

## Golden 481

### Chapter 481 Changes in the Eyes

The poorer the place, the less sound the legal system. In a country like Myanmar, under military rule, it's incredibly easy to frame someone. Compared to Hu Rong, Win Cha is like an ant; he could be crushed with a single finger.

Therefore, Wenchang did not dare to neglect Hu Rong's words at all. After spending a sum of US dollars to send away the group of soldiers with guns, Wenchang summoned his ground crew and held the most agonizing meeting of his life. The meeting focused on promoting integrity and prohibiting the acceptance of tips. The atmosphere at Mandalay Airport improved significantly in a short period of time.

Of course, Zhuang Rui and Hu Rong were unaware of these things. At that moment, Zhuang Rui was sitting in a motorhome driven by Hu Rong, heading towards the hotel.

"Brother Hu, can't we go to the mining area today?"

Judging from Hu Rong's expression, he wanted to stay in Mandela for a day. To be honest, Zhuang Rui's schedule had been really tight lately, and he really didn't want to delay any longer.

Hu Rong smiled and said, "Tomorrow then. The road to the mining area from here isn't very good, and besides, there's not much to see at night. I'll have someone bring a helicopter tomorrow; it won't take much time..."

"Alright then, Brother Hu, may I ask where your mine is located?"

Zhuang Rui asked casually, but he was actually a little nervous. If Hu Rong's mine was far from the treasure location, Zhuang Rui would have to give up this treasure hunt. After all, he had limited time and several things to do back home.

"Yes, I'll show you..."

As Hu Rong spoke, he took out a map from the car, traced the map with his finger, and finally stopped at a spot, saying, "It's here. This used to be an old pit, but it was filled in decades ago. Later, I had someone survey it, and they said there were still mineral veins, so we started mining again. I never expected it to be an abandoned mine. This is a huge loss..."

"Brother Hu, this is a mountain range, right? Don't worry, maybe if we dig a little deeper, we'll find a mineral vein..."

Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei exchanged a glance, a hint of joy in their eyes. For the past few days, they had been comparing a map of Myanmar with the one on their digital camera, and they discovered that the location marked with the Japanese flag was in the Degang region, exactly where Hu Rong had pointed earlier.

According to Peng Fei, the area is a tropical jungle and mountainous region with very difficult roads. It is also not particularly far from Ruili, the border with China. Therefore, Peng Fei has been making preparations for the past few days. The large backpack he carries, which is more than a meter long, is filled with all the equipment he will need for this trip.

"Forget about that, let's not talk about it. I just brought you here to have some fun. How about this, this afternoon I'll show you around Mandela. This used to be the site of the royal palace of Myanmar, and there are quite a few ancient buildings here..."

In every respect, Zhuang Rui was a distinguished guest, so Hu Rong naturally wouldn't treat him lightly. After Zhuang Rui put his things in the hotel, Hu Rong took him to the former site of the royal palace of the former Burmese king. However, Peng Fei unexpectedly did not go with them. Instead, after Hu Rong and the others left, he quietly left the hotel alone.

Along the moat of the royal city, Hu Rong's RV drove towards the foot of Mandalay Hill. The royal city quietly faced Mandalay Hill. This last royal palace of the Burmese dynasty, like the Forbidden City in Beijing, buried the vicissitudes of a highly developed agricultural country that was crushed by Western industrial civilization during the great colonial era hundreds of years ago.

The first place Hu Rong took Zhuang Rui to was the Golden Palace Teak Temple, originally the residence of King Mindon of Burma. After King Mindon's death, his successor, King Thibaw, to avoid any taboo, moved the entire building to its current location and converted it into a monastery. This teak building is noticeably more elaborate than ordinary double-eaved temples.

Myanmar is not only rich in jade, but also in teak. Teak is also known as rouge tree, purple teak, or blood tree. A small amount of teak also exists in Yunnan, my country, where it is called purple oil wood. It is a deciduous or semi-deciduous tree that can grow to 40-50 meters tall with a diameter at breast height of 2-5 meters and a straight trunk.

Teak originates from Myanmar, Thailand, and Laos. It is a major afforestation tree species in Southeast Asia and one of the world's most valuable timbers, known as the "King of Woods." In Myanmar and Indonesia, it is considered a "national treasure."

The teak temple is very beautiful, and looks serene from a distance. The building is a square-roofed, double-eaved structure, but it seems to be more complicated than ordinary double-eaved buildings. There are many exquisite wood carvings on the interior and exterior doors, windows and walls. The entire temple is situated on hundreds of thick teak pillars, and there are also teak pillars protecting the outside.

There were significantly fewer tourists in Mandalay than in Yangon. Apart from Hu Rong and Zhuang Rui, there was only the driver and his attendant. The huge temple was almost deserted, with only a few local children running up and down the temple's high steps.

The children's giggles echoed through the temple, clear and resonant, lingering for a long time. To Zhuang Rui, those children's voices, in the solemn and dignified temple, were like the chanting of sacred music, calming his eager heart as he searched for treasure.

Hu Rong turned out to be a devout Buddhist. After entering the temple, he took off his shoes and knelt down to worship the Buddha statue at one end of the corridor. After staying at the teak temple for a while, Hu Rong took Zhuang Rui to the Kuthodaw Pagoda, the most famous pagoda in Mandalay.

Kuthodaw Pagoda is proudly called "the world's greatest merit pagoda" by the Burmese. The merit refers to the fact that in 1857, King Mindon convened 2,400 monks from all over the Indochina Peninsula to hold the Fifth Buddhist Council to revise the Buddhist scriptures. The revised scriptures were then inscribed on 729 marble steles.

Outside each stone tablet, a white stupa was built, so the entire temple is a continuous stretch of white stupas. According to Hu Rong, if a person reads for 8 hours a day, it would take at least 450 days to read all the stone tablets under these white stupas.

The Burmese seem to have a great fondness for gold. In the very center of the Kuthodaw Pagoda stands a golden pagoda, surrounded by white pagodas in all four directions. The layout is symmetrical in all four directions, resembling a long, white square formation.

There were even fewer people here. Zhuang Rui and his companions walked through the snow-white pagoda forest without encountering a single tourist. They entered a Buddhist pagoda and looked at the scriptures with completely incomprehensible text. Suddenly, Zhuang Rui felt the spiritual energy in his eyes stirring.

It was hard to describe the feeling, but the golden spiritual energy in his eyes gave him a warm feeling inside the white tower, like being surrounded by warm water. It was so comfortable that Zhuang Rui couldn't help but groan. He even deliberately ignored Hu Rong's shouts outside.

