

## Golden 1001

### Chapter 1001 Gold Mine (Part 1)

The valley was gourd-shaped and spacious, but this was also the tragedy for the Duva organization. After an explosion, several survivors, just as they raised their guns to return fire, were mowed down by a hail of bullets.

Peng Fei and Li Zhen had no intention of leaving any survivors. For them, killing all these people would be enough to comfort the spirit of their old platoon leader.

The gunfight lasted only a short time, just five or six minutes, after which the valley fell silent, and no more gunfire came from within.

"Boom! Boom boom!"

Peng Fei pulled out two more grenades from his waist and threw them in. He was afraid someone might pretend to be dead and shoot him from behind. He thought it would be better to fight head-on than to die from a sneak attack.

"Shura, I'll go in first, you keep cover..."

After waiting for a while and hearing no sound from inside the valley, Peng Fei gestured to Li Zhen and prepared to enter. Suddenly, he saw Zhuang Rui running towards him, bent over. Startled, Peng Fei waved his hands frantically and shouted, "Brother Zhuang, don't come any closer! Wait a little longer..."

"It's alright, there shouldn't be any survivors..."

Zhuang Rui ran to Peng Fei's side in one breath and squatted down. He had just used his spiritual energy to sense that there were no other living beings in the valley besides one other living being that could absorb the spiritual energy he released.

However, Zhuang Rui believed that even if the person who absorbed his spiritual energy was still alive, he wouldn't live much longer after these successive explosions, and probably wouldn't even be able to lift a gun.

"Brother Zhuang, it's better to be safe than sorry. I'll go in first, you wait here..."

Peng Fei shook his head. These drug dealers were all fearless and ruthless. Even if they only had one breath left, they would pull the grenade and die together with their opponent. He didn't feel comfortable letting Zhuang Rui go in.

"Okay, be careful..."

Looking at the corpses he'd seen on the way here, and smelling the pungent stench of blood, Zhuang Rui suddenly regretted coming. This wasn't a chicken slaughterhouse; these were all living, breathing people.

"Alright, it's all over now, Li Zhen, come in..."

Two or three minutes after Peng Fei entered the valley, a sound came out. Li Zhen and Zhuang Rui, who were hiding behind the rocks, stood up at the same time and walked into the valley.

The stream in the valley was stained red with blood, and more than a dozen corpses lay scattered about. Many people still had expressions of shock on their faces, seemingly not expecting that the other side could use heavy weapons to directly threaten the valley.

"Duwa!"

Peng Fei quickly found Duwa, whose photo was already deeply etched in the minds of Peng Fei and Li Zhen.

Duwa's face was facing the ground, his entire back was blown to pieces, and the blood flowing from his body stained the green grass around him. Peng Fei walked forward and forcefully turned Duwa's body over.

"Huh? He's not dead yet?"

Duwa, who had been turned over, was pale and had his eyes closed, but his chest was still rising and falling slightly, and a bellows-like sound came from his throat.

Peng Fei crouched down and touched Duwa's neck, saying, "He won't last more than a few minutes..."

As the saying goes, death ends all debts. Peng Fei and Li Zhen killing Duwa was considered revenge for the old platoon leader. They weren't so perverted as to cut off and eat Duwa's fat.

Just as Li Zhen and the others were inspecting the situation inside the valley, Hu Rong also rushed in with a group of people. Although it was a bit of hindsight, Peng Fei and Li Zhen had indeed taught his men a good lesson today on what jungle warfare was all about!

"It's Duwa, that's right!"

Hu Rong walked over to Peng Fei and looked at the fat man lying on the ground. He said that Hu Rong's raw stone smuggling team had clashed with Duwa back then, and the two were old acquaintances.

"This fat man followed Khun Sa since the 1980s, and even started his own business in the 1990s. I never expected him to die here..."

Looking at Duwa, who was barely clinging to life on the ground, Hu Rong felt a pang of emotion.

Duwa had been a powerful figure in the Golden Triangle for two or three decades, with immense fame and a major name in the global drug trade. But now, looking like a dead dog, Hu Rong couldn't help but feel a sense of impending doom for this once-powerful figure.

"Sigh, what a pity..." Hu Rong suddenly remembered something and slapped his thigh.

"Hmm? Brother Hu, what's the pity? A man like that doesn't deserve to die..."

When Zhuang Rui first entered the valley, he was a little unaccustomed to it, but after seeing so many dead people, he became numb to it. Although he still felt a little nauseous, Zhuang Rui still had no pity for someone like Duwa.

"Hey, you don't know, this guy was a local tyrant for over ten years, he's got quite a fortune..."

Hu Rong didn't need to elaborate on the profits from drug trafficking; everyone present knew that as one of the three giants of the Golden Triangle, the wealth he possessed was astronomical.

Moreover, Duwa was extremely stingy. Apart from his close associates of one or two hundred who were well-treated, the rest of his people lived like people from a primitive society. It is said that he deposited all his money in foreign banks.

Now that Duwa has died, it's like he's just made a free profit for those foreign banks; in a few decades, those debts will become non-performing loans.

"Um?"

Upon hearing Hu Rong's words and glancing at Duwa's heaving chest, Zhuang Rui felt a stirring in his heart. Although Duwa's wealth was ill-gotten, he could spend it cleanly.

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui secretly released a stream of spiritual energy from his eyes, which was invisible and colorless and injected into Duwa's body. Zhuang Rui did not intend to save him, but only wanted to keep him alive and see if Peng Fei and the others had the ability to extract the wealth of the Kachin tribe from Duwa's mouth.

"Heh...heh heh..."

Just a few seconds after the spiritual energy entered Duwa's body, Duwa suddenly began to breathe rapidly, looking as if he was about to run out of breath.

Seeing this, despite his deep hatred for Duwa, Peng Fei lowered the muzzle of his gun, preparing to give him a finishing shot.

"Holy crap, he's not dead?!"

Before Peng Fei could pull the trigger, Duwa's eyes suddenly opened slowly, and the rise and fall of his chest became calmer, which startled everyone. Was this guy a cockroach? How could he survive such serious injuries?

"Bank of China...?"

Upon seeing Peng Fei, Duwa uttered a few words indistinctly.

"Duwa, do you still remember the Chinese soldiers you ambushed at Songkou Mountain eight years ago?"

Peng Fei's voice was somewhat low. Since Duwa wasn't dead, let him die knowing the truth.

"Cough...cough cough, I've killed so many people in my life, how could I possibly remember them all?"

Duwa laughed self-deprecatingly. He who kills will be killed in return. Duwa's chieftainship was not inherited, but seized after killing countless clansmen. He had known all along that this day would come.

"Peng Fei, do you think you can get anything out of him? I'm going out now..."

Duwa spoke in Burmese. After Hu Rong explained it to Zhuang Rui, Zhuang Rui understood the meaning. He couldn't understand the conversation and didn't want to stay in the valley filled with the smell of blood.

After Zhuang Rui left the valley, Hu Rong arranged for people to clean up the battlefield. It was the hottest time of the year, and if the corpses were left there for too long, a plague might break out.

Although he knew these people deserved to die, Zhuang Rui still felt uneasy watching dozens of vibrant lives perish before his eyes.

The mine security team members who were carrying the bodies behaved even worse than Zhuang Rui. Some of them threw the bodies into the pits they had dug and immediately turned around and vomited. Even Captain Zhang, who prided himself on having killed people and seen blood, looked extremely pale.

"Smack!"

Zhuang Rui kicked a piece of rock that had broken off from the mountainside five or six meters away. His spiritual energy unconsciously swept over the rock, and suddenly, Zhuang Rui's eyes widened.

"Damn it, how could I forget about that?"

Zhuang Rui patted his head in self-reproach. The gunfight just now was too exciting. If he hadn't accidentally seen the faint spiritual energy contained in that stone, he would have forgotten the main mission of his trip.

Zhuang Rui bent down and picked up the stone, which was slightly smaller than his fist, and examined it carefully.

This stone is different from the gray, weathered stones on the outside of the rock wall. It is entirely black, and if you look closely, you can see a very faint trace of gold. Even without using spiritual energy to identify it, an experienced person can tell that this is a piece of ore from which gold can be extracted.

"This gold mine has a considerable amount of gold..."

Zhuang Rui raised his head, released the spiritual energy in his eyes, and carefully examined the cliff in front of him, which was at least forty or fifty meters high.

"I should have read more books on geology. If Professor Tang were here, he could definitely have roughly determined the gold content of this mine..."

After watching for more than ten minutes, Zhuang Rui shook his head helplessly. He found that this mine was very peculiar. The valley was surrounded by mountains on three sides, but only this side contained gold mines. Moreover, not only were there a large amount of gold ore inside the mountains, but there were also gold mines hidden more than ten meters underground.

Zhuang Rui didn't know much about gold; he could only tell that this was a rich mine. As for how much gold could be extracted after refining these ores, he couldn't estimate.

"Zhuang Rui, what are you doing? Why are you staring at this cliff like that?"

Just as Zhuang Rui was examining the stone wall, Hu Rong and his group came out. Behind them, several mine guards were carrying a corpse, indicating that the Duwa chieftain had already passed away.

Zhuang Rui snapped out of his reverie, smiled, and said, "There's been a rather unexpected discovery. We'll talk about it later. Did Duwa say anything?"

"He told us everything himself, we didn't need to ask. Here, it's a USB drive. I didn't expect this guy to know about high-tech stuff..."

Peng Fei handed Zhuang Rui a USB drive, which he had found on Duwa. Knowing he was going to die, Duwa revealed all his wealth.

Duwa had only one condition: that Peng Fei give his wife and children, who were living in his secret residence in Yangon, one million US dollars. It can be said that Duwa was very clever; one million US dollars was enough for his wife and children to live on without causing any disaster.

Chapter 1002 Gold Mine (Part Two)

How much money is there in total?

Zhuang Rui didn't have a computer and couldn't check the contents of the USB drive, but he figured that Duwa's life savings must be at least tens of millions of dollars.

"It totaled over eight hundred million US dollars. In addition, Duwa also bought a small island in the Caribbean. The relevant infrastructure has been completed. The contract is in a Swiss bank safe deposit box, and the password is on a USB drive..."

Peng Fei felt that Zhuang Rui was incredibly lucky; Duwa had just finished explaining these things and died before he could catch his breath.

The USB drive wasn't on Duwa at the time; he had slipped it into a crevice nearby. If Duwa hadn't told him, this fortune might never have been discovered.

Eight hundred million dollars?!

Even though Zhuang Rui was mentally prepared, he was still shocked when he heard the number. Drug trafficking is indeed one of the most profitable businesses in the world. Duwa is just the lowest-ranking drug lord in the Golden Triangle, yet he has a net worth of eight hundred million US dollars.

"Damn, wouldn't Black Scar and the other drug lords combined have billions of dollars in assets?"

Zhuang Rui looked towards the distant mountains. At that moment, he even had the urge to find the other two drug lords.

"Not only that, Black Scar's wealth far surpasses Duwa's. Khun Sa entrusted his entire fortune to him back then. But Brother Zhuang, don't even think about getting your hands on Black Scar. He may be a drug lord, but sometimes..."

Peng Fei clearly knew Black Scar very well. According to him, almost all of Black Scar's drugs were sold to Europe and the United States. His organization did not allow the dumping of drugs into China. Therefore, whether it was the governments of the United States and the United Kingdom, or drug traffickers in the Americas or Italy, they all hated Black Scar to the core.

Therefore, although this operation involved troops from the governments of Myanmar and Thailand, the shadows of European and American governments were undoubtedly behind it. It was essentially a crackdown on the Black Scar organization. As for Duwa and his associates, they were simply unlucky to be caught in the crossfire.

"Hehe, I was just thinking about it. You two were lucky this time. We don't need to provoke anyone else..."

Zhuang Rui chuckled dryly, picked up the USB drive and weighed it in his hand. After pondering for a while, he looked up at Hu Rong and said, "Brother Hu, your family has been away from China for a long time. Have you ever thought about going back?"

