks, with long periods, high fees, and sometimes we are also subject to exchange rate fluctuations."

"But using compliant virtual currency for settlements can reduce the period from the original 15 days to two days, significantly lowering fees, and avoiding exchange rate risks."

"We are not engaging in virtual currency business for the sake of concept speculation, but to pave the way for our industrial business; this is a crucial step for Guanghai's transformation and upgrade..."

After announcing the decision, Liu Guangxin briefly answered a few questions before stepping out of the venue, leaving the subsequent Q&A to other senior executives.

Back in the office, he personally poured a cup of tea for Qi Yun, smiling as he asked, "Xiao Qi, even though you're not willing to participate in company management, you're about to be appointed as the deputy general manager of the subsidiary; aren't you going to make a public appearance?"

Their cooperation progressed quickly, and after signing the agreement, the subsidiary on Hong Kong Island had taken the faxed document to apply for procedures in the morning. With the president of the Financial Authority speaking up, the process went smoothly, of course.

Just within a morning, the pre-approval for the license had been passed, and you only need to wait for the filing to be completed to officially obtain it next week.

So now both parties have formally reached a cooperative relationship, which makes their conversation seem much closer.

"Forget about making an appearance; I'm not one to seek the limelight." Qi Yun gently shook his head.

His position as deputy general manager is just a title, and he might never even visit the company on Hong Kong Island, so there's no need to make a big fuss.

"Hey, it's good for a young man to be calm and low-key, but virtual currency is different from other businesses; it requires a public figure to stand under the spotlight, which can increase the platform's credibility."

"As one of the top ten outstanding young people in J Province, and even recognized and praised by news LB, I think you'd make a perfect image ambassador, hahaha."

Liu Guangxin, while speaking, looked at Qi Yun, and his tone didn't really sound like he was joking.

Qi Yun, of course, understood his reasoning, but the matter of stepping into the spotlight means endorsing the platform, and should any issues arise in the future, even if the law doesn't touch him, public opinion would engulf him.

Chapter 619: The Decision (2) and Makara

So he didn't want to take that risk.

"Heh, I think it would be more appropriate for you to be the spokesperson. In terms of social status and business reputation, I'm far behind you."

"Haha, I'm old; the future world belongs to you young people." Liu Guangxin waved his hand with a smile.

Qi Yun also smiled and responded, "I believe age isn't the point. Look at Chuanpu; he endorses his currency, doesn't he?"

Liu Guangxin gave Qi Yun a meaningful look but didn't insist further.

After the press conference, under the witness of a group of high-ranking officials from the group, both parties signed a formal equity transfer agreement.

From then on, Qi Yun could be considered half a person of Guanghui Group.

As the news of Guanghui Group's move into virtual currency was announced, it instantly caused a stir on the Internet.

Titles like "The Wealthiest Bet on Virtual Currency" and "Guanghui Group Storms the Market" filled the screens.

Countless financial media and experts expressed their views, all considering it a strategic breakthrough for a traditional industry giant in the era of digital finance.

This sensational news not only sparked conversations but directly swept through the capital market.

By the close of the stock market that day, all three A-share listed companies under Guanghui Group hit the price limit!

And this result, perhaps, was something Liu Guangxin had long anticipated, which was why he was eager to announce it to the public as soon as possible.

...

After leaving the headquarters of Guanghui Group, Qi Yun originally planned to attend a dinner party that night. Shao Yuewen had set up a meeting with people from the Ministry of Land, Water Resources, and the Supervisory Bureau to settle all the paperwork for the drinking water company.

This was also agreed upon when they initially discussed cooperation with Farmer's Three Punches.

Before the car could make it halfway, he received a call from Brother Quan.

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

"Only a few people from that team have survived!" Brother Quan's voice was grave on the other end as he described everything he saw after entering Shambala.

Qi Yun was utterly shocked upon hearing it.

Is there really some unknown creature in that space?

What could it be?

In legends, Shambala is supposed to be a peaceful secret realm. How could it hide something murderous...

Seeing Qi Yun remain silent, Brother Quan's question came through the receiver again: "I'm guarding the entrance at the mountainside now, but... judging by the brutality inside, I estimate those people might not be able to come out."

Qi Yun came back to his senses, his Adam's apple moved: "Your decision is correct, hold the entrance first, and if anything happens, evacuate immediately!"

"Send me the image of that scale, I'll first discuss the situation with the professor and see what he says."

"Understood." Brother Quan responded and added in a lowered voice, "By the way, regarding the time you asked me to observe."

"Our entry time into the passage was around nine-thirty in the morning, and after entering that place, the time... was roughly still nine-thirty."

"Time... it seems like time disappeared..."

Qi Yun had already anticipated this result because the last time they left Shambala, it took them several hours to walk out of that passage.

Under normal circumstances, even if Brother Quan and his team immediately returned after entering, they would have come out by evening at the earliest.