Sitting quietly inside the pagoda, Zhuang Rui felt the pure aura that permeated the entire pagoda. His soul seemed to be cleansed by a belief, and he felt a sense of returning to emptiness and tranquility. It was as if all the troubles of the world had left him.

The greatest form is formless, the greatest love is without desire, the greatest virtue is without words, and the greatest kindness leaves no trace. At this moment, in Zhuang Rui's heart, there is no desire or want, and the spiritual energy in his eyes seems to be undergoing a slight change.

“Zhuang Rui, Brother Zhuang...”

After an unknown amount of time, Zhuang Rui was finally awakened by Hu Rong's voice. Startled awake, he quickly went outside.

Looking back at the pagoda, Zhuang Rui felt a pang of reluctance. Although the spiritual energy inside the pagoda was very faint, it made people feel very comfortable.

Zhuang Rui glanced at his watch and was startled. He had arrived at just past 2 p.m., and now it was already past 4 p.m.

“Brother, I didn’t expect you to have a Buddhist affinity! You’ve been in the stupa for quite a while now. How about becoming a lay Buddhist in this world? I’ll find a high-ranking monk to help you take refuge...”

Hu Rong looked at Zhuang Rui with a strange expression. Young people are always impatient to stay in places like this. He didn't expect that Zhuang Rui would stay inside for more than two hours. He was getting impatient himself.

"No, please don't, Brother Hu, I'm not married yet..."

Zhuang Rui had just emerged from that ethereal state when he was startled by Hu Rong's words. He hadn't even enjoyed his wonderful life yet, how could he possibly become a monk?

"Hehe, lay Buddhists who are still alive can take refuge without being ordained. They are allowed to get married and have children. It's just about pursuing a spiritual state..."

Hu Rong laughed. He knew that Zhuang Rui was about to get engaged to his cousin, and he had prepared a gift for Zhuang Rui, but it wasn't time to bring it out yet.

"Let's go, I'll take you to eat authentic Burmese snacks, and then tonight I'll take you to the Mandalay rough stone market. You might find some good stuff there; many people have been collecting old mine jadeite for decades, and they often put it up for sale there..."

Hu Rong glanced at the sky and realized it was getting late. He called out to Zhuang Rui and then led the way toward the mountain gate.

Zhuang Rui glanced back at the white pagoda forest. The setting sun shone on the white pagodas, giving them a golden hue that made them appear even more solemn and majestic, and filled the air with an indescribable aura.

At this moment, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a little strange about what had just happened. Could it be that there really is faith and gods in this world?

"Hmm, the distance of spiritual energy has become farther?"

Just as Zhuang Rui withdrew his gaze, he inadvertently felt that the spiritual energy he could originally only release within a distance of ten meters could now be sensed from the white pagoda thirty meters away. He could even see the faint but very special spiritual energy on the white pagoda clearly.

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"how so?"

Zhuang Rui immediately stopped and turned his gaze back to the spot about thirty meters away, carefully sensing the spiritual energy within his eyes.

A few minutes later, Zhuang Rui withdrew his gaze and hurriedly chased after Hu Rong, who had left. He was extremely excited. After his investigation, he found that the distance at which his spiritual energy could be projected had indeed doubled.

Although there was no fundamental upgrade other than an increase in the distance the spiritual energy could be projected, it was still good news for Zhuang Rui, because the spiritual energy had not changed at all since he left the Jokhang Temple.

"I must visit some famous mountains and rivers in the future; perhaps I can truly elevate the spiritual energy I perceive to another level..."

Both breakthroughs in spiritual energy seemed to be related to temples. The first time was in a room with Thangkas in the Jokhang Temple, and this time it was among hundreds of stupas. This couldn't help but make Zhuang Rui's mind wander. However, he had never encountered such a situation when he visited some temples and tourist attractions in Beijing, which left Zhuang Rui puzzled.

Logically speaking, the temples in Beijing should have been built earlier than the pagodas in Myanmar, but no unusual spiritual energy could be felt there. At most, one could only find that the buildings contained abundant spiritual energy, but this was of no help to Zhuang Rui's perception of spiritual energy.

"Could this be the power of faith? But I don't believe in these superstitious beliefs..."

Even after getting into Hu Rong's RV, Zhuang Rui was still frowning and deep in thought. Seeing his expression, Hu Rong didn't disturb him. Buddhism speaks of "sudden enlightenment," and Hu Rong thought that Zhuang Rui had grasped some Buddhist truth in the pagoda.

After much thought, Zhuang Rui found only one commonality between the Jokhang Temple in Tibet and the Pagoda Forest in Myanmar: their devotees were extremely devout. In contrast, many temples in Beijing were more of a facade; who knew if the monks would wear hats and sneak into nightclubs at night?

Shaking his head, Zhuang Rui banished these chaotic thoughts from his mind. The spiritual energy in his eyes came suddenly and without any discernible pattern. But it was alright; as long as he could use it, there was no point in thinking about it too much. Besides, Zhuang Rui didn't dare to reveal the supernatural power in his eyes.

Once Zhuang Rui regained his senses, he saw Hu Rong observing him and quickly said, "Brother Hu, I'm sorry, I got a little lost in thought. There are so many pagodas in Myanmar, there must be many believers..."

"Of course, over 95% of the people in Myanmar are Buddhists; it's the state religion of Myanmar..."

Hu Rong's words confirmed Zhuang Rui's thoughts; perhaps the changes in spiritual energy really were related to faith.

"Peng Fei, do you know the Royal Restaurant in the west of the city? Let's take a motorcycle taxi and come eat here..."

"Brother Zhuang, you guys eat, I won't go, I have some things to take care of..."

After arriving at the restaurant, Zhuang Rui called Peng Fei, but the guy was acting mysteriously and hung up after a couple of sentences.

Hu Rong was clearly well-connected in Mandalay. As soon as he entered the restaurant, people kept greeting him. Hu Rong cupped his hands and greeted everyone around him, leading Zhuang Rui to a private room on the second floor.

Neither of them drank alcohol. After enjoying a seafood feast with distinctly Burmese characteristics, Hu Rong did not call a taxi but instead led Zhuang Rui on foot towards the jewelry trading center in Mandalay.

"Brother Hu, is this the place?"

The jewelry trading center in Mandalay was not far from this restaurant. After walking for three minutes, Zhuang Rui stared at the place in front of him, which looked like a vegetable market in China, and asked Hu Rong in astonishment.