"Of course I want to, but I don't just have a few dozen or a hundred people in Myanmar. There are tens of thousands of people who rely on the Hu family for their livelihood. Even if we have money, we can't settle them all back home..."

Hu Rong gave a wry smile. From the very first education he received when he was born, he was told that he was Chinese, and every child in Chinatown received the same education.

As the saying goes, fallen leaves return to their roots, especially the elders in the family. They have always longed to return to China, but in the early years, when the political situation in China was turbulent, they did not dare to go back at all. Now, the family business is too big, and they are willing but unable to go back.

It's important to understand that even if only a few thousand people were to return to China, let alone tens of thousands, it would still be a massive undertaking. Putting aside nationality, the resettlement of these people alone would be a huge problem.

"Brother Hu, I feel the situation in Myanmar is a bit unstable. Investing and doing business here is fine, but it would be best to move your base elsewhere..."

Today's gunfight left a deep impression on Zhuang Rui. If this happened in China, it would be unimaginable. But in Myanmar, dozens of lives were lost, and no one cared or even asked about it. Living in such a country must have given him an extreme sense of insecurity.

"Cough, Zhuang Rui, I know all this, but there's simply no way the country can accommodate so many people. Three or five hundred might be manageable, but..."

Hu Rong shook his head. In Myanmar, you have to use armored vehicles to enter and exit, and your accommodations are built like war fortresses. Is that a pleasant thing?

“Brother Hu, there was nothing we could do before, but that might not be the case now...” Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this, tossing the USB drive in his hand to Hu Rong.

Afraid of breaking the USB drive, Hu Rong hurriedly caught it and looked at Zhuang Rui, saying, "Huh? What are you doing?"

“Brother Hu, I don’t want the money from drug trafficking. Here’s what I’m thinking: you should use this money to invest in China, and do some charity work along with it. Use that money to negotiate with the government in your hometown and get a piece of land for the people of Chinatown to settle down. I’ll try to find some people here to see if we can get this done.”

Zhuang Rui was telling the truth. The wealth on this USB drive was built on countless bones. Zhuang Rui felt like he was burning his hands holding the USB drive. He might as well help Hu Rong solve some problems.

"By the way, Peng Fei, Li Zhen, do you two have any objections to how I'm handling this money?"

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, he turned to look at Peng Fei and the other man, saying that they also had a share of this wealth.

Peng Fei shook his head and said, "Brother Zhuang, no problem. What do we need so much money for? Just let me follow you..."

Peng Fei and Li Zhen were already very satisfied that they were able to help their old platoon leader avenge his death in Myanmar. They had no worries about food and drink with Zhuang Rui and their lives were very colorful. They really didn't know what to do with so much money.

"This...this is unlikely, there aren't just a few hundred or a thousand people, there are at least thirty or forty thousand..."

Hu Rong paid no attention to the conversation between Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei; he was already stunned by what Zhuang Rui had just said.

Hu Rong never expected that Zhuang Rui would come up with such an idea. He had thought about this problem before, but it involved too many things, and no matter how he thought about it, it was an impossible thing.

Moreover, Hu Rong didn't have enough funds. Although the Hu family had accumulated wealth over generations in Myanmar and had made a lot of money in recent years by partnering with Zhuang Rui to mine jade, Chinatown was a bottomless pit of money, with daily expenses being astronomical. Hu Rong simply couldn't afford to immigrate.

"Hehe, Brother Hu, it's not necessarily impossible. Nowadays, domestic officials want political achievements. As long as there is investment, they will definitely treat you like a grandfather. You could probably build a shrine to immortality for him..."

Find a suitable city, invest five hundred million US dollars, and then use the remaining money to build houses. By the way, these Chinese who have left behind in Myanmar can also work in the companies you invest in..."

Zhuang Rui paused for a moment, then continued, "And you can also hype it up, saying that these people are descendants of Chinese soldiers who died in World War II, and ask the government for some policies. This matter will definitely be resolved..."

Zhuang Rui knew that there was a lot of hype about the Chinese Expeditionary Force in China recently. He thought that if he brought this up now, the relevant departments would definitely take it seriously. He also thought that if he could talk to his uncle and get his hands on it, he might be able to accomplish the feat of bringing 10,000 people back home.

This was Zhuang Rui's second visit to Chinatown. The Chinese people he met were all very simple and hardworking, and he believed that they could also live a good life with their own hands when they returned to China.

"Really... really?"

Even though Hu Rong had seen many storms, he was deeply moved after listening to Zhuang Rui's analysis. This was a big deal for the Hu family, for the Chinese community in Hpakant, and even for various forces in Myanmar.

"Of course, that's fine. By the way, Brother Hu, if you have time, you could take over that little Caribbean island too. It'll be a place to stay in case anything happens in the future..."

Zhuang Rui didn't care much about the money, but he was quite interested in the Caribbean islands that Peng Fei had mentioned.

It's important to understand that over the past decade or so, almost all the islands available for sale in overseas waters have been sold off. Now, even if you have the money, you might not be able to buy one. And even if you could, the geographical location and natural scenery of the islands would certainly not be as good as those sold off in the past.

"Alright, I'll go back and discuss this with my clan. I'll return to China in a few days to look for projects and see if this can be done..."

Although Hu Rong was the clan chief, he could not make decisions on his own, as the lives and future of tens of thousands of people in the clan were at stake.

"By the way, I don't want that island anymore. I'll find someone to take it over for you. You can prepare to be the king then..."

Hu Rong knew that if he wanted to settle down in China, he would need Zhuang Rui's help. Moreover, the USB drive in his hand should have belonged to Zhuang Rui, so he naturally had no intention of taking the island for himself.

Moreover, Hu Rong had already made up his mind that after taking over the island, he would use his own money to build some facilities on the island, as a way of compensating Zhuang Rui for the huge favor he had done.

"Alright, then I won't stand on ceremony..."

Zhuang Rui chuckled. He had long wanted to buy property abroad. If it weren't for the poor communication on Pirate Island, Zhuang Rui would never have leaked information about Pirate Island and would have simply built it into a private island.

"Alright, there's nothing else here, let's go back. Relocating back to China is a huge undertaking, we need to plan this carefully..."

The Hu family is a very powerful force in Myanmar. If they withdraw, the pie they leave behind will definitely be fought over by various forces. Even if they have a chance to return to China, it will not be a short-term matter. It may take several years or even decades to work out.

With the matter settled, Hu Rong felt much more at ease. The efforts of generations had finally brought hope of returning home, which filled him with excitement. He couldn't help but feel an overwhelming urge to rush home immediately to discuss the matter further.

Zhuang Rui waved his hand to stop Hu Rong, saying, "No, Brother Hu, good things come in pairs today. I don't want money stained with blood, but I want the lion's share of this money..."

"What do you mean by 'do you want the money'? And you're talking about the 'big part'? Explain yourself clearly..."

Hu Rong was confused by Zhuang Rui's words and looked at Zhuang Rui with a puzzled expression. Could it be that Duwa had other wealth?

"Brother Hu, take a look at this..."

Zhuang Rui handed the fist-sized stone that he had been playing with to Hu Rong, believing that Hu Rong would definitely be able to see something.

Chapter 1003 Gold Mine (Part 3)

Why would I do something with a rock?

Hu Rong took the stone from Zhuang Rui, puzzled. He glanced at it casually, his mind preoccupied with what Zhuang Rui had just said. He had no interest in looking at this worthless stone.

"Brother Hu, take a good look, this stone is also a kind of mineral..." Zhuang Rui reminded Hu Rong with a smile, without specifying what kind of mineral it was.

"Myanmar has many mines, but not all of them are valuable..."

Hu Rong muttered something under his breath, but then turned his attention back to the stone in his hand. He believed that Zhuang Rui wouldn't speak without reason, and that this stone must have something special about it.

"Brother Zhuang, what's that? It's all black..."

Peng Fei had just heard Zhuang Rui mention a discovery, and now, taking advantage of Hu Rong's inspection of the stone, he asked Zhuang Rui about it.

"Anyway, it's good stuff. By the way, Peng Fei, you have to spend time with Zhang Qian when you go back this time, but I need to leave someone here in Myanmar. Li Zhen, how about you stay here?"

Zhuang Rui was already certain that this was a gold mine. Unlike jade mines, gold is a strategic reserve material for all countries, representing the ultimate wealth of a nation. Even if Hu Rong could mine here, there was no doubt that some people would have ulterior motives.

Moreover, this place is already within the territory of the Savage Mountain, where people are rarely seen. If there isn't someone skilled in jungle warfare here to oversee security, they might all be wiped out without anyone outside knowing.

Judging from today's battle, Peng Fei focused on offense, while Li Zhen was mainly on defense. Only by leaving him here to oversee the future security work of the gold mine could Zhuang Rui feel at ease.

"You want me to stay here?"

Li Zhen was taken aback for a moment upon hearing this, then looked at Zhuang Rui and asked, "Brother Zhuang, what treasures are here? Is it worth guarding this place?"

To be honest, in this remote and impoverished area, you hardly ever see a soul, so nobody wants to stay here.

"Hehe, of course there's treasure, but don't worry, you'll be able to leave in a year or two at most..."

Zhuang Rui reassured Li Zhen, saying that according to his visual estimation, the gold mine had a very high gold content, but it was not large, and most of it was exposed on the surface, making it easy to mine. He believed that it would be able to be mined out in a year or two.

"Alright, Brother Zhuang, let's make this clear first. If it weren't a gold mine, you wouldn't ask me to do this job..." Li Zhen reluctantly agreed.

Zhuang Rui laughed after hearing Li Zhen's words: "Hehe, you guessed pretty accurately..."

"Is it really a gold mine?" Li Zhen looked incredulous. This gold was too cheap; you could find it anywhere you just walked by.

"Um?"

Before Zhuang Rui could explain, Hu Rong suddenly exclaimed, drawing everyone's attention.

"Zhuang Rui, where...where did you find this ore?"

Hu Rong grabbed Zhuang Rui and stopped calling him "Broken Stone," his face full of urgency.

Zhuang Rui gently pushed Hu Rong away and said with a smile, "Brother Hu, don't rush, tell me what you've figured out?"

"Do you even need to look at this? Do you really think I got my PhD in geology for nothing?"

Hu Rong glared at Zhuang Rui, annoyed, and pointed to the dark part of the ore, saying, "If I'm not mistaken, there must be gold dust in here, but it needs to be washed and broken down. We can't tell the quality of the gold now..."

Hu Rong is not only a master of jade jewelry design, but also a PhD in geology from the University of Birmingham in the UK. He is very knowledgeable about various minerals, and his family business also includes a copper mine currently in operation.

Although Myanmar is rich in mineral resources, with gold, silver and copper mines widely distributed, there are too many wolves and not enough meat. The mines that have been explored outside have already been divided up by various forces.

The Hu family had long been engaged in jade mining, but their resources in other minerals were relatively scarce, so they couldn't get a share of the profits. They only managed to acquire a copper mine, which was obtained through a bloody struggle that resulted in many deaths.

"Brother Hu has a good eye. It took me a while to realize it was a piece of gold ore..."

Zhuang Rui gave Hu Rong a thumbs-up, and only after Hu Rong looked impatient did he smile and say, "Brother, I'm incredibly lucky, Brother Hu, look up..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hu Rong looked up and followed Zhuang Rui's gaze. He was immediately stunned, his face filled with astonishment, and he murmured, "It's...it's that place?"

The place Zhuang Rui was looking at was the rock wall that had been blasted open by Li Zhen's grenade. The opening was more than a meter deep, and there were many rocks scattered around it that had fallen from above.

Originally, Zhuang Rui didn't know how to make the gold mine appear to the world. It was all thanks to this battle. Otherwise, if Zhuang Rui had taken a hammer and hit the rocks to say that there was a gold mine, it would have been too shocking.

“That’s right, Brother Hu, otherwise why would I say I’m lucky...” Zhuang Rui laughed smugly.