But now, it was only in the afternoon, and they had already come out...

However, this wasn't the issue to dwell on now. Qi Yun stared at the photo that Brother Quan had sent, examining it carefully.

As the other party described, this scale indeed looked very much like fish scales.

But could there really be such a large fish scale?

Even if there were, could a fish come ashore to attack those people?

After staring at the photo for a while, Qi Yun looked up and asked Xiao Wu in the front passenger seat, "Xiao Wu, do you remember when we came out last time, you mentioned feeling like something was watching us?"

"Could it have been some kind of large animal?"

Xiao Wu, having heard most of the call earlier, thought for a moment and slowly shook his head: "That thing was well hidden, didn't even leave a scent, I can't judge."

"However... even if it is some kind of large creature, it must be highly intelligent, and its body very agile, otherwise, I wouldn't have failed to notice any trace..."

Qi Yun frowned deeply at what he heard; highly intelligent, agile, and could leave behind such large scales... What could this thing be?

Why weren't they attacked the last time they went in?

He recalled the lost time and connected it with this eerie creature, feeling that the secrets hidden in Shambala's secret realm were even more complex than he had previously imagined.

Xiao Wu, seeing Qi Yun's tightly knit brows, added: "If it were an ordinary large animal, no matter how agile, it couldn't be this clean; it..."

"It seems to know how to avoid our detection, deliberately hiding in the dark."

Qi Yun took a deep breath, feeling that the more he thought about it, the more ominous it seemed.

He picked up his phone and dialed Ignacio's number.

"Professor, something happened in that space at Kunlun Mountain... I have sent you the image of that scale."

On the other end, Ignacio didn't say a word, only the light sound of a keyboard tapping could be heard.

After two minutes, his response came: "The structure of this scale is very strange. I magnified its cross-section and discovered that this material seems to be 'polycrystalline siliconized horny layer.'

"Polycrystalline siliconized horny layer?"

"What is this?" Qi Yun frowned and asked.

The name sounded unfamiliar, completely in his knowledge blind spot.

"Simply put, this structure shouldn't appear on a biological entity."

"Polycrystalline silicon is an industrial material, commonly found in solar panels."

"And the horny layer is a protective layer of an organism's skin, in theory, these two should have no connection..."

Ignacio's voice carried a tone of disbelief, evidently unable to fathom the connection himself.

"Could this scale not be something from Shambala, but a craft brought in by outsiders?" Qi Yun asked again.

Because it all sounded unrelated.

"This needs component analysis to obtain an accurate answer, you can find a laboratory to conduct the test, and send me the report."

Qi Yun nodded to the point: "Alright, I'll have someone send that scale back immediately."

"Let's leave it at that for now." He said and was about to hang up.

"Wait!" Ignacio stopped him.

"Hmm? What's wrong?"

Ignacio paused before saying, "I remembered a legend I once read in a Buddhist scripture..."

"What legend?" Qi Yun asked suspiciously.

It was a description of a creature in the original Sanskrit version of the Lotus Sutra...

"The scripture says that deep within the Kunlun Void, there was a 'Water Storage Realm,' where a creature was said to hibernate. It resembled a giant serpent, covered in scales and armor, able to easily carve through mountains... It was said to be the Guardian Beast of one of the eight Dragon Kings in Buddhism, the Vandana Dragon King."

"In the Buddhist scriptures, this creature is called 'Magara'"

Ignacio's voice grew deeper, as if reciting from ancient texts, "The book offers scant details on this creature's appearance, and no scholar has ever proven its existence..."

Magara!?

Giant serpent!?

Qi Yun was taken aback.

Could it be that things recorded in the Buddhist scriptures could actually appear in the real world?

"Alright, have that scale analyzed first. Without test results, any speculation lacks evidential support."

Qi Yun didn't say more, and after hanging up, immediately called Brother Quan to arrange for someone to send the item back.

"If anyone comes out of the passage afterward, try to control the situation, and ask about their experiences inside."

"Understood, I'll have someone send it back now."

...

Kunlun Mountain, Ritso Peak's mountainside.

Brother Quan took out the scale from his pocket and looked at An Zai, who was shivering: "The boss wants the item sent back first, you make a trip."

Originally, An Zai wanted to return long ago, but after experiencing that earlier scene in the jungle, he was reluctant to leave his brothers behind.

However, he ultimately complied with Brother Quan's request, taking the item with him as he departed.

...

Chapter 620: When Did You Take Me As Your Disciple?

At ten o'clock in the evening, Qi Yun was originally waiting for An Zai to bring something back, but instead of An Zai, an unexpected person arrived.

"Hey, Brother Qi, I'm in Bird City. Wanna hang out tonight?"

Qi Yun looked at the name "Ji Kai" on the screen with some surprise, wondering why this guy came.

"Haha, where are you? Should I send someone to pick you up?"