The jewelry and rough stone trading center that appeared before Zhuang Rui wasn't even a shed; it was just an open area enclosed by a wooden fence and wire. At the entrance was a large wooden gate, with two soldiers carrying guns standing guard.

Compared to the jade trading center in Pingzhou, China, this place is simply unbearable to look at; it's incredibly shabby.

"That's right, this is it. Our company also has a booth in here. Hehe, that's how it is in Myanmar. In the early years, they didn't care about jade at all. It was only in the last ten years or so that they started to pay attention to it. This market has been around for twenty or thirty years. It's become a habit, so no one tries to change it..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's expression, Hu Rong laughed and continued, "Don't let this place's unassuming appearance fool you; it's produced quite a few fine items. Top-quality jadeite, like imperial green and purple-eyed jade, has been found here. It all depends on your eye and luck..."

Zhuang Rui nodded upon hearing this. He understood the principle that the meat in a bun doesn't lie in the pleats. The situation in Myanmar was somewhat like that of people living by the river. No one would care that the sand covering the riverbed could be sold for money. Similarly, the people of Myanmar did not realize in the early days that the stones covering the mountains and plains were actually treasures.

"Brother Hu, isn't this discrimination? Do Burmese people not have to pay?"

When Zhuang Rui arrived at the market entrance, he saw a sign next to the soldier that read "One Dollar for Entry" in both Chinese and English. Several buyers, who appeared to be Chinese based on their appearance and clothing, had to throw a dollar into the box under the sign before they could enter.

"Of course you don't need to..."

Hu Rong greeted the two men at the door with a smile, then led Zhuang Rui inside. He continued, "Most of the people here are Chinese. Although you have to pay, foreigners who break the law in Myanmar usually don't get imprisoned; they just pay a fine. Otherwise, where would so many people dare to come to Myanmar to smuggle raw stones?"

Upon entering the market, Zhuang Rui felt as if he had arrived in Pingzhou, because most of the people passing by spoke Cantonese. Most of the raw jade merchants in China were from Guangdong and Yunnan. Some individual buyers who did not have the funds to participate in jade auctions usually came here to hunt for raw stones.

Walking in the middle of the market, Zhuang Rui noticed that each stall had a shelf, and most of the items for sale on the shelves were finished jade pieces. However, the workmanship was poor and the styles were outdated. After looking at a few, Zhuang Rui lost interest. If he were to sell these worthless things in his own shop, it would lower Qin Ruilin's standards.

Aside from the finished jadeite jewelry on the shelves, the raw stones were all laid out on the ground. Zhuang Rui carefully examined several stalls and found that most of them were completely rough stones, with very few having windows cut or polished surfaces. This significantly increased the risk of gambling on stones.

Buyers from all over the world squatted on the ground selecting raw stones, occasionally haggling with the stall owners.

"How much is this piece of material? Oh, by the way, you don't understand Chinese..."

Zhuang Rui squatted down, pointed to a piece of raw jade and asked the stall owner, but then realized what he was doing and asked again in English.

"200,000!" Before Zhuang Rui could finish asking the price in English, the stall owner held up two fingers and answered fluently in Chinese.

This piece of jade, no bigger than a fist, has some green inside. Once cut open, it's probably worth 30,000 to 50,000 yuan. But 200,000 yuan is just outrageous. In Pingzhou, a stone egg like this would only cost 300 to 500 yuan. It's just something for people who have never played with jade gambling before to try out.

Zhuang Rui didn't haggle. He stood up and continued walking forward. Does this guy really look like an idiot?

"Hehe, Brother Zhuang, don't be angry. They're all overcharging. If you bargain down to 500 yuan for that material, they might even sell it for free..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's indignant expression, Hu Rong laughed. The Burmese may not have learned from others in China, but they have learned to ask for exorbitant prices and then haggle on the spot quite well.

Zhuang Rui nodded. After looking at four or five stalls, he still couldn't find any good materials. Some stalls simply mixed broken stones with jadeite rough and sold them together. Zhuang Rui even found people buying them. He couldn't help but shake his head. There really is nothing in this world that can't be sold.

"Zhuang Rui, this stall is mine. Do you want to take a look? If you see any piece of jade you like, Brother Hu will give it to you to cut and play with..."

When Hu Rong reached a stall, he stopped. Upon seeing Hu Rong, the stall owner immediately stood up from his stall, put his hands together, and greeted Hu Rong.

"Oh? If I pick out a piece of glass-type jade, wouldn't Brother Hu be making a huge loss?"

Zhuang Rui stopped when he heard this and looked at Hu Rong's stall. His stall was obviously much larger than the ones next to it. There were about a hundred rough stones on the ground, most of which were gambling stones. Several people were picking through them.

"What, you look down on me? Even if you can find imperial jadeite, I can still afford to give it to you..."

Hu Rong pretended to be angry and put on a stern face, explaining, "How about this, we each pick one and see who has the better eye, okay?"

To be honest, Hu Rong brought Zhuang Rui to this market with the intention of testing him. Hu Rong himself had been playing with raw jadeite since he was a toddler, when others were playing with mud. However, after this Myanmar jadeite auction, Hu Rong realized that his skills in identifying raw jadeite were much worse than Zhuang Rui's.

As the saying goes, "In literature, there is no first place, but in martial arts, there is no second place," and Hu Rong also wanted to compare himself with Zhuang Rui.

"Alright, since Brother Hu has put it that way, I'll certainly oblige..."

Given the relationship between Zhuang Rui and Hu Rong, they wouldn't let the outcome of this bet ruin their harmony. Hearing Hu Rong's suggestion, Zhuang Rui became interested as well.

"Here, take this..."

Hu Rong took two magnifying glasses and a flashlight from the stall owner, handed one set to Zhuang Rui, and then the two separated to examine the rough stones.

"Hmm? There really are old mine jade pieces..."

Zhuang Rui was standing next to a pile of fist-sized jadeite rough stones. Even without using his spiritual energy, he could tell that these were all black jadeite from the Ma Meng factory.

Chapter 483 The Bet (Part 1)

The rough stones produced in the Ma Mong mines of Myanmar, also known as "black jade," are generally not very large. Their outer skin is as black as the bottom of a pot. Although they often contain full green jadeite, the texture and clarity are generally average, and the quality is not particularly high.

However, the chance of finding green jadeite in black jadeite is quite high. Therefore, people who collect raw stones especially like to gamble on stones from the Ma Meng factory. Generally speaking, as long as the purchase price is not too high, the chance of winning is very high. Moreover, it is not uncommon for black jadeite to produce top-quality stones.