Hu Rong, no longer caring about Zhuang Rui's self-praise, put down the stone in his hand and hurriedly picked up another stone to examine it.

"It really is a mine, Zhuang Rui, you...you're incredibly lucky, aren't you?"

After examining several stones, Hu Rong looked up at Zhuang Rui with a strange expression. This wasn't just good fortune; it was like the God of Wealth had descended to deliver money.

Although there are no instruments available to determine the quality of the gold contained in the stone, this shallow spot, practically an open-pit gold mine, is sure to make them a fortune.

Especially since this area is located within the Savage Mountain range, heavy machinery cannot enter at all, and mining can only be carried out using explosives. This type of terrain is most suitable for mining.

"Hehe, Brother Hu, we're brothers, so let's keep things clear. I'm the one who discovered this gold mine, so you can name a profit-sharing ratio..."

Zhuang Rui is acting like a miser right now. It would be a lie to say he's not heartbroken about giving away seven or eight hundred million US dollars earlier. Of course, he's going to try to make up for it with gold.

"You brat, things haven't even started yet, and you're already calculating the odds..."

Hu Rong jokingly scolded Zhuang Rui, then thought for a moment and said, "We don't know the gold content yet. Although this mine is an open-pit mine, making extraction relatively easy, transportation is very difficult and requires a large workforce..."

More importantly, keeping this gold mine a secret from other forces is quite difficult..."

"Hey, Brother Hu, I don't care about any of that. You're the local bigwig in Hpakant. After we finish this job, you can move your people back to the country. What are you afraid of?"

Zhuang Rui interrupted Hu Rong, realizing what Hu Rong meant: he wanted to bypass the Burmese government and mine independently. However, if this got out, Hu Rong would likely become the target of public criticism in Myanmar.

The Burmese military junta has virtually no tax revenue. The government can only operate by selling shares in various resource mines to raise funds. Although they know that the lion's share is going to others, the military junta has no choice but to accept this because they lack both technology and capital.

This is precisely why the Burmese military government has extremely strict control over mineral resources. Mining is allowed, but a portion of the profits must be shared. Otherwise, the government will fight tooth and nail, as these are their lifeline.

"Brother Hu, how about this? You first have someone survey the gold mine to determine its quality and content. If the quality is high and the gold content is abundant, I suggest we postpone the sale of the jadeite mine..."

Zhuang Rui said while thinking, "The jade mine is located in a remote area. We can build a simple refining plant next to it, refine the gold, and transport it out. This way, we can avoid attracting attention..."

Gold refining is actually quite simple, especially for gold ore like this. Simply put the crushed ore into a ball mill, grind it into a slurry, and then put it into flotation. Sodium carbonate is used as a modifier to make the gold float to the surface. At the same time, butyl xanthate and amine black are used as recoverants to separate the gold ore powder from the slag, thus producing gold concentrate powder.

The process is not complicated and is easy to operate. After adding  $\text{KNO}_3$  oxidant, silver and borax to the gold concentrate powder, high-purity gold can be extracted by high-temperature smelting.

"Temporarily suspend the sale of jadeite mines?"

Hu Rong hesitated upon hearing this. They didn't know the gold content yet, but the jade mine could be converted into real cash. If they dragged this out, who knew if things would change?

"Brother Hu, this isn't urgent. Let's get someone to survey the gold mine first..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand, saying that talking about anything now was pointless; figuring out the gold content of this mine was the most practical thing to do.

"Okay, I'll make the arrangements. Have someone guard this place for now. This gold mine isn't really suitable for having someone survey it. I'll go back and get the equipment and tools, and then I'll survey it myself..."

The gold mine in Myanmar has a much wider impact than the jade mine. Even with Hu Rong's current power, if this news gets out, he might not be able to protect the gold mine. That's why Hu Rong decided to survey it himself; only in this way could he feel at ease.

Hu Rong thought for a moment, then said, "Come back to Hpakant with me. Go to the warehouse and select the jadeite rough stones you need. I'll have someone send them back to China in a while..."

"Alright, Li Zhen, you stay here and set up a minefield around this area. But when Brother Hu comes in later, make sure it doesn't blow up..."

Zhuang Rui nodded. He had been away for almost a month and wanted to go back to China. Huangfu Yun had been urging him to return many times, as the ocean shipwreck exhibition hall was waiting for him to open.

Upon hearing this, Hu Rong immediately summoned Zhang Guojun and several squad leaders of the mine protection team, and discussed the matter with Li Zhen. They decided to leave thirty men to guard the area, while the rest would go back to transport weapons, supplies, tents, and other essential tools.

After arranging everything, Hu Rong returned to Zhuang Rui's side and said with a smile, "What's wrong? Now you're not going to mention the shares?"

Hu Ronghui was in high spirits. Although there were many risks involved, he had gained a gold mine for free, which was enough to make him laugh in his dreams.

Chapter 1004 Jade Warehouse

"Brother Hu, you're the local bigwig. Even if you don't give me a share of this gold mine, there's nothing I can do about it..."

Zhuang Rui deliberately put on a sour face. He believed that with Hu Rong's worldly experience, even though the two were related, Hu Rong would definitely handle the matter to his satisfaction.

"You brat, let's keep things separate. I'll be responsible for all the funding and equipment for this mine, from the initial investment and mining to the later refining and sales. As for the profits... you get 60% and I get 40%, how about that?"

After thinking for a while, Hu Rong offered a distribution plan, which was the biggest concession he could make.

Firstly, the gold mine's reserves are still unknown. Secondly, mining gold here requires a large workforce, and the investment in the refining plant is not insignificant. If the gold mine's reserves are small, Hu Rong might even lose money.

"Okay, let's go with this ratio. I trust you to handle things, Brother Hu..."

Zhuang Rui was naturally very satisfied. He had simply discovered this gold mine, and he could own 60% of it without spending any money or doing anything. How could he not be satisfied?

Zhuang Rui had also considered whether he should travel around and see how many rare minerals might still be unexploited underground. After all, these days, the truly wealthy are the ones who play the resource game.

Don't be fooled by the fact that most of the world's richest people are in the financial sector; their wealth is mostly reflected in the stock market. If there are a few Black Fridays, their assets will shrink immediately.

While those mining tycoons may not appear on any wealth lists, their influence far surpasses that of the billionaires on those lists. To exaggerate a bit, their actions can even affect the decisions of some superpowers.

However, Zhuang Rui's time passed in the blink of an eye. If he really did that, his happy days would probably be over, and he would probably have to go through many departments to get approval if he wanted to go abroad.

...

The people who attacked the jade mine earlier were likely Duwa's men. Now that Duwa's organization has been eliminated, the mine's security forces can be redeployed. Hu Rong dispatched over 200 men with various supplies to Zhang Guojun and his group.

After arranging these matters, Hu Rong returned to Hpakant with Zhuang Rui and others. Since Duwa had been dealt with, they did not take an armored vehicle this time, but instead rode in Hu Rong's off-road vehicle, arriving in Chinatown in just a few hours.

Upon arriving in Chinatown, Hu Rong instructed his second brother to take Zhuang Rui to the jade warehouse to select raw stones, while he himself disappeared in a flash, busy preparing instruments for surveying gold mines.

"Brother Jun, these... these raw stones aren't just from that new mine, are they?"

Led by Hu Jun, Zhuang Rui passed through several sentry posts before arriving at a house that looked very ordinary on the outside. However, once the door was opened, the interior space was quite large, measuring three or four hundred square meters, and was filled with jadeite rough stones of various shapes.

The difference between the rough stones from the new mine and those from the old mine is significant. As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the warehouse, he sensed something was wrong, because he could tell from the surface of many of the rough stones that they were from the old mine.

"Brother Zhuang, all the jadeite rough stones in this warehouse are accumulated by our Hu family over three generations. Many of them are old mine jadeite that has already been dug out. My elder brother said that if you see any you like, he'll send them all to you later..."

Hu Jun is thirty-five or thirty-six years old. Judging from his appearance, he looks very honest. However, he is the main person in charge of the Hu family in the Chinese city. He is in charge of all aspects of the Hu family's affairs in the area. His reputation in Hpakant is even greater than that of Hu Rong.

However, Hu Jun was also very puzzled today. He didn't know why Hu Rong had asked him to bring Zhuang Rui to select raw stones as soon as he got home, and even specifically instructed him to open this warehouse and let Zhuang Rui choose freely.

You should know that these are top-quality raw stones accumulated by the Hu family over generations. Any one of them would be fought over by everyone. This is the foundation and basis of the Hu family's strength.

The jade in this warehouse isn't all from the Hu family's own mines; many of them were stolen from others in the past, so each piece has its own history.

If Zhuang Rui were to be careless and expose him, Hu Jun wouldn't know how to explain it to the elders in his family. However, as the head of the family, Hu Rong had the right to do so, which is why Hu Jun was currently in a very difficult position.

Seeing Zhuang Rui enter Warehouse No. 1, Hu Jun couldn't hold back any longer and said, "Hey, Brother Zhuang, actually, all the rough stones from that new jade mine are in Warehouse No. 2..."

"Oh? What Brother Jun just said..."

Zhuang Rui pretended to be confused. Just now, brother, you said you could pick whatever you wanted. Are you going to change your mind right away?

"Uh, it's nothing. Big Brother instructed me to let you pick whatever you like, Brother Zhuang. Oh, by the way... I have something to do. Xiao Wu, keep an eye on things for your Brother Zhuang. I'll be right back..."

Hu Jun chuckled dryly, but didn't know what to say in front of Zhuang Rui. He beckoned to the Hu family member who was watching the warehouse, apologized to Zhuang Rui, and then hurriedly went to find Hu Rong.

Zhuang Rui smiled and didn't take it to heart. He could guess Hu Jun's feelings to some extent, and even when Hu Rong let him into this warehouse to select raw materials, Zhuang Rui knew that the Hu family was doing this to repay the favor of eight hundred million US dollars.

Zhuang Rui checked the time on his phone; it was already past 5 p.m., almost lunchtime. He couldn't help but laugh. It seemed Hu Rong had a backup plan, not giving him much time to select raw materials from the warehouse.

"Brother Zhuang, is that a cell phone you're holding?"

Xiao Wu, who was following behind Zhuang Rui, looked at the phone in Zhuang Rui's hand with envy. There were mobile phones in Hpakant, but ordinary people couldn't afford them, and many people had never even seen one.

In the case of Chinatown, apart from Hu Rong and some department heads, there are no direct descendants of the family.

Xiao Wu, who was only in his early twenties, was particularly fascinated by these new things, especially cell phones, which were usually only held by important people. Looking at the brick-like walkie-talkie in his hand and then at the small cell phone in Zhuang Rui's hand, his envy was palpable.

"Yes, don't they have them here in Myanmar?"

Zhuang Rui answered casually, only to realize afterward that it seemed very rare to see people using mobile phones in Myanmar.

Xiao Wu shook his head and said, "No, only Big Brother and a few others here have it. Brother Zhuang, is this expensive?"

Myanmar is mountainous, and the investment required to install wireless mobile devices is very large. The government does not have the funds for this, while equipment suppliers with the funds are concerned about cost recovery. Therefore, mobile phones are not widespread in Myanmar.

This is somewhat similar to China in the early 1990s, when people would stop and stare at someone walking down the street with a mobile phone, which would elicit envious glances.

"It's not expensive, Xiao Wu, you can play with this..."

Listening to Xiao Wu's words, Zhuang Rui recalled the way Wei Ge looked when he was in college, holding his phone. He felt a pang of emotion, turned off the phone, took out his SIM card, and handed the phone to Xiao Wu.

"No...no, Brother Zhuang, I can't accept this. It's incredibly expensive..."

Xiao Wu was startled by Zhuang Rui's actions. Although he longed for it, he dared not accept Zhuang Rui's things, as the Hu family's rules were still very strict.

"It's not expensive at all. Just take it. If Hu Rong asks, just say it was from me..."