The last time they were in Shanghai, due to Ding Junkai's foolishness, he had a conflict with Crown Prince Brother Feng of Shanghai. At that time, his boss supported him strongly, so now that the guy came over here, he should entertain him both emotionally and logically.

"No need for a pick-up. I'm with friends. If you have time, come join us. I'll introduce someone to you."

Qi Yun glanced at Zhao Qing, who was deeply engrossed in watching a drama next to him, thought for a moment, and agreed: "Okay, send me the location. I'll come over now."

"Alright, see you soon."

After hanging up the phone, Qi Yun greeted Zhao Qing and left with his coat.

The location Ji Kai sent was at a clubhouse, near the New District.

Qi Yun had been to this place before; it was run by President Bi and his friends, and he even arranged for him to have a membership.

More than half an hour later, the Maybach stopped in the parking lot at the entrance of the clubhouse.

As he pushed open the car door, Qi Yun saw Ji Kai smoking with a fat guy at the entrance of the lobby. Actually, calling him fat wasn't entirely accurate; this guy wasn't flabby but was built like a mountain.

Compared to Ji Kai, he was like Fiddlesticks standing next to Gragas...

"Brother Qi, you're here!" Ji Kai saw Qi Yun get out of the car and promptly stepped forward.

Qi Yun nodded at him and smiled: "Why did you suddenly come to J Province without giving me a heads-up so I could pick you up."

Ji Kai laughed heartily: "It was a last-minute decision, and I came over to handle some things."

As he spoke, he patted Gragas's arm next to him, "Let me introduce you, this is my good buddy, Da Chuan, we grew up together."

Upon hearing this, Qi Yun began to size up Da Chuan.

This guy looked quite rugged, with a square face and coarse skin, which seemed like he spent a lot of time outdoors. His body showed evident signs of regular exercise.

"Da Chuan, this is the Brother Qi I mentioned to you earlier, Qi Yun, also the vice president of Sky Shining Energy."

Da Chuan grinned, reached out to shake hands with Qi Yun: "Brother Qi, I've heard a lot about you! You live up to your reputation!"

As soon as they touched hands, Qi Yun felt something unusual; this big hand had quite a few calluses.

Anyone who can hang out with Ji Kai must have a decent family background, so the calluses on his hands wouldn't be from manual labor; the only possibility is...

"Haha, you're too kind; it's not worth mentioning." Qi Yun replied with a smile.

From the joking tone, you could tell he was a straightforward person.

"Hahaha, let's go inside and talk." Ji Kai urged them both forward by their arms.

Although when they were in Shanghai, Ji Kai said he was eager for the exotic atmosphere here, upon entering the private room, he found there wasn't even anyone to liven up the atmosphere.

"It's so quiet?" Qi Yun sat on the sofa and glanced at the empty private room, "Should I arrange some entertainment for you?"

Ji Kai waved his hand with a smile: "Not this time, next time, next time!"

"Haha, alright." Qi Yun didn't insist further.

After a few casual drinks and small talk, Ji Kai revealed the reason for his visit to J Province.

It turns out several heavyweight figures will be coming here for inspections soon, including his uncle, so he came to join in the excitement.

Although Qi Yun already knew this guy had an extraordinary background, he was still astonished upon hearing his uncle's name.

That's someone who could dine with the leader Wendong.

No wonder he wasn't fazed by the Shanghai Crown Prince...

Besides Ji Kai's uncle, Qi Yun heard two familiar names, showing surprise on his face: "So many bigwigs coming?"

Ji Kai nodded: "In recent years, resources have been continuously diverted to this region from above, and now they say they're going to invest 3 trillion here to transform it into Western Peng City."

trillion!

Qi Yun secretly marveled at the magnitude, this wasn't an ordinary amount.

As the core area of the Silk Road economic belt, J Province holds an essential position as a vital hub in connecting Eurasian trade. Years ago, various development slogans were shouted, but the effect remained lukewarm.

It seems they're determined to make a big push now.

"But... that's just one of the reasons they're coming."

Ji Kai glanced at the private room door, lowered his voice and continued, "The other reason relates to a person headed for Beijing; he won't be coming back, and the announcement will be made in the next couple of days."

Qi Yun's gaze sharpened. Although he had been expecting this result, when the matter was finally settled, he couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief.

Finally, it's over.

Once the news is announced, it will trigger a massive shockwave.

And that's probably the main reason these bigwigs are coming... someone needs to keep things steady.

"Since you know all this, why come and stir in this storm center? Wouldn't it be better to have a good time elsewhere?" Qi Yun looked at Ji Kai, puzzled.

Ji Kai was indifferent: "I'm not going to get involved; mainly, I haven't seen my uncle in a while, so I thought I'd come check on him."

"Also, if there's any real storm, my Brother Da Chuan can handle it." As he spoke, he patted Da Chuan's shoulder, "With a physique like this, what storm can't he withstand?"