After squatting down and picking through the pieces for a while, Zhuang Rui frowned. These thirty or forty pieces of black jadeite were indeed from the old mine of Ma Meng Factory, and most of them contained jadeite. However, the quality and clarity were not satisfactory, and at least none of them were to Zhuang Rui's liking.

"What, Brother Hu, are you also going to pick out a piece of black jade to cut?"

Zhuang Rui watched for a while, then shook his head and stood up. Only then did he realize that Hu Rong had also come over and was selecting materials behind him.

Hu Rong examines raw stones very quickly. He basically doesn't even look at stones without any flaws or veins, but he will observe rough stones with cracks for a while.

Gambling on cracks is worse than gambling on color. Although the weathered patterns left on the outer skin of a jadeite rough can roughly indicate the quality of the jadeite inside, the uncertainty is too high, and it is even uncertain whether there is jadeite inside at all.

However, if there are cracks in the raw stone, it usually contains jadeite. The only difference is the depth of the cracks, which determines whether the jadeite has been damaged and the quality of the jadeite.

Hu Rong was clearly an expert at gambling on cracks. When observing cracks, he would use a strong flashlight to see the direction of the weathered crystals at the cracks. Moreover, the pieces he shook his head and put down were all rough stones that Zhuang Rui had seen before and that did not contain much jade.

Hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hu Rong laughed and said, "The chances of finding jadeite in black sand are high. If I were to choose something else and still not be able to find jadeite, I'd be incredibly embarrassed..."

Having set his sights on winning, Hu Rong naturally intended to go all out; otherwise, his title of "King of Burmese Jade" would be somewhat undeserved. Although it was just a joke-like bet, Hu Rong didn't want to lose to Zhuang Rui.

Seeing that Zhuang Rui didn't seem very interested in the pile of black jade, Hu Rong said, "Brother Zhuang, to tell you the truth, of all the materials I have here, only this black jade is from an old mine. The rest are from new mines. I can't even say whether they contain jadeite..."

"Hehe, I'm just browsing. Some of the rough stones from the new mine are quite good..."

Zhuang Rui smiled, stood up and walked towards another pile of rough stones. He had already seen through what Hu Rong had said, but the black jadeite in that pile was really not very good. The best quality was only bean green, and the color was not right. It was worth at most a hundred thousand yuan.

There are still so many rough stones to examine. If there aren't any good ones, Zhuang Rui plans to go back and pick out that green jadeite to cut. He won't lose to Hu Rong in the end.

"Damn it, no wonder Uncle Qin and the others don't come here..." Zhuang Rui frowned even more when he saw most of the raw stones.

As Hu Rong just said, the jadeite rough stones produced by these new factories are indeed appalling. Not only is the outer skin completely devoid of any jadeite, but there is not a single piece of jadeite inside either. They are like watermelons without any flesh, with nothing inside or out.

Some of the cut jade pieces were unrecognizable; there wasn't even any mist on the cut surface, let alone any green. Zhuang Rui wondered if such pieces, displayed here, could actually fool people into buying them.

Hu Rong owns eighteen jade mines, making him a big shot even in Myanmar. Yet his stall is so shabby; one can only imagine what the smaller stalls must look like.

After examining several pieces of clear material, Zhuang Rui became too lazy to bother and started looking at those completely unreliable, unsecured pieces.

In fact, Zhuang Rui didn't know that it was rare to find good things in this kind of market.

Those jadeite rough buyers who frequently travel between China and Myanmar would never come to places like this. Like the middle-aged man he met on the plane, they all have specific brokers in Myanmar who take them to local people's homes to inspect the goods.

Only beginners who don't know much about jade gambling would choose this market. Hu Rong brought Zhuang Rui here simply to let him have some fun.

After walking around the stall enclosed by ropes, Zhuang Rui shook his head. Although gambling is said to result in nine losses out of ten, if you're lucky when you first sit down at the table, you can win four or five out of ten rounds.

However, the chances of winning at jade gambling are extremely slim. At least Zhuang Rui didn't find a single piece of jade with good quality inside after wandering around for a while. Basically, he lost every time he gambled.

When Zhuang Rui walked to the outermost edge of the stall, he saw three or four pieces of new factory rough jade that were still on display. Even from two or three meters away, he could see that there was no green on the cut surface.

Zhuang Rui lost interest in looking any further and turned to walk towards the pile of black sandstone rough stones. At least there was something decent there. As he turned, Zhuang Rui casually used the spiritual energy in his eyes to glance at the rough stones.

"Huh? What is that?"

Zhuang Rui's body, which had already turned around, abruptly stopped. However, the brain's command was a little late; his entire body had already turned around, but his head remained still, still looking at the few raw stones.

After turning his body around, Zhuang Rui twisted his neck hard, thankfully without hurting himself.

Just as he turned around, his eyes seemed to sense that these jade pieces contained extremely rich spiritual energy. However, Zhuang Rui withdrew his gaze too quickly and could not identify which piece of raw stone it was.

Zhuang Rui glanced around furtively, and seeing that no one was paying attention to him, he slowly walked to the few raw stones, released his spiritual energy, and began to examine them one by one.

The three rough stones were quite large, each weighing around 30 to 40 kilograms, and they had all been cut open, but no green jade was found on the cut surfaces, which is why they were thrown to the edge of the stall.

Given its enormous size and poor performance, isn't it afraid of being stolen? If Zhuang Rui hadn't glanced at it just now, he wouldn't have taken this raw stone even if it were given to him for free.

After examining two pieces of jadeite without finding any, Zhuang Rui turned his attention to the last piece of semi-rough jadeite. As soon as his spiritual energy seeped into it, he sensed something different.

"It's an icy jadeite, the green is nice, very green. Hmm, what's this?"

About two centimeters inside the cut surface of the rough stone, a touch of green caught Zhuang Rui's eye. The texture and water content were very good, reaching the level of high-ice jadeite, and the green color was very pure. As Zhuang Rui continued to look inside, he even discovered several clusters of yellow and red jadeite about the size of a thumb.

It would be more accurate to say there are several, because these red and yellow jadeite pieces are extremely small, the largest being no more than the length of an index finger. They are intertwined with the green jadeite, somewhat resembling caterpillars growing on a tree.

"Damn, this stone-cutting skill is absolutely amazing..."

After thoroughly examining the internal structure of the rough stone, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but curse under his breath. He couldn't help but admire the skill of this stone cutter to the point of prostration.

The rough stone was cut twice from both sides, and now it is in the shape of a pyramid. However, both cuts were about two or three centimeters away from the jade inside, and they still couldn't cut it out.