Zhuang Rui smiled and handed the phone to Xiao Wu. These days in China, everyone, even those who buy groceries or collect scraps, has one. It can truly be called a "phone" now.

Seeing Xiao Wu holding the phone, looking like he wanted to return it but was reluctant, Zhuang Rui smiled and said, "It's okay, maybe in a while, everyone in Chinatown will be able to afford a mobile phone..."

"Really? Brother Zhuang, everyone can afford it?"

Xiao Wu looked incredulous. There are tens of thousands of people in Chinatown. Even if you take away the elderly and children, there are still tens of thousands of people. If everyone had a cell phone, how much money would that cost?

"Yes, everyone can use it. You'll see in a while. Okay, this is the power-on version. There are games inside. Play them. I'll give you the charger later..."

Looking at the warehouse full of old mine jadeite, Zhuang Rui lost interest in chatting with Xiao Wu. After teaching him how to turn on the machine, he turned and went into the warehouse.

Wow, they're really rich and powerful!

Looking at the warehouse full of old mine jadeite rough stones, Zhuang Rui felt like he had entered a treasure mountain.

It should be noted that old mine jadeite is extremely rare nowadays. An ordinary person would keep a piece as a family heirloom and hide it under the bed (this is a true story; a comrade in Yangzhou had a piece of jadeite weighing over 70 kilograms that he had kept under the bed for seven or eight years). But in front of Zhuang Rui, there were as many as a thousand pieces.

"The Hu family thinks it's pretty good; these materials can be considered top-quality..."

There were thousands of raw stones in the warehouse. Zhuang Rui was too impatient to examine them one by one, so he directly released his spiritual energy to sense them.

Most of these rough stones are completely uncut, with very few having windows cut into them. However, the vast majority contain jadeite, and the quality is quite good, generally reaching the icy variety.

There were even two pieces of glass-type jadeite, with a slightly lower green color, which were almost comparable to imperial green. This broadened Zhuang Rui's horizons, proving that the reputation of a jadeite family was well-deserved.

Zhuang Rui didn't stand on ceremony and marked out more than a hundred pieces of icy and glassy jadeite with chalk. No matter how valuable these raw stones were, they couldn't possibly be worth 800 million. Zhuang Rui had no psychological burden when selecting them.

However, Zhuang Rui still left some assets for the Hu family. Otherwise, if Hu Rong were to cut open the family's stock of raw stones and find only bean-green jadeite, his older brother would be furious.

"Brother Zhuang, you haven't even started picking yet, have you? Xiao Wu, go... turn on the headlights so your brother Zhuang can properly choose some good materials..."

After Zhuang Rui marked the rough stones he needed, he had just walked back to the warehouse entrance when he was greeted by Hu Jun, who had a beaming smile on his face.

Chapter 1005 Integration (Part 1)

"No need, I've already chosen them and marked them with chalk. Brother Jun, have someone send these rough stones back to China later..."

Zhuang Rui was initially surprised by Hu Jun's sudden enthusiasm, but after a moment's thought, he understood—Hu Jun must have asked Hu Rong about the US dollars.

In fact, Zhuang Rui was wrong. Hu Rong hadn't even had a chance to mention the \$800 million yet. He had only mentioned it to Hu Jun, saying that he would need Zhuang Rui's help to return to China in the future.

This book is being published for the first time, providing you with a reading experience free of errors and disordered chapters.

It should be noted that the Hu family has longed to return to China for generations, and this extends to the education of their children. If Zhuang Rui can truly accomplish this, the Hu family will not say a word even if they give him some ancestral stones or move the entire storehouse.

"Brother Zhuang, why don't you pick out a few more pieces?" In Hu Jun's opinion, in just over 10 minutes, how many pieces could Zhuang Rui possibly pick out?

"That's enough, Brother Jun. If we keep picking on you, we'll be at a huge loss. Let's go eat, we're a bit hungry after a long day..."

Zhuang Rui chuckled. The rough stones he selected were the best materials from the warehouse. Zhuang Rui was determined that when he cut these rough stones in the future, the Hu family members must not find out, otherwise they would be so angry that they would vomit blood.

After dinner, the Hu family held a family meeting, and Zhuang Rui was fortunate enough to attend. He saw many elderly people in their seventies and eighties with missing teeth. When Hu Rong announced that the family was expected to return to China, many people were moved to tears.

Seeing this scene, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but sigh. The Hu family was considered to be doing relatively well in overseas Chinese communities, and they still had such a strong desire to return to their homeland. As for those Chinese who were not doing well, their feeling of not being able to return to their homeland was probably even stronger.

When they heard that Zhuang Rui had proposed the matter and would even assist in it, the old men held onto Zhuang Rui's hands tightly, refusing to let go. All night long, Zhuang Rui heard words of gratitude all he heard. As for how Hu Rong and the others discussed it, Zhuang Rui didn't hear a single word.

The next day, Zhuang Rui went to Warehouse No. 2 to select some more rough stones, and then he and Peng Fei left Hpakant and returned to Mandalay to take their private plane directly to Beijing.

Before Zhuang Rui could even spend a few days with his family, Huangfu Yun, who had been eagerly awaiting his arrival, dragged him to the museum. The shipwreck exhibition hall had already been built, and even the ancient Song Dynasty shipwreck had been transported in, just waiting for Boss Zhuang to preside over the opening ceremony.

...

"Brother Huangfu, everyone, just treat me as a decoration. These things can be handled just fine without my presence, can't they?"

Zhuang Rui sat in Huangfu Yun's office. Yun Man, Manager Wu of "Qin Ruilin", and even Zhao Hanxuan of "Xuanrui Zhai" had come over.

It was rare for Boss Zhuang to seriously inquire about business matters, and these managers almost burst into tears. However, the purpose for which Zhuang Rui had gathered these people today was something none of them had expected.

"Boss, if you keep saying that, I'm quitting! What kind of boss are you? You don't care about anything. So even if our shop gets squeezed out, you don't care at all?"

Zhao Hanxuan was older and had been a boss himself before, so he spoke to Zhuang Rui without any reservations. Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's irresponsible remarks, he immediately jumped up.

"Hey, Lao Zhao, isn't your place the most hassle-free? Otherwise... I'll take this shop back from you?"

Zhuang Rui was most afraid of these trivial business matters. If any trouble arose, he would have already considered transferring "Xuanrui Zhai" to another company.

Firstly, "Xuanrui Zhai" doesn't make much money, but it has a lot of business. It deals with various departments like industry and commerce bureaus, tax bureaus, and police stations every day. Some of these people are quite arrogant; they know Zhao Hanxuan is just the manager, not the owner. Several times, when Zhuang Rui was notified to attend some kind of public security meeting, he didn't go and was subsequently given a hard time.

It was Ouyang Jun who eventually settled the matter, which made Zhuang Rui very unhappy. The smaller the business, the more people are in charge. Fortunately, Panjiayuan has a relatively large influence now, otherwise even the urban management officers could get involved.

Secondly, given Zhuang Rui's reputation, he no longer needs to set up a shop in Panjiayuan to buy antiques. The Dingguang Museum is a living advertisement, and Huangfu Yun's collection website is very successful, with many items being sold internally. Therefore, whether Xuanrui Zhai exists or not is not so important to Zhuang Rui.

"Hey, Zhuang Rui, I didn't mean that at all. I was just...venting..."

Zhao Hanxuan was stunned for a moment after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. He was very happy with his job as the head manager, earning hundreds of thousands every year and not having to worry about the

store's profits and losses. If he were to go back to being the boss, he probably wouldn't be able to sleep tonight.

"Old Zhao, don't worry, I'm really overwhelmed right now and can't take care of many things. The shop is doing quite well, you can consider it. The price is negotiable. If you don't have the money, you can hold onto it for now..."

Zhuang Rui has no real interest in doing business. What he wants most now is to see his children grow up healthy and, in his lifetime, to discover as many shipwrecks and treasures buried by history as possible.

Of all the businesses he's currently involved in, only the museum is something Zhuang Rui is really interested in. After all, the artifacts he's explored or salvaged need to be displayed there, which aligns with his interests and hobbies.

Zhao Hanxuan thought about Zhuang Rui's words seriously for a while, but in the end he shook his head and said, "Zhuang Rui, it's no use. I don't have the same sharpness I used to have. My child is about to graduate from university, why should I worry about that?"

Although he was doing something similar to the boss, Zhao Hanxuan knew that his mindset was nowhere near Zhuang Rui's. Zhuang Rui could afford to lose any amount of money, but he couldn't.

"Old Zhao, for the past two years, you and Da Xiong have been managing the business. I haven't put in any effort as the boss. I'm really not a very good boss..."

Zhuang Rui first offered a self-criticism, then presented the plan he had already devised: "I'd like to change the shareholding structure of this store. Old Zhao, you've worked incredibly hard these past few years, so you should get 30%. Old Zhao, don't rush, let me finish..."

Da Xiong is slowly getting the hang of things now. I'll give him 20% of the profits. Monkey has made a lot of money in seal engraving, so he only needs 10%. The remaining 40% is still mine. But from now on, I'll only be in charge of profit sharing. You guys can handle the specific business operations..."

Zhuang Rui had been considering this plan for a long time. He was a little reluctant to sell the entire "Xuanrui Zhai" brand, as the name held great sentimental value.

In recent years, "Xuanrui Zhai" business has been booming, which can be attributed to Zhao Hanxuan, Daxiong and others. Although he has treated them well and given them a lot of money, they are not as attentive as he is to his own business. He believes that after the shares are distributed, he will not have to worry about the store anymore.

Zhuang Rui is a sentimental person. Da Xiong and Monkey followed him to Beijing from Peng Fei, so he should give them a chance to be independent. No matter how high the salary is, it's not as comfortable as being his own boss.

"So... Zhuang Rui, then... then aren't you at a huge disadvantage?"

Old Zhao hesitated a bit upon hearing this. He knew the history of this shop best. The current "Xuanrui Zhai" was not the same as it was two years ago. It was doing very well in Panjiayuan. The signboard alone was probably worth several million.

Moreover, Xuanrui Zhai's annual profit is now over five million, so this 30% share is 1.5 million, which is equivalent to more than three years' wages for Lao Zhao.

"Old Zhao, as long as you guys make this shop bigger and better, I might even make a profit. Alright, that's settled then. Go back and discuss it with Da Xiong and Monkey first, then come see Brother Huangfu later. He's my personal lawyer; you can talk to him about the specifics..."

In ancient times, specifically before the liberation, antique shops typically had three managers. These managers received a share of the profits, which was to prevent other shops from poaching their staff. Of course, back then, the owners wouldn't have given Zhuang Rui such a high percentage of the profits.

"Okay, I'll go back now and see what Nobita and the monkey have to say..."

Seeing that Zhuang Rui had made up his mind, Zhao Hanxuan didn't say much. He knew that with Zhuang Rui's current wealth, the money that "Xuanrui Zhai" earned was really nothing. Zhuang Rui would rather use his skills in managing "Xuanrui Zhai" to salvage two shipwrecks overseas.

...

"Hey Mr. Zhuang, what's going on here?"

After Zhao Hanxuan left, Huangfu Yun looked at Zhuang Rui with a face full of doubt. He felt that Zhuang Rui's words today were all pre-planned.

Zhuang Rui waved his hand and said, "Brother Huangfu, don't rush, we can talk about your business later. Manager Wu, tell me about Qin Ruilin's recent work..."

"President Zhuang, Qin Ruilin's sales in the first two quarters of this year increased by 130% compared to the same period last year, with total revenue of 168.3 million. The vast majority of the jewelry sold were jade ornaments..."

After deducting all expenses, there is still 154 million left...

Manager Wu, speaking in a Hong Kong-accented Mandarin, opened his notebook and began reporting the revenue of Qin Ruilin Jewelry Store to Zhuang Rui.

"Sales for two quarters totaled over 160 million?"

Zhuang Rui was also startled when he heard this. He remembered that when he first took over Qin Ruilin a few years ago, the sales volume in a quarter was only about 30 million. Now it has more than doubled.

Moreover, unlike before, Qin Ruilin now sources all the raw materials and supplies for his main product, the premium jadeite jewelry series, himself. By eliminating intermediaries, the profit margin is many times higher than before.

Zhuang Rui did a rough calculation and found that, after deducting various expenses, there would be at least 120 million yuan in net profit out of the 160 million yuan. Of course, this was also inseparable from his skill in gambling on stones.

## Chapter 1006 Integration (Part Two)

Because the jade jewelry sold by "Qin Ruilin" in Beijing is not only of high quality but also entirely hand-carved, it has become the most renowned jade jewelry specialty store in the country in just two or three years.

Not only do you find high-end jadeite jewelry here that you won't find in other shops, but you can also occasionally find top-quality jadeite such as blood jade bracelets and imperial green pendants.

As a result, not only big stars in the film and television industry, or jade collectors and enthusiasts, but even some well-known auction houses will take the initiative to propose cooperation to Qin Ruilin to help him auction some extremely rare jade pieces on the market.

Even though Zhuang Rui never interfered with the operation of the jewelry store, Manager Wu was very dedicated. He built a large consumer network based on the different spending power of consumers and formulated a VIP customer system.

Whenever new goods arrive at the store, Manager Wu will immediately notify customers with purchasing power. Often, many newly manufactured jade ornaments are bought by customers who have heard about them before they even have a chance to be put on the shelves.

Therefore, in recent years, the "Qin Ruilin" store in Beijing has become synonymous with luxury jade. People who come here to select and buy jade are all wealthy and noble, and naturally, money rolls in.

The process of putting a high-end jadeite ornament on the market involves only two steps: raw materials and processing. All the jadeite ornaments in Zhuang Rui's store are made from raw materials obtained through gambling on rough stones, which greatly reduces costs.

As for processing, Zhuang Rui started last year to expand Luo Jiang's studio in Pengcheng into a small jade processing factory. Luo Jiang serves as the factory manager, and his apprentices have also grown up. Some small ornaments are carved by them.

Although Zhuang Rui has improved the treatment of Luo Jiang and others in the past two years, it is still a small amount of money compared to the continuous flow of jade ornaments from the factory. Looking at the jewelry industry across the country, Zhuang Rui's Qin Ruilin probably has the lowest cost.

After listening to Manager Wu's introduction, Zhuang Rui turned to Yun Man and asked, "President Yun, what is Qin Ruilin's monthly employee salary expense?"

Zhuang Rui has no intention of relinquishing his shares in this jewelry store, but Manager Wu is a shrewd manager and can compensate for it elsewhere.

"Including Manager Wu, the monthly employee expenses are 580,000 yuan..."

Yunman was in charge of all of Zhuang Rui's business finances and could readily provide information on Qin Ruilin's expenses. Of the 580,000 yuan she mentioned, 300,000 yuan was Manager Wu's salary, while the remaining 280,000 yuan was the salaries of the deputy manager and sales staff in the jewelry store.

Don't be fooled by the fact that the remaining people only received 280,000 yuan; it was actually quite a lot. Qin Ruilin only had eighteen salespersons in total. Apart from the deputy manager and the team leader, whose salaries were slightly higher, even the ordinary salespersons earned more than 10,000 yuan.

It's worth noting that in today's society, an ordinary sales clerk can earn over 10,000 yuan a month, almost the same as a flight attendant. The pay is quite high, which makes Qin Ruilin Jewelry Store a place full of beautiful women, creating a beautiful scene.

Zhuang Rui pondered for a moment, weighing the options in his mind, and then said, "Manager Wu's previous annual salary was around 3 million, right? Let's raise it to 5 million. As for the store's employees, their monthly salaries can be increased by 1,000 to 5,000 yuan depending on their performance. Manager Wu can formulate the specific rules..."

In Zhuang Rui's business empire, besides the Dingguang Museum, the Qin Ruilin Jewelry Store is now a goldmine. If things continue to develop as they are, it can bring Zhuang Rui hundreds of millions of RMB in revenue every year, which is much better than Zhuang Rui's vague overseas investments.

Therefore, spending an extra two or three hundred thousand RMB each month is a trivial matter for Zhuang Rui, and with Yunman's financial supervision, he is not afraid of Manager Wu playing any tricks.

"Thank you, thank you, Mr. Zhuang..."

Nobody complains about having too much money. Manager Wu beamed with joy upon hearing Zhuang Rui's proposal. An annual salary of five million—even CEOs at some multinational corporations might not earn that much.

Zhuang Rui waved his hand and said, "Alright, Lao Wu, there are rewards for merits and punishments for demerits. You've done a really good job these past few years. You'll need to pay more attention to things at the store in the future..."

By the way, the jade market is expected to rise further in the next few years, so you could consider raising the prices of some of your jewelry. You can discuss the specifics with the Qin family in Hong Kong..."

Zhuang Rui himself studied finance. Although he wasn't very interested in doing business, he had a deep understanding of the capital market. Since he had spent a sum of money for nothing, he naturally wanted to make up for it in some way.

Given the spending power of the "Qin Ruilin" jewelry store's customer base, they wouldn't care whether an imperial green jade item sells for 5 million or 6 million. These people are like what was said in the movie "Big Shot's Funeral": they only buy expensive things, not necessarily the right ones! Selling a couple more items will make up for all the losses.

"Zhuang Rui, why do I feel like you're making your final arrangements? Is that really necessary?"

After Manager Wu left, Huangfu Yun looked at Zhuang Rui with suspicion. Wasn't everything fine before? Why did he have to split up the business?

"Get out of my way, you'll die while I won't..."

After Lao Wu and the others left, only Huangfu Yun and Yun Man remained in the room. Their relationship was more like friends than boss and subordinate, so they spoke quite casually.

"Then what are you doing? Right, everyone else got the benefits, but what about me?"

Huangfu Yun suddenly laughed, looking at Zhuang Rui with a greedy expression, rubbing his two fingers together.

Zhuang Rui glared at Huangfu Yun, annoyed, and said, "You and Yunman both get a share. The Dingguang Museum will give you two a combined 5% share. As for how you two divide it, that's none of my business..."

"Five percent of the shares in the Dingguang Museum?"

Even though Huangfu Yun knew that Zhuang Rui wanted to give him benefits, he was still shocked by Zhuang Rui's generosity.

Don't underestimate the seemingly small figure of five percent. Keep in mind that the Dingguang Museum is currently valued at at least four billion US dollars, so five percent is two hundred million US dollars. Even if Huangfu Yun and Yun Man each received half, they would immediately join the ranks of billionaires.

Huangfu Yun touched Yun Man beside him in disbelief and said, "Wife... pinch me, did I... hear that right?"

Huangfu Yun's previous annual salary was only around five million, which was enough to live comfortably in Beijing. However, he was a sword collector and had to invest a lot of money every year, so he wasn't very well-off.

"Ouch, you actually pinched me?"

Seeing Huangfu Yun jump up from the sofa, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but laugh, "Don't get your hopes up. Let me tell you, you can only receive dividends from this 5% stake every year; you can't cash it out. Also, if you leave the museum, the shares will be automatically cancelled..."

Zhuang Rui isn't stupid. Every item in this museum is a priceless cultural relic. He wouldn't give away his shares for free. Giving Huangfu Yun these "dry shares" is just to increase his annual income.

"Damn, capitalist...you're a complete and utter capitalist..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Huangfu Yun jumped even higher than before. His dream of becoming a billionaire had been shattered by Zhuang Rui's words, and he couldn't help but feel a little sullen.

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this, pointing at Huangfu Yun and saying, "Come on, if your brother puts more effort into the museum, you'll earn more and get a bigger share, right?"

"That's true, but... you gave me these shares just to make me your slave? You're ruthless, you even schemed against my wife and me..."

Huangfu Yun tilted his head and thought for a moment. The Dingguang Museum now maintains a daily visitor flow of about 20,000 people, and its monthly ticket revenue alone, excluding souvenirs, is as high as 30 million.

Although tourism has peak and off-peak seasons, Dingguang Museum's annual income is around 350 million yuan, and even after deducting various expenses and maintenance costs, it still amounts to as much as 200 million yuan.

Therefore, the five percent that Zhuang Rui gave to Huangfu Yun was equivalent to giving him 10 million yuan for free every year. After carefully calculating the amount, Huangfu Yun felt relieved.

"Ah, now that I've finished dealing with this, I feel so relieved..."

Zhuang Rui stretched with a smile, earning him eye-rolls from Huangfu Yun and Yun Man, who had never seen a boss who complained about having too much money.

...

However, Zhuang Rui was not able to relax in the following days. The opening of the shipwreck museum was another grand event for the Chinese archaeological community, and experts from the national scientific research community once again gathered in Beijing.

Although the meeting was chaired by Professor Meng, Zhuang Rui, as Professor Meng's disciple and the owner of the sunken ship, was also extremely busy.

However, Zhuang Rui did not waste this opportunity. He contacted many television media outlets and publicized the significance of the shipwreck salvage. As a result, Dingguang Museum once again became famous.

The most direct result of this was that the museum's daily revenue skyrocketed, and the number of tourists surged from 20,000 to around 40,000, far exceeding the museum's capacity. Director Huangfu was all smiles all day long.

"Ah, this kind of life is so comfortable..."

A week after the shipwreck museum opened, Zhuang Rui finally finished his work and had some free time to spend with his wife and children at home. Sitting under the awning watching Fang Fang and Yuan Yuan playing with the white lion and King Kong, Zhuang Rui felt incredibly warm inside.

Now his suburban manor has become a wildlife park. The white lion's offspring have all grown quite large and are considered the manor's tyrants. The golden eagle is undoubtedly the manor's second tyrant, often taking anyone it doesn't like for a spin in the sky.

King Kong blended in with the people in the manor. This intelligent creature often made people forget that it was a wild beast.

Chapter 1007 What's going on?

September in Beijing wasn't so hot anymore. Lying under a parasol by the swimming pool, Zhuang Rui chatted casually with Qin Xuanbing, feeling a special peace in his heart.

Zhuang Rui's two-year-old children are much taller than other children their age, and at first glance they look like three or four-year-olds. This is the effect of Zhuang Rui often using his spiritual energy to help them regulate their bodies.

The two little ones were already splashing around in the pool. With King Kong protecting them, and Ouyang Wan standing on the shore with a worried look on her face, there was no concern that the little ones were in danger.

"Honey, you won't run off again this time, will you?"

Qin Xuanbing peeled a grape and held it to Zhuang Rui's lips. Ever since the incident when she and Zhuang Rui were attacked by pirates, Qin Xuanbing realized that Zhuang Rui's trips were not as safe as she had imagined. Therefore, she was a little worried about Zhuang Rui's trip to Myanmar.

"What? You want me to retire already?"

After Zhuang Rui finished eating the grapes from his mouth, he casually kissed Qin Xuanbing's small hand. Although they were an old married couple, the shy Qin Xuanbing still glared at Zhuang Rui with embarrassment and annoyance.

"I'm not going out; I'll stay home with my wife and kids..."

Zhuang Rui's words were somewhat insincere. He secretly glanced at Qin Xuanbing and continued, "Uh... even if we go out, we'll take you all with us!"

The family business has been taken care of, so Zhuang Rui doesn't need to worry about it at all. Zhuang Rui does have a plan to go out to sea. There are several shipwrecks with abundant spiritual energy near the China Sea.

It's important to know that winter temperatures are too cold for sea operations, so the best time to salvage a shipwreck is from early spring to August or September. After that, you'll have to wait until next year.

This means that Zhuang Rui's luxury salvage ship basically needs to rest for nearly half a year. If Zhuang Rui doesn't make good use of it, it would be a waste of the tens of millions of yuan spent on the salvage ship every year.

"I knew you couldn't stay still..."

Qin Xuanbing gave Zhuang Rui a reproachful look, but then peeled another grape and handed it to him. She knew that at Zhuang Rui's age, it was the time to focus on his career, so she didn't really blame him.