This is what a blind man holding the handle of a stone-cutting machine could probably cut out of this piece of jade. The original stone-cutting master, however, just wandered around for a while without getting his hands on the jade inside. But it's fortunate that he didn't, otherwise this jade piece, which looks like a tree, might have been cut in half.

The jadeite inside grows in a rather strange way, somewhat like coral in the sea, with several branches that are extremely irregular. The red and yellow jadeite that looks like jade worms appears on the branched green jadeite.

"If this were carved into a tree, with branches or leaves carved into the forked parts, and the red and yellow jade carved into insects, wouldn't it be a rare masterpiece?"

Looking at the rough stone, Zhuang Rui felt excited. Although the texture and clarity did not reach the top-grade glass type, this type of jadeite was extremely rare. Moreover, the three or four naturally formed jade insects added to its beauty.

"What's wrong, Brother Zhuang? You've taken a fancy to this piece of material? It's practically scrap..."

Zhuang Rui squatted down and tried to hug the rough stone. It was indeed quite heavy. He could lift it, but walking on it was a bit difficult. Just as he put the rough stone on the ground, he heard Hu Rong's voice.

Looking up, Hu Rong was staring at Zhuang Rui's actions with a look of surprise. Hu Rong did have some impression of this piece of rough jade. Back then, this piece of new jade from the factory actually had blemishes on its outer skin.

Several family members were very optimistic about this piece of jade at the time, but after one cut, there was nothing. Some, unwilling to give up, cut it again, but still no green appeared, so it was left here. If even a little bit of green had appeared, it would probably have been sent to a public auction.

"Hmm, Brother Hu, this piece should be a new mine rough stone, right? Look at the blemishes at the bottom, there's no reason it won't yield green. I'll bet on this one..."

Actually, there was a blemish underneath, which Zhuang Rui only noticed after he put the rough stone down, but it gave him a convenient excuse.

"Alright, I didn't expect there would still be someone who's still not giving up on this piece. I've made my selection too, let's go get it cut open..."

Hu Rong burst into laughter. At the time, a younger member of the family was still not giving up and made a second cut, but he was laughed at for a long time. He did not expect Zhuang Rui to be even more stubborn than that younger member, and actually wanted to make another cut before he would give up.

"Brother Hu, have you chosen your materials yet?"

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he noticed the piece of black lacquer that Hu Rong was holding. It was only slightly larger than a fist and looked quite ordinary, without any pine flower pattern or python pattern.

Upon seeing this piece of jade, Zhuang Rui secretly praised Hu Rong, whose title as the "King of Jade" was indeed well-deserved.

Chapter 484 The Bet (Part Two)

The black jadeite rough stone that Hu Rong selected had neither python patterns nor pine flower patterns on its outer skin, and there were no weathering marks on the surface. Only a very fine crack appeared on one side. Hu Rong made his judgment based on this crack, which secretly impressed Zhuang Rui.

The rough stone that Hu Rong is holding is the best piece of green jadeite from that pile of black jadeite. Apart from the semi-rough stone at Zhuang Rui's feet, there is no other rough stone in the entire place that is better than the one in Hu Rong's hand.

Among that pile of rough stones, there were many with better outer skins than this one, but Hu Rong chose this one by chance. If Zhuang Rui hadn't found this icy jadeite in front of him, he probably would have lost the bet to Hu Rong today.

"Brother Zhuang, you've chosen this spot? No regrets?"

"Hey, Brother Hu, we're not gambling. If I lose, it just means my judgment isn't as good as yours, which is normal. There's nothing to regret..."

Zhuang Rui laughed and said, "After you cut out the jade, just don't regret giving it to me."

"Okay, let's go, let's go get the stone cut..."

Hu Rong called out to the person watching the stall and asked him to bring over a small cart, the kind of simple cart used for pulling luggage. After Zhuang Rui put the rough stone on it, he used the two elastic straps on the cart to secure the stone and pulled it behind him to follow Hu Rong.

The news that Boss Hu was going to have the stone cut caused a sensation throughout the market. Zhuang Rui and Hu Rong walked in front, followed by several people from time to time. Merchants who were selecting rough stones, and even stall owners from various stalls, all followed. Before they even reached the market gate, there were already dozens of people following behind them.

Next to the market, there were many jade processing workshops. After walking for less than three minutes, Zhuang Rui followed Hu Rong into a courtyard where seven or eight people were busy at work.

As soon as Hu Rong entered the courtyard, he said to a young man, "Xiao Wang, can I borrow your space for a bit? I need to cut two stones..."

"Uncle Hu, you've had your fill. It's been a long time since we've seen you cut stones. Let's broaden our horizons today..."

The young man surnamed Wang was probably also Chinese, as he spoke Mandarin. While speaking, he instructed several people who were working to tidy up the middle of the area, and then went to the door to pull the light cord and turn on the main light in the yard.

"Brother Hu, do you often get stones cut here?" Zhuang Rui was a little surprised to see how familiar Hu Rong was with this man. Wasn't it said that people who specialize in raw stone business usually don't gamble on stones?

Hu Rong seemed to sense Zhuang Rui's question and said with a smile, "For some stones that look good, we'll cut them open or make a window before selling them. If green comes out, the selling price will be much higher than for completely uncut stones. Sometimes when I'm browsing the market here, I'll cut a few pieces to play with..."

Cutting stones and gambling on stones are two completely different concepts. Raw stone merchants cut stones in order to increase the price of the raw stones, while those who gamble on stones are gambling on whether there is jadeite in the raw stones and what grade of jadeite it is.

People who gamble on stones may not know how to cut them, but experienced stone cutters are definitely experts in stone gambling because they need to show people the best aspects of the stone in order to stimulate merchants' desire to buy.

Over the years since taking over the Hu family business, Hu Rong has personally cut at least tens of thousands of raw stones, and his experience in cutting stones far surpasses that of Zhuang Rui.

"Brother Zhuang, why don't you go first?" Hu Rong turned to look at Zhuang Rui.

"Brother Hu, why don't you go first? I'll take this opportunity to learn..." Zhuang Rui waved his hand repeatedly.

"You little rascal, you're as shrewd as a monkey when it comes to gambling on stones. You've even dared to cut open red jade worth hundreds of millions, so what are you afraid of?"

Hu Rong was amused by Zhuang Rui's expression. Without any hesitation, he fixed the piece of black sand onto the stone cutting machine, grabbed a grinding wheel, and turned on the power.

Who is that young man?

"I don't recognize him, but he actually won over 100 million yuan worth of jade in the gamble. No wonder Mr. Hu was so polite to him..."

"His surname is Zhuang. Could he be that young man from the Pingzhou public auction last year?"

Upon hearing Hu Rong's words, the onlookers began speculating about Zhuang Rui's background. Anyone participating in the jade auction was considered a big shot in their eyes, and some quick-witted individuals even guessed Zhuang Rui's identity.

Hu Rong squatted down, using a grinder to continuously polish the surface of the jet-black raw stone. He wasn't just polishing one spot; after removing the black skin, he would immediately change the angle, as if he wanted to remove the entire outer layer of the stone.

This piece of black jadeite was not very large to begin with. After about 10 minutes, the black outer layer of the stone had been completely polished away, revealing the slightly whitish gray crystals.

"Uncle Hu, it looks like it's turning green..."

Xiao Wang brought a basin of water and washed the rough stone after wiping off the outer layer. Through the thin layer of white crystals, he could vaguely see a hint of green inside.

"Hmm, it needs to be wiped a little more. Xiao Wang, could you move aside?"

Hu Rong snorted dismissively. The appearance of green was exactly what he expected, but judging from the looks of it, the texture and color seemed to be just average. If it were a high-quality green jade, the green color would have been clearly visible by now, instead of being so faintly visible.

In Hu Rong's mind, even if the jadeite inside this rough stone was of poor quality, he was still guaranteed to beat Zhuang Rui, because Hu Rong couldn't see any signs of jadeite in the stone that Zhuang Rui had chosen.

As the white crystal was gradually peeled away, the jade inside was revealed. After about half an hour, a piece of jade the size of a baby's fist appeared in Hu Rong's palm.

After being washed with water, under the light, the color of this jadeite can be seen to be slightly bluish, and its texture and clarity are not very clear; at best, it can only be classified as bean green jadeite.

However, in today's jade market, even a piece of jade this large, with its bean-green color, can sell for over 100,000 yuan. For jade, it is a seller's market, not a buyer's market.

"Brother Hu, this piece of black jadeite didn't seem to have any special characteristics, yet you managed to find jadeite in it. You're truly amazing, I'm completely outmatched..."

After Zhuang Rui took the jade and played with it in his hand for a while, he gave Hu Rong a thumbs up. This was not just a polite remark, but a heartfelt expression of admiration. If he didn't have that eye, he would never have chosen this rough stone with its poor appearance and cracks to gamble on.

"As expected of the Jade King of Myanmar, he's truly impressive..."

"Sigh, if only I had Mr. Hu's eye for detail..."

"Let's check out Mr. Hu's stall later, maybe we can find something good..."

"That's right, we'll go there later. Boss Hu is Chinese, after all, he won't be as ruthless as the Burmese boss..."

When Hu Rong unearthed the jadeite, the small processing factory suddenly became noisy. Being able to witness the jadeite king of Myanmar gambling on stones with his own eyes was something to brag about back home.

Hearing Zhuang Rui and the others' praise, Hu Rong didn't show any pride on his face. For him, finding a piece of green jade was nothing special. If it weren't for the bet with Zhuang Rui, he wouldn't have continued cutting after he found the green color. Instead, he would have put it back and sold it. That's the way of doing business for a raw stone merchant.

"Brother Zhuang, it's your turn. We don't know who will win or lose yet..."

To be honest, Hu Rong also wanted to see why Zhuang Rui had chosen this rough stone that had already been cut twice. Zhuang Rui's reputation in the jade gambling circle was built on numerous successful gambles. Perhaps there was something about this stone that he hadn't noticed.

"Okay, let's see if there's anything inside this piece of material that's been cut in two..."

Zhuang Rui had already removed the raw stone and placed it on the stone-cutting machine. With the thin end facing inward, he turned the mottled surface towards the crowd. The onlookers, seeing Zhuang Rui's posture, thought he was about to cut it in half, and their eyes widened in surprise.

Cutting stone is more exciting than rubbing it. With one cut, you can immediately tell if it's real or fake. It's satisfying to cut and exhilarating to watch.

However, after Zhuang Rui secured the raw stone, he did not do as everyone wished. Instead, he picked up a grinder and prepared to grind the stone.

Hu Rong was also a little confused and said, "Brother, do we not need to polish this piece of material?"

"Yeah, young man, wouldn't it be so much more satisfying to just make a cut directly..."

"Yeah, it's free material anyway, let's just cut it..."

Others shared the same thought as Hu Rong and began to clamor.

"Damn it, the material itself is free, but the items inside are valuable..."

Zhuang Rui cursed inwardly, then turned to Hu Rong and said, "It looks like this ringworm is seeping in. I'll rub it first. If it doesn't turn green, then I'll cut it in half..."

Hu Rong shook his head but didn't say anything more. Although the moss on the jadeite rough was very likely weathered jadeite residue left outside, it could not be ruled out that it was a trace left by other magma or associated minerals. Zhuang Rui's conclusion that there was jade inside based solely on that moss was something Hu Rong couldn't understand.

Zhuang Rui ignored what others thought and, huffing and puffing, took the grinder and began grinding into the affected area.

However, after wiping in about two centimeters thick, the scab was wiped away, revealing a white crystalline substance with a hint of green.

"stop!"

Hu Rong, who had been squatting on the ground intently watching the grinding, suddenly shouted, startling Zhuang Rui, who quickly turned off the grinder.

"It looks like there's green. Judging from this fog, it should produce some green. This...this...brother, you have a good eye! I've lost our bet..."

Hu Rong cleaned the polished surface, examined it with a magnifying glass for two or three minutes, and then looked at it with an incredulous expression. The surface was misty with a greenish tint, and it was almost certain that there was jade inside.

With Hu Rong's discerning eye, he could tell from the green mist that the quality of the jadeite inside was definitely better than that of the bean-green jadeite.

Chapter 485 The Bet (Part 3)

"This hasn't even turned green yet, Brother Hu. It might not be as good as your piece..."

Zhuang Rui smiled, but instead of continuing to polish the stone from the bottom, he changed his angle and used the stone polishing machine to polish the middle part of the rough stone.

Although Zhuang Rui didn't understand carving and design, considering the overall jadeite inside, it seemed that leaving the crystalline material at the base made it look more like a jadeite tree. If the stone underneath was wiped away now, it would be impossible to fill it in later.

As mentioned before, it seems that the person who cut this rough stone must have cursed Buddha that day, as their luck was so bad that both cuts were only three to five centimeters away from the green part. After Zhuang Rui polished the cut surface for about 10 minutes, the green jadeite was revealed to everyone.

"This...this, how is this possible?"

Hu Rong was completely stunned. He could understand if the jade was cut from the bottom and polished out, but Zhuang Rui just changed the location randomly, and even used the same cut surface, and still managed to polish out green.

The green area is about ten centimeters away from the base, which means that this piece of jade should be quite large. Even if it is of the bean-green type, it would be much more valuable than the piece that Hu Ronggang just cut out.

This made Hu Rong's old face somewhat embarrassed. Zhuang Rui had extracted jade from such a piece of material that was generally considered waste. Didn't that mean that everyone in his Hu family was blind and ignorant, actually putting such a piece of rough material into the waste area to sell?

"Uncle Hu, this water is excellent, it's almost icy jadeite. This guy is really amazing! I've seen this piece of material before, Uncle Hu, it looked like a piece of junk. I never expected this guy could cut jadeite out of it. I admire you, I really admire you..."

After Xiao Wang rubbed the side and revealed the green color, he immediately rinsed it with water. The jade, which was about the size of a matchbox, was lush and green, and the water droplets that slid down the jade seemed to turn green as well.

"Hehe, I'm a stubborn person, I often make things difficult for myself. After seeing this flaw, I won't feel at ease until I've cut it open. It's all luck, nothing like Brother Hu's success which is based entirely on his eye for talent..."

When Zhuang Rui saw Hu Rong's expression suddenly turn somewhat unpleasant, he assumed it was because Hu Rong was unhappy about his victory. Little did he know, Hu Rong was actually unhappy because, in his entire family, no one could match Zhuang Rui's discernment.

Judging from the texture, clarity, and color of this piece of jade, a rough estimate suggests that the jade inside is worth at least tens of millions. The Hu family's decision to treat it as waste material is, to put it nicely, a misjudgment, and to put it bluntly, blatant blindness.

"Brother, don't flatter me. When it comes to gambling on jade, I'm really no match for you. Even if the 'Jade King' from Yunnan came, he wouldn't be as good as you. I've lost this bet..."

Hu Rong wasn't reluctant to spend the money, but he felt ashamed that after decades of gambling on stones since he was a toddler, he was still inferior to Zhuang Rui. However, Xiao Wang and Zhuang Rui's words gave him a way out, so he flattered Zhuang Rui a few times, and his words of admitting defeat were truly heartfelt.

Upon hearing Hu Rong's words, the onlookers all looked at Zhuang Rui in astonishment. They hadn't expected Hu Rong to speak so highly of Zhuang Rui. In the jade gambling circle, who hadn't heard of the "Jade King"? For Hu Rong to say that even the "Jade King" was inferior to Zhuang Rui was definitely big news if it got out.

"Brother Hu, what do you think of this piece of material?"

"Of course it's yours. I can afford to lose this little bit..." Hu Rong interrupted Zhuang Rui unhappily.

Zhuang Rui, both amused and exasperated, said, "Brother Hu, that's not what I meant. I was asking if we should continue cutting this piece of material?"

Hu Rong circled the raw stone once and said, "Let's untie it; it's too big to carry around..."

"good....."

Zhuang Rui agreed and picked up the stone-cutting machine to continue cutting. However, the jadeite in this rough stone was quite complex, resembling a tree, and in some places, it was mixed with lower-quality jade. Zhuang Rui's cutting was very slow.

"Brother, let me take care of it..."

More than an hour later, Hu Rong took the grinding wheel from Zhuang Rui. He hadn't expected the jade inside this rough stone to look like this. After more than an hour, only four or five centimeters of green had been polished out, and it was still extending downwards.

If there were a break, then it could be cut, but the jadeite in the rough stone is a whole, so Hu Rong didn't dare to say anything about cutting it.

It's important to know that the carving of jadeite ornaments is often determined by the shape of the jadeite itself. If the jadeite in the material has a good shape, a single cut can ruin it, greatly reducing its value.

When Hu Rong was polishing the raw stone with a grinding wheel, he was noticeably more careful than Zhuang Rui. He would skip over any areas that were green or had other colors and continue polishing.

As a result, Hu Rong's stone-cutting efficiency was even lower than Zhuang Rui's. More than an hour later, it was already past 9 p.m. The crowd of onlookers had long since dispersed, and only Xiao Wang, the owner of the processing plant, was still watching from the side.

Seeing that Hu Rong was covered in sweat but still refused to rest, Zhuang Rui stepped forward and said, "Brother Hu, how about we cut it tomorrow? There should be stone-cutting machines in the mining area, right?"

"No, we have to unravel it today. The shape of this piece is very unique. Look, there are actually two kinds of chalcedony here, red and yellow. Paired with this green jade, it can be carved into a jade bonsai. It's a masterpiece of nature..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hu Rong stopped what he was doing. Although he looked tired, he was still very excited. Even as he spoke, his eyes were still shining as he looked at the raw stone.

Hu Rong is a jewelry designer himself. His passion for jewelry design even surpasses his passion for managing the family business. He also serves as the design director of a jewelry company in Taiwan. Upon seeing this high-quality, uniquely shaped jadeite, he naturally wanted to unravel it completely to see it for himself.

"Oh dear, I forgot you took a plane today, brother. I'm so sorry. How about I call a car to take you back to your hotel to rest? I'll untangle it today..."

Hu Rong suddenly remembered that Zhuang Rui had just arrived from Yangon today, and had been dragged around aimlessly by Hu Rong since arriving in Mandalay. It was time for him to rest.

Zhuang Rui shook his head and said, "It's alright, Brother Hu, I'll help you. We can take turns solving it, and it'll be faster..."

Zhuang Rui took the grinding wheel from Hu Rong, changed the grinding wheel, and started grinding the raw stone. Hu Rong was also quite tired after more than an hour, so he didn't hesitate to light a cigarette and sit down to rest.

Although Zhuang Rui had the advantage of being able to see inside the rough stone, he still had to be very careful when processing the jadeite. Some of the forked jadeite was extremely fine, and if he wasn't careful, he could easily break off the forks. So his movements weren't very fast, and after more than an hour, he had only managed to cut out one-third of the jadeite.

During this time, Zhuang Rui received a call from Peng Fei. Fearing that something might happen to Zhuang Rui, Peng Fei also rushed to the processing plant. He watched as Zhuang Rui and Hu Rong took turns cutting the stone until nearly one o'clock in the morning, when the jade inside the stone was finally fully revealed.