"Okay, honey, I promise I won't go anywhere for the next few days, alright?"

Zhuang Rui shamelessly put his arm around Qin Xuanbing's waist, prompting Qin Xuanbing to whisper, "Mom and the child are here, can't you be a little more discreet..."

"Uh, so... tonight, damn, whose call was that?"

As Zhuang Rui was chatting with his wife, the phone on the round table next to them rang.

"Huh? Brother Lei..."

Zhuang Rui picked up the phone and was somewhat surprised. His older brother was usually so busy that it was rare for him to have time to call him. He answered immediately, "Brother Lei, what's up? You rarely call your little brother..."

"Xiao Rui, I need to discuss something with you. Are you free now?"

Ouyang Lei spoke with a strong voice. The chief's health had been poor lately, so as his deputy, he had more work to do. However, for Ouyang Lei, who was in his forties, work was a catalyst that kept him full of enthusiasm every day.

"Did you need something?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment upon hearing this. Could it be that Ouyang Lei found out about the things he said about Ouyang Lei in Myanmar? If Ouyang Lei found out that he said he was "no good" in that area, he would definitely be in big trouble.

"Yes, I need to talk to you about something. It's not convenient for you to come to the Central Military Commission..."

Ouyang Lei hesitated for a moment on the other end of the phone, then said, "How about this, aren't you a researcher at the Peking University Archaeological Institute? Let's meet there in an hour and a half..."

"Hey, Brother Lei, you even know about such a small thing?"

Zhuang Rui spoke with a hint of smugness. After all, researchers at the Peking University Archaeological Institute enjoy professorial待遇 (treatment/benefits). Even his senior, Dr. Ren, is only an associate researcher.

Because Zhuang Rui used the discovery of the Dingguang Sword to prove that the Ten Famous Swords of Ancient China did indeed exist, and later salvaged a Song Dynasty shipwreck, which played a prominent role in the research of Chinese Tang and Song history, Peking University made an exception and promoted him, a guy who had just graduated with a master's degree, to the level of researcher.

A 29-year-old researcher is probably the first of its kind at Peking University, or even in the whole country. Zhuang Rui still cares a lot about this title, after all, that guy Jin Pangzi is almost fifty years old and is only an associate researcher at the Palace Museum.

However, this matter was only recently approved, and Zhuang Rui only received the news yesterday. He didn't expect Ouyang Lei to find out so quickly.

"Okay...Brother Lei, what's up? Tell me first? Hello...hello?"

Ouyang Lei, being in a high position, exuded an unconscious authority when he spoke, which made Zhuang Rui subconsciously agree. Before he could ask anything else, Ouyang Lei had already hung up the phone.

For Ouyang Lei to call personally, it must be something important, but he didn't explain what it was about, which made Zhuang Rui feel uneasy, like he was being scratched by a cat.

Zhuang Rui hung up the phone, looked at Qin Xuanbing apologetically, and said, "Xuanbing, I'm sorry, Brother Lei called and said he needs to talk to me, so I have to go out now..."

"Alright, go ahead. Don't forget what you said, you have to take us three with you when you go out again..." Qin Xuanbing has lived in Beijing for more than two years and now speaks fluent Beijing dialect.

"Don't worry, I definitely will!"

Zhuang Rui jumped up and suddenly kissed Qin Xuanbing on the cheek. By the time Qin Xuanbing screamed, he had already disappeared.

...

Since Peng Fei's wife, Zhang Qian, was due to give birth in the next couple of days, and Li Zhen was far away in Myanmar, Zhuang Rui drove himself to Peking University. When he arrived at the Institute of Archaeology, he found two soldiers with pistols slung over their waists standing at the entrance.

Zhuang Rui knew that Ouyang Lei's current military rank was high enough to qualify him for this level of guard, so he didn't pay much attention to it at the moment. After verifying his identity, he walked into the research institute.

"Brother Lei, you could have just talked on the phone, why did you have to come here?"

In the lobby outside the research institute, Ouyang Lei was examining the specimens displayed on the walls with a curious expression.

Ouyang Lei pointed at the skulls, seemingly unrelated to the question, and said, "Xiao Rui, is this what you usually study?"

"Ahem, Brother Lei, those things are specimens dug out of tombs. The research institute has a project to reconstruct the faces of these ancient humans, so they were borrowed temporarily..."

After Zhuang Rui finished answering, he looked at Ouyang Lei with a puzzled expression and asked, "Fourth Brother, you didn't ask me to popularize scientific research knowledge, did you? Why are you asking these questions?"

Zhuang Rui was really puzzled. Given his relationship with Ouyang Lei, they could discuss anything at home. He wondered what Ouyang Lei meant by inviting him to the archaeological institute today.

"These things... are quite interesting. By the way, Xiao Rui, you salvaged a Song Dynasty shipwreck a while ago, right? I heard it was salvaged from a depth of over a thousand meters, and even foreign media reported on it?"

Ouyang Lei's leaps in thought left Zhuang Rui completely bewildered. What was all this about? How did it all end up back on the shipwreck? Did the government want him to hand over the cargo from that shipwreck?

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui said, "Brother Lei, I spent a lot of money to salvage that ship. If the country could spend that much money, it could salvage it too. It's nothing special..."

Zhuang Rui's meaning was clear: he paid for the salvage himself, and the country should pay for it themselves; they shouldn't try to take advantage of him.

"Hey kid, what are you thinking about? You think I came here just for that wrecked ship?"

Ouyang Lei, being the person he was, naturally understood the implication in Zhuang Rui's words. He pointed at Zhuang Rui, both amused and exasperated, and said, "Don't worry, your assets, though they may seem substantial, aren't actually that much. The country won't take advantage of you..."

"You said you weren't taking advantage of me, but when I borrowed a helicopter to transport some gold, you took half of it..." Zhuang Rui muttered, but his voice wasn't loud, because it was something he had done voluntarily.

Just as Ouyang Lei was about to say something, he looked up and saw four more people walking in through the door, so he shut his mouth. Zhuang Rui, however, stood up and went to greet them, saying to the person in front, "Teacher Meng, isn't today your day off? What brings you here?"

Zhuang Rui didn't recognize any of the people who came in with Professor Meng, but judging from their demeanor, they should all be leaders, at least they all had a leader's belly. On the other hand, Ouyang Lei, this real general, did not have a general's belly caused by being overweight.

Zhuang Rui was increasingly puzzled. It seemed that Ouyang Lei's reason for contacting him was related to archaeology, and that he hadn't chosen this place rashly.

"Dean Liu called me, saying there was something he needed to discuss..."

Before Professor Meng could finish speaking, the man who appeared to be a leader behind him stepped forward to greet Ouyang Lei. When they were about four or five meters apart, he extended his hands and said, "You must be Chief Ouyang? My surname is Liu, just call me Xiao Liu..."

Dean Liu's behavior disgusted Zhuang Rui. "Damn, he's in his fifties or sixties, yet he calls himself 'Little Liu' when he sees Ouyang Lei. Isn't that just pretending to be young?"

"Dean Liu, hello, please have a seat, everyone please have a seat..."

Although Ouyang Lei was dressed casually today, he exuded a very imposing aura. With just a few casual words, he placed himself in a dominant position.

After Ouyang Lei sat down, he said to one of the people next to Dean Liu, "Old Yu, your minister certainly has a big ego."

Upon hearing Ouyang Lei's words, Old Yu immediately stood up and said respectfully, "Chief Ouyang, if I had known it was you coming, the Minister would have arrived immediately. However... although this matter is not insignificant, it shouldn't warrant your involvement, should it?"

"This matter involves my younger brother, so it would be better if I explained it..."

Ouyang Lei waved his hand, gesturing for Lao Yu to sit down, then turned to Zhuang Rui and said, "Xiao Rui, Lao Yu is the Vice Minister of the Ministry of Transport. You two should get to know each other..."

Chapter 1008 Awa Maru (1)

"The Vice Minister of Transportation...?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned when he heard this. Although he could tell that these people were all leaders, he didn't think much of Lao Yu's initial performance. He never expected that Ouyang Lei's introduction would reveal that Lao Yu was actually a deputy ministerial-level cadre.

It's important to understand that although there are many departments in China, the Ministry of Transport is definitely a powerful department. If a vice minister of the Ministry of Transport were placed in a local government, he would likely become a high-ranking official in charge of a region.

However, Zhuang Rui was puzzled. Although Ouyang Lei held a high rank in the military, a lieutenant general was only one rank higher than a deputy minister of a national department, and the two were not even in the same system. So why would Minister Yu be so flattering to Ouyang Lei?

"Minister Yu, hello..."

After the initial shock, Zhuang Rui quickly extended his hand. In terms of age and rank, the other person was several levels above him, so of course he had to be polite.

Although Zhuang Rui looked down on the other party, he had been in society for several years and wouldn't show it on his face. These days, a single glance can offend someone, especially for these seasoned officials who are masters of reading between the lines.

"You must be Xiao Zhuang? I didn't expect you to be so young. The President of the European Commission, you really are a scion of a military family..."

When shaking hands with Zhuang Rui, Vice Minister Yu only extended one hand, but the smile on his face was very warm and welcoming. While talking to Zhuang Rui, he did not forget to flatter Ouyang Lei.

"Xiao Zhuang, you really helped us a lot recently, giving our country's deep-sea salvage industry a good reputation. On behalf of the Ministry of Transport, I would like to express my gratitude to you!"

Although Vice Minister Yu's words had a bureaucratic tone, given his status and position, the fact that he could say such things to Zhuang Rui was definitely out of consideration for Ouyang Lei... or rather, the Euro family.

Vice Minister Yu's respect for Ouyang Lei was naturally related to the old man from Yuquanshan and the current core member of the Standing Committee, but that wasn't the whole story.

Anyone could see that, given Ouyang Lei's age, it was a certainty that he would become a member of the Standing Committee of the Central Military Commission in the future, and it was not impossible for him to become the first vice chairman of the Central Military Commission. If that happened, Ouyang Lei would be considered a national leader.

That is why Vice Minister Yu adopted such a humble posture in front of the Ouyang family representatives, who are so powerful in both the military and political circles. This is a very normal behavior.

"I don't deserve it, it's what I should do..."

For some reason, Zhuang Rui uttered a very clichéd phrase, and immediately felt awkward after saying it.

"Hmm, young people are neither arrogant nor impatient; no wonder you've achieved so much. By the way, the Song Dynasty shipwreck you salvaged last time has been an inspiration for some aspects of our country's deep-sea salvage. You can apply for reimbursement for some of the related expenses..."

Vice Minister Yu was blatantly trying to curry favor with Zhuang Rui. All that talk about enlightenment was nonsense. The main point was simply to get Zhuang Rui to agree to add the Ministry of Transport's name to the salvage operation.

"Minister Yu, I appreciate your kind offer, but please forget about the expenses..."

Zhuang Rui shook his head and politely declined Vice Minister Yu's offer. He knew that even if the Ministry of Transport reimbursed him for some expenses, it would only amount to a few hundred thousand yuan at most, which was a drop in the ocean compared to his investment.

Moreover, Zhuang Rui knew that government departments were extremely slow in handling affairs. Even with the supervision of leaders, it was unknown when the money would be withdrawn from the finance department. He didn't care about the money and didn't want to cause any trouble.

"Hmm? Xiao Zhuang's style is still superior..."

Vice Minister Yu was taken aback by Zhuang Rui's words. He had originally intended to use this as a pretext to move on to the next matter, but Zhuang Rui's complete refusal to accept the money left Vice Minister Yu speechless.

"Brother Lei, what exactly did you call me here for? Just tell me..."

Zhuang Rui was getting a little impatient. Couldn't things be done more directly in officialdom? Why did they have to beat around the bush and confuse people before getting to the point? Did they think they couldn't show their leadership skills if they didn't do it this way?

"Minister Yu, it's better if you speak first. Although the military will be involved this time, it's mainly led by your Ministry of Transport..."

Ouyang Lei shook his head, not answering Zhuang Rui's question. It would be unbecoming of him to speak about such a matter. If Zhuang Rui hadn't been involved, Ouyang Lei wouldn't have shown up at all.

"Ahem, Xiao Zhuang, it's like this..."

Vice Minister Yu's face flushed slightly. He coughed and continued, "Xiao Zhuang, as you know, countless merchant ships have sunk at sea over the centuries. Recently, the Ministry of Transport has been looking to clean up the relevant waters off Fujian and would like to request your assistance..."

Vice Minister Yu's words were half true and half false. Although the Ministry of Transport was credited for Zhuang Rui's salvage of the Song Dynasty shipwreck, it was obvious to everyone that the Ministry of Transport had simply attached the name to it. The salvage had nothing to do with them. As a result, the leaders of the Ministry of Transport were under considerable pressure.

So after a meeting and consultation, the ministry decided to salvage a historical shipwreck with great influence, but they were not very confident in the technology, so they approached Zhuang Rui.

"Vice Minister Yu, please speak frankly. I will do my utmost to help if I can..."

Zhuang Ruiwei subtly pursed his lips, spouting pleasantries while inwardly scoffing. Did they think he was a three-year-old? Did they really need to involve the military and archaeological departments in cleaning up the Fujian waters?

"Yes, that's right. Xiao Zhuang, have you ever heard of the name Awa Maru?"

Vice Minister Yu was somewhat embarrassed by Zhuang Rui's words, so he didn't beat around the bush and directly stated the main purpose of his visit.

"The Awa Maru? Minister Yu, are you referring to the Japanese ocean-going oil tanker that sank in the Chinese sea in 1945?"

Before Zhuang Rui could answer, Professor Meng, who was sitting to the side, suddenly stood up and pressed Vice Minister Yu for an answer.

Vice Minister Yu nodded and said, "Yes, it's that shipwreck. We want to salvage it this time. This shipwreck is of great historical significance, which is why we wanted to ask Xiao Zhuang to help us..."

"Wait, Minister Yu, as far as I know, the sunken ship has already been salvaged. Why do we need to salvage it again?"

Professor Meng interrupted Vice Minister Yu somewhat rudely, and continued, "It's been almost thirty years. I personally participated in the salvage of the Awa Maru back then, and I still remember it vividly..."

"Well, Professor Meng, since you participated in that salvage operation, you should know that due to technical and weather conditions, only part of the hull was salvaged, and many controversial items were not recovered from the seabed..."

Vice Minister Yu's words were somewhat vague, not specifying what exactly had not been retrieved, but Zhuang Rui understood them perfectly.

Although Zhuang Rui's archaeology major is not modern archaeology, anyone with even a slight understanding of history has heard of the Japanese Awa Maru, and Zhuang Rui knows it very well.

The Awa Maru is a Japanese ocean-going oil tanker built in the 1940s. It was launched on March 5, 1943. Although nominally a merchant ship, it was built according to military performance and requirements. In terms of scale, nature and performance, it was a true military vessel.

At the time, four merchant ships of the same type as the Awa Maru were converted into light aircraft carriers, but the Awa Maru belonged to Nippon Yusen Kaisha (NYK) and made six round trips on the Japan-Singapore route to transport supplies for the army.

During this period, the Awa Maru was attacked by bombs and American torpedoes, but it still completed its mission and was therefore hailed by the Japanese military as an "unsinkable ship".

During this period, in order to improve the conditions of prisoners of war, the United States and Japan reached an agreement in 1944 to provide humanitarian assistance to people in Japanese-occupied areas.

The Japanese and American sides converted the Awa Maru into a transport ship for relief supplies. To ensure everything went smoothly, the two sides agreed that the anti-aircraft guns and bow guns on the Awa Maru would be removed, the soldiers would be withdrawn, and a green cross would be painted on the hull for identification.

By the 1940s, the Awa Maru was Japan's trump card transport ship, as its naval power had been exhausted. The Japanese government was not content to use it only to transport relief supplies, which sowed the seeds for the later disaster of the Awa Maru.

In February 1945, the Awa Maru set sail from Moji Port in Japan for Singapore and other Japanese-controlled areas, embarking on a perilous voyage.

At this time, Japan's naval fleet was almost completely incapable of fighting. The "Awa Maru" became the only Japanese giant ship that could sail safely in the Pacific Ocean, and Japan's only hope for transporting supplies and personnel in the Pacific.

At this time, Singapore, Jakarta and other Japanese-controlled areas were already in dire straits, so high-ranking Japanese officials, generals, wealthy businessmen and their families in Southeast Asia were scrambling to board this ship. In the end, this cargo ship, which was originally designed to carry 236 passengers, ended up with 2,009 people!

Once the "Awa Maru" arrived in Southeast Asia, it was placed under strict secrecy. Only under the watchful eyes of the Japanese military police at night were the mysterious cargo transported into the ship's hold. On March 28, the "Awa Maru" departed Singapore and embarked on its journey home.

However, late at night on April 1, when the Awa Maru was passing through the waters off Fujian, China, it was attacked by a torpedo from the American submarine USS Queenfish, and sank three minutes later.

Apart from one survivor, 2,008 people sank to the bottom of the ocean. Among them were war criminals with numerous crimes, highly skilled professionals, as well as the elderly, women, and infants. The Pacific Ocean witnessed its greatest maritime disaster in history!

More than half a century has passed, and the survivors have all passed away. There are many unanswered questions about the Awa Maru. Of course, the most eye-catching thing is the huge amount of wealth that is widely known on board.

#### Chapter 1009 Awa Maru (2)

The Awa Maru had been attacked by American torpedoes or shells several times without suffering major damage, but this time, after being attacked by a torpedo, it sank into the sea in just three minutes, which cannot help but raise questions.

Later, some analysts suggested that the Awa Maru was equipped with a large amount of military explosives, and the torpedoes were just the fuse. However, the truth has become shrouded in mystery as the massive ship sank to the bottom of the sea.

However, one thing is generally accepted: the Awa Maru was carrying a large amount of valuable cargo, including 40 tons of gold and about 40 boxes of jewelry and artifacts looted from Southeast Asia and China.

In addition, there were large quantities of industrial diamonds, 12 tons of platinum, 3,000 tons of tin ingots, 3,000 tons of rubber, and thousands of tons of rice. Even today, the value of these goods is staggering and almost incalculable.

Later, Western countries provided video footage of the Awa Maru leaving Singapore. The footage showed that the Awa Maru was loaded with several tons of gold at the dock, all of which was packed into iron boxes and carried onto the ship by Japanese soldiers one box at a time. There were also many extremely precious cultural relics, which confirmed the astonishing wealth on the Awa Maru.

Since the Awa Maru sank within my country's territorial waters, according to international maritime law, the Awa Maru shipwreck belongs to China's sovereignty. No country or individual may enter China's territorial waters for salvage operations without the approval of the Chinese government. Only the Chinese government has the right to salvage the Awa Maru.

In the late 1970s, many major Western powers, including the United States, Britain, Germany, and France, made requests to the Chinese government to come and salvage the objects or to cooperate with my country in the salvage operation.

However, China rejected these requests at the time, and in early May 1977, the Ministry of Transport and the Navy jointly established an on-site command center for the salvage operation. Relevant departments issued announcements and navigation warnings, declaring that the Awa Maru shipwreck would be salvaged in the Niushan waters.

This news shocked the world, because many countries believed that China was simply not capable of salvaging the Awa Maru. However, it turned out that after more than two years of hard work by thousands of soldiers and staff, most of the ship was salvaged.

At the time, a total of 5,418 tons of materials, including tin ingots, rubber, mercury, niobium, tantalum, mica, and optically modified glass, were salvaged from the sunken ship, with a total value of more than 50 million yuan. In addition, the remains of 368 Japanese people were also salvaged and returned to the Japanese Red Cross Society by the Shanghai Red Cross Society of China.

However, the ship's most valuable assets—gold, platinum, and diamonds—were nowhere to be found, and the precious artifacts shown in the video footage also failed to be recovered.

For decades, the whereabouts of this fortune has remained a mystery. Although many individuals, organizations, and even tomb raiding gangs have attempted to salvage the area under various pretexts, they have never been able to find anything. It has truly vanished without a trace.

"Teacher, was it really true that none of that gold was ever recovered?"

Zhuang Rui was also familiar with this history, but he always wondered if, due to specific political factors at the time, these things were not announced to the outside world after they were salvaged.

"I participated in that salvage operation from beginning to end, but we didn't find any gold..."

Professor Meng's eyes were a little unfocused, as if he were recalling the salvage operation more than 30 years ago. He continued, "Actually, that salvage operation was incomplete. At that time, both the deep-diving technology and the deep-water sludge removal technology were inadequate..."

According to the survey at the time, approximately 10,000 cubic meters of silt buried the vault, bridge, guest rooms, crew cabins, and engine room, making it impossible for divers to reach those locations...

Professor Meng was skeptical of the supposedly successful salvage operation and had even written a letter questioning it. However, in that special era of correcting past wrongs, Professor Meng unfortunately faced serious charges and was imprisoned in Qincheng Prison for over a year for investigation.

So when Professor Meng heard about restarting the salvage operation for the "Awa Maru," his expression wasn't very pleasant. However, the old man was quite magnanimous, and since more than thirty years had passed, he didn't dwell on it any further.

"Professor Meng is right. Due to technical reasons at the time, we were unable to completely salvage the Awa Maru. However, the technical problems that existed in the salvage operation of the Awa Maru have now been resolved..."

Thanks to the efforts of our Ministry of Transport, the state has approved this salvage operation. After our research and with the approval of higher authorities, it has been decided that Professor Meng will serve as the chief commander of this salvage operation..."

Although Vice Minister Yu was not involved in the salvage operation back then, he was aware of what had happened to Professor Meng. He immediately offered an explanation, and his position as the chief commander was undoubtedly intended to reassure Professor Meng.

"Hey, Minister Yu, I have a question..."

Zhuang Rui sensed something was amiss and said, "According to Minister Yu, this salvage operation is a national undertaking, so it has nothing to do with me. Why did you call me here?"

It's not that Zhuang Rui lacks awareness, it's just that his luxurious salvage ship is essentially throwing money away every day at sea. Zhuang Rui wouldn't do something that doesn't bring him any benefit.

Moreover, the country is not short of money. The annual food and drink expenses of these civil servants alone amount to hundreds of billions. Let alone salvaging one "Awa Maru", it would be no problem to salvage ten of them.

"Xiao Zhuang, this kind of thinking... cough cough..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Vice Minister Yu instinctively adopted an official tone. However, he only realized halfway through his sentence that the other person was not a member of the system at all, and that what he was saying to him was completely inappropriate.

Moreover, Zhuang Rui is not an ordinary businessman. As long as Zhuang Rui does not break the law, Vice Minister Yu has neither the guts nor the ability to manipulate Zhuang Rui elsewhere. Didn't you see that this is just a small matter of salvaging a sunken ship, yet Ouyang Lei came here personally?

"It's like this, Xiao Zhuang, as you know, the geographical environment in the Fujian sea area isn't very good, especially now in September and October, which is typhoon season. If the salvage vessel's tonnage is too small, it definitely won't work..."

Vice Minister Yu adopted a posture as if he wanted to have a long talk with Zhuang Rui, and continued, "Our country doesn't have a salvage vessel of this size. If we were to build one temporarily, it would take at least one or two years and cost the country a lot of money. But you happen to have such a vessel, Zhuang Rui, so we thought we could cooperate..."

Originally, the ministry had planned to rent or even use Zhuang Rui's luxury salvage ship for free. However, Vice Minister Yu seemed to find Zhuang Rui difficult to talk to, and with Ouyang Lei's unexpected arrival, the word "cooperation" was used instead.