Because the stone was being cut at night, the lighting wasn't very good, and there were a few areas that were difficult to distinguish that I didn't manage to clean. However, the overall outline of the jadeite was now fully revealed.

This piece of jade is about 25 centimeters tall and is shaped like a tree trunk. It is about the thickness of a thumb at both the top and bottom, and it has four branches in the middle. What is rare is that at each branch, there is a red and yellow jade that looks like an insect.

When placed under strong light, the entire piece of jade looks like a bonsai tree surrounded by colored light bulbs, radiating an alluring glow through the white crystals on its trunk.

"This...this is truly a marvel of nature, Brother Zhuang, we must keep this..."

Hu Rong's gaze was completely drawn to the jadeite, and he muttered to himself, showing no trace of the demeanor of a Burmese jadeite tycoon.

"Brother Hu, if you like it, you can keep it..."

Zhuang Rui felt a little sorry for Hu Rong, but since Hu Rong had asked for it, he couldn't very well refuse.

Hu Rong was stunned for a moment after hearing Zhuang Rui's words, then waved his hands repeatedly and said, "No...no, that's not what I meant. I meant that I will carve this jadeite, and when it's finished, I will send it to you. The item will still be yours..."

Hu Rong paused for a moment, then continued, "Once this is carved, it will be worth at least 100 million RMB. Brother, I'm completely convinced of your eye for quality..."

"One hundred million? That can't be that expensive, can it? This is just icy jade..." Zhuang Rui was a little surprised by the price Hu Rong mentioned.

"At least 100 million. This kind of jadeite with this shape is extremely rare, and these jade insects are the icing on the cake. The icy jadeite is already quite good. Brother, some people who collect rare stones only care about the shape and don't really care about the material..."

Hu Rong circled the almost naturally formed jade tree repeatedly, his eyes filled with fervor.

Zhuang Rui didn't want to take the lead; he was the one who had cut the material himself, so why shouldn't he take it? He readily agreed, saying, "Alright, Brother Hu, then I'll leave it to you to handle..."

After Zhuang Rui agreed, Hu Rong called the RV driver who had been waiting outside, carefully placed the jade in the vehicle, and then drove Zhuang Rui back to the hotel. They arranged to go to the mine again at noon the next day.

After entering the hotel room, Zhuang Rui noticed Peng Fei staring intently at him and said curiously, "Peng Fei, go take a shower. Are you looking at me?"

"Brother Zhuang, I went out to get this today, please keep it safe..."

Peng Fei smiled mysteriously and took out an object from behind his waist, startling Zhuang Rui.

Chapter 486 Better to be prepared than not

"Peng Fei, what are you doing with a gun?"

Zhuang Rui was startled to see Peng Fei pull out a gleaming black pistol from his waist, though a hint of curiosity still flickered in his eyes. Zhuang Rui had handled submachine guns before, but had never had the chance to fire a handgun—except, of course, for Wu Guniang.

"Brother Zhuang, Yangon and Mandalay are relatively safe, but things get chaotic once you get into the mining areas. Plus, those places are close to the China-Myanmar border, so there might be smugglers and drug traffickers there. It's safer to carry a gun..."

As Peng Fei spoke, he skillfully took out the magazine from the pistol in his hand, then pulled the gun back, and a bright yellow bullet jumped out of the smooth barrel. Peng Fei grabbed it in his hand, showing that he had been keeping the bullet loaded the whole time.

"This...is it a Type 54 pistol?"

Zhuang Rui was somewhat envious, and he didn't pay any attention to Peng Fei's talk about smuggling and drug trafficking. His eyes were fixed on the gun. Peng Fei smiled and handed the gun to Zhuang Rui.

Reaching out, Zhuang Rui took the pistol with the magazine unloaded. He remembered seeing the Type 54 pistol carried by the second lieutenant instructor during the last few days of live-fire target practice in university military training. It was exactly the same as this one. Back then, the instructor was extremely stingy and wouldn't even let the students touch it.

Liu Chuan's father used to own a gun like this, but he was afraid that his son and Zhuang Rui would get into trouble, so he never dared to bring the gun home. This was the first time Zhuang Rui had ever handled a handgun.

The gun's surface is entirely covered in black paint, except for the grip, the smoothbore, and the trigger, which show obvious signs of frequent use. The black paint has been worn away, revealing the silvery-white iron color. It feels heavy in the hand, probably weighing a little over a pound.

Men often have a special affinity for guns. Even the most cowardly person can unleash extraordinary courage when holding a gun. Although Zhuang Rui didn't particularly like using violence to solve problems, he found himself reluctant to put the gun down.

"It's a Type 54 pistol. Although we can find some more powerful weapons, they're not very convenient to carry, so we'll just have to make do with this..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui playing with the gun, Peng Fei laughed, took the gun from Zhuang Rui's hand, and then taught Zhuang Rui the characteristics of the Type 54 pistol, how to load and fire it, and where the safety was.

The Type 54 pistol is a copy of the Russian-made TT33 Tokarev series pistols. It uses the Type 51 62\*25mm pistol cartridge, adopts the short-recoil recovery principle, and has a barrel swing locking mechanism. The magazine capacity is eight rounds. The entire gun consists of the barrel, upper slide, lower slide, recoil mechanism, trigger, and magazine.

The Type 54 pistol was used as a standard weapon in China for more than half a century. At a distance of 25 meters, it could penetrate a 3-millimeter-thick steel plate, a 10-centimeter-thick wooden board, and

a 6-centimeter-thick brick wall. At a distance of 50 meters, it could meet the needs of self-defense weapons in combat and was classified as a high-powered military pistol.

By 1987, the number of Type 54 pistols produced had reached 35 million. Not only were the military and police equipped with this gun, but even the security departments of some large companies used Type 54 pistols.

The "Two Kings" who roamed the country back then stole this Type 54 pistol, and dozens of soldiers and policemen died by its bullets, which shows how deadly it was.

"Peng Fei, you should keep this. It's much better for you to have it than for me to..."

After playing with the gun for a while, Zhuang Rui handed it to Peng Fei. He knew his own limitations; even if he were to use the gun, he could probably only hit the target within a meter. Beyond that distance, it would likely be inaccurate.

Peng Fei waved his hand, then magically pulled another gun from his person, saying, "Brother Zhuang, keep this in your handbag for self-defense. I have another one of my own..."

"Hey kid, where did you hide that gun?"

Zhuang Rui noticed that Peng Fei was only wearing jeans and a t-shirt, and those two guns weren't small; he really didn't know where he'd hidden them.

"It wasn't stuffed in his crotch, was it?"

Zhuang Rui couldn