"Cooperation? Hmm, that's a good idea. Actually, we should have cooperated with the private sector a long time ago, through commercial operations, self-financing, risk-sharing, government approval, and profit sharing, to complete this task. I submitted this suggestion to the relevant departments before, but..."

After hearing Vice Minister Yu's words, Professor Meng nodded in agreement. Due to the complex environment of the Fujian sea area and the thick layer of silt on the seabed, no one could guarantee that the salvage operation would be successful. Using the cooperative method that Professor Meng suggested could minimize losses and reduce risks.

"This...this, what Professor Meng is saying is..."

When Vice Minister Yu heard Professor Meng's words, he felt like he was swallowing a bitter pill and couldn't express his grievances. According to their original plan, this matter was handled by the Ministry of Transport and the Navy, and they never thought about involving the private sector.

However, if Professor Meng were to reject this suggestion, Zhuang Rui would likely not accept it either, leaving the Vice Minister in a rather awkward position.

Originally, he had planned to take advantage of Zhuang Rui's salvage of the Song Dynasty shipwreck to salvage the even more influential treasures of the Awa Maru shipwreck, thus boosting the Ministry of Transportation's work achievements. However, he did not expect that this lapse in composure would be somewhat out of his control.

"Minister Yu, let's do as the teacher says. You can discuss the specifics with my lawyer..."

Zhuang Rui also saw through Vice Minister Yu's intentions. His teacher had built a ladder for him, so of course he wanted to climb up it. He was determined to make the Ministry of Transport suffer in silence.

"Uh... Xiao Zhuang, this matter... I need to go back to the department for a meeting to discuss it further. I'll contact you again later to discuss the specifics of the cooperation..."

This was the first time the state and the private sector had cooperated in salvaging a sunken ship. At this moment, Vice Minister Yu dared not make any grand promises. He knew that sometimes it was better to achieve nothing than to make a mess of things and cause serious trouble.

However, those in officialdom are most adept at the art of delaying, and Vice Minister Yu is a master of this. He wants to stall the matter for now, and whether it will be carried out later remains to be "studied".

"Alright, that's settled then. I have a meeting, so I'll take my leave now..."

Ouyang Lei, who had been sitting silently to the side, stood up, shook hands with Professor Meng and the others, and then turned back to Vice Minister Yu as he walked to the door, saying, "Minister Yu, sometimes we need to broaden our thinking when doing work. This cooperation isn't unacceptable. It's best to finalize it as soon as possible. The Navy will provide full assistance then..."

Ouyang Lei was naturally very clear about the ways of officialdom. Seeing that the deputy minister wanted to delay, he helped Zhuang Rui again before leaving, giving the deputy minister a word of advice that carried considerable weight.

"Don't worry, Chief Ouyang, I'll immediately suggest to the Minister that we convene a Standing Committee meeting to discuss and set the tone for this cooperative salvage operation..."

Vice Minister Yu was filled with bitterness. He dared to delay Zhuang Rui, but he dared not deceive Ouyang Lei. It seemed that the first precedent of cooperating with the private sector to salvage the sunken ship was about to occur during their term.

Chapter 1010 Peking Man Skull (Part 1)

After Ouyang Lei left, Vice Minister Yu couldn't sit still any longer. He said goodbye to Zhuang Rui and Professor Meng and then hurriedly left, presumably to return to the ministry to discuss how to resolve the salvage incident.

"Teacher, what's your opinion on this matter? Should the students participate or not?"

To be honest, Zhuang Rui wasn't particularly interested in cooperating with relevant national departments. He'd rather spend that time sailing around the Atlantic Ocean, where all the items salvaged would belong to him.

If he participates in this domestic salvage operation, it's obvious that if the gold, platinum, and 150,000 carats of unprocessed diamonds are salvaged, they will belong to the state. At most, he might receive some commendation.

However, Professor Meng was a witness to the salvage of the Awa Maru back then, and Zhuang Rui wanted to hear the old man's opinion. Moreover, he had a question in his mind that he also wanted to ask his teacher.

"With great power comes great responsibility, Xiao Zhuang. Although many departments in China have their flaws, as long as you act according to your conscience and are worthy of these more than a billion people, that's enough..."

Professor Meng is a pure scholar and doesn't really like bureaucratic practices. Today's events made him particularly uncomfortable because, before he came, Dean Liu told him that a research grant of two million yuan he had applied for a few months ago had been approved.

Professor Meng was initially delighted upon hearing the news, but upon arriving here, he learned that the funding was actually a compensation measure taken by the leadership because they feared he might be unwilling to participate in the salvage operation due to the trauma of his imprisonment over the "Awa Maru" salvage incident more than 30 years ago.

Art, science, and history cannot be bought with money. The old professor felt disgusted, as if he had swallowed a fly. This guy was one of those who kicked someone when they were down back then.

"However, we can discuss how to cooperate. Xiao Zhuang, you don't lack those gold, silver, diamonds and the like, so just let them have them. But it seems that your museum doesn't have many items, does it?"

Professor Meng winked at Zhuang Rui as she spoke, her face beaming with smiles.

"Hehe, teacher, will they agree?"

Zhuang Rui understood Professor Meng's meaning. Since it was a cooperative salvage operation, his side should naturally benefit. The money went to the country, so he could use his ingenuity to salvage the artifacts lost on the ship.

However, based on previous records and some items salvaged from the water last time, those lost cultural relics are very likely those that were lost from Manchukuo, that is, those that Puyi took out of the Forbidden City. These are all national first-class precious cultural relics, and the state may not necessarily agree to his request.

"Disagree? Are you going to leave it for those bureaucrats to ruin? Are you going to leave it to rot in the Forbidden City?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui raise this question, Professor Meng's voice suddenly rose a few octaves, and a look of indignation appeared on his face.

"Teacher? What's wrong?" Zhuang Rui was puzzled, wondering what he had said that displeased the teacher.

"This has nothing to do with you. Some time ago, I wanted to retrieve a pottery jar depicting a figure from Liu Xiu's tomb, which was unearthed from the Forbidden City recently, for research purposes. But... but unexpectedly, the item was destroyed..."

Professor Meng became increasingly angry as he spoke. That pottery jar could easily be considered a national second-class protected cultural relic, but after it was damaged, it was neither reported nor repaired. Instead, it was concealed within the Palace Museum.

If it weren't for Professor Meng's research needs and the accidental discovery of the damaged pottery jar, this matter would probably never have been known to the world, not even to those in the field.

Professor Meng had reached his limit with this bureaucratic system, and he didn't want to see any precious artifacts unearthed on the "Awa Maru" being squandered by the bureaucrats of the Palace Museum.

"Okay, teacher, I will definitely stick to my guns regarding cultural relics..."

Zhuang Rui was furious when he heard about this. As a cultural relics supervision department, it was impossible for them to properly preserve the precious historical relics left by their ancestors. Moreover, they were shifting responsibility after the relics were damaged. Zhuang Rui could not trust such a department.

"Damn it, I'm never exchanging exhibits with the Palace Museum again. It's so unreliable..."

After listening to Professor Meng's explanation, Zhuang Rui was still a little scared. He was relieved that nothing went wrong with his promise to Jin Pangzi to exchange exhibits with the Palace Museum. Otherwise, he would have been heartbroken if his precious items had been damaged or lost.

Professor Meng's expression softened, and he pointed at Zhuang Rui, saying, "Hmm, some people care about political achievements and won't pay much attention to these things that can't be eaten or drunk. We should be able to negotiate a deal, but it'll be a bargain for you..."

"Teacher, you participated in the first salvage operation. What artifacts were on the Awa Maru? Tell me about them. I've heard that the Peking Man skull was on the Awa Maru. Is that true or not?"

Ever since Zhuang Rui heard the name "Awa Maru" from the Vice Minister, this question has been lingering in his mind for most of the day.

"You little rascal, I knew you'd ask that question..."

Professor Meng laughed upon hearing this, and after pondering for a moment, he said, "Xiao Zhuang, how much do you know about the Peking Man skull?"

Professor Meng wasn't trying to test Zhuang Rui, but the Peking Man skull is involved in a very complex history, and without understanding the circumstances at the time, it's impossible to make any inferences.

"Teacher, everything I know comes from the textbooks, plus some rumors, so it's not reliable..."

Zhuang Rui scratched his head sheepishly. The Peking Man skull is more significant to anthropologists and historians than to archaeologists, so when he saw the related reports, he only treated it as a story.

However, due to his professional sensitivity, Zhuang Rui still remembered the ins and outs of this matter. Back in the 1920s, Chinese scientists discovered two teeth belonging to early humans in Zhoukoudian. In October of the same year, when the scientific community in Beijing reported this important discovery, it immediately caused a sensation at home and abroad.

Subsequently, the Geological Survey of China and Peking Union Medical College joined forces to carry out large-scale excavation work at the Peking Man site in Zhoukoudian. One day in early winter, during the excavation, young paleontologist Pei Wenzhong suddenly saw a small hole with a narrow opening that only allowed one person to pass through.

To find out the truth, Fei Wenzhong entered the cave alone and unexpectedly discovered many animal fossils inside. After a day of excavation, an archaeological discovery that shocked the world finally emerged.

It was already dark when Fei Wenzhong, who was digging by lamplight, discovered a Peking Man skull. At that time, half of the skull was still in the soil. After careful and meticulous excavation, the first Peking Man skull was finally completely unearthed.

At that time, Pei Wenzhong personally rode in a car, using his own two quilts, mattresses, and felt blankets to wrap this rare treasure and escort it to the city.

In 1936, Jia Lanpo discovered three more Peking Man skull fossils in the Ape-Man Cave. In total, six skulls, 12 skull fragments, 15 mandibles, 157 teeth, and broken femurs and shinbones were unearthed, belonging to more than 40 individuals of different ages and genders.

The discovery of the Peking Man site and its fossils is a major event in the history of paleoanthropological research worldwide. To date, no other paleoanthropological site has yielded such a wealth of fossils and other materials related to ancient humans, cultures, and animals as the Peking Man site at Zhoukoudian.

The Peking Man fossils have thus become a rare treasure that has attracted worldwide scientific attention. Although not the earliest human, as a representative of the intermediate link between ape and human, it is known as "the most meaningful and moving discovery in the entire history of ancient humans". Therefore, the preciousness of the "Peking Man skull" is self-evident.

However, precisely because of this, it also became the object of covetousness of some speculators and imperialists. The five Peking Man skulls and a batch of fossils excavated by Pei Wenzhong and others mysteriously "disappeared" during the War of Resistance Against Japan.

In 1941, relations between Japan and the United States became increasingly tense. In Beiping, which was then occupied by the Japanese army, the Japanese army began to occupy some institutions of the neutral United States in Beiping.

Although Peking Union Medical College Hospital, which housed and preserved the Peking Man skull fossils, was American property, it was not immune to the disaster at the time. Under these circumstances, the Cenozoic Research Laboratory decided to find a safer place to store the Peking Man fossils.

Because the contract signed between China and the United States during the joint excavation of fossils stipulated that all fossils unearthed at Zhoukoudian were Chinese property and prohibited from being transported out of the country, the US legation refused to accept them at the time.

After coordination by the Nationalist government, the US ambassador to China in Chongqing agreed and authorized the US legation in Beiping to receive these precious ancient human fossils and prepare to transport them safely to the United States for preservation.

In the early morning of December 5, 1941, a special train for U.S. Marines departed from Beiping. As planned, after the train arrived in Qinhuangdao, the fossils were transported to the "President Harrison" ship and then shipped to the United States.

Unfortunately, just as the Marines were preparing to return to the United States, the Japanese launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, which triggered the Pacific War. The Japanese army quickly occupied American institutions in China, and the US Marine Corps barracks in Qinhuangdao were also occupied by the Japanese army. The Peking Man skull disappeared without a trace.

This became a theft case that shocked the world, and people have been searching for it for more than half a century.

In 1998, Jia Lanpo, the father of Peking Man, joined more than ten other academicians in launching the "Great Search at the End of the Century," but in the end, no valuable clues were found, and there are still no results to this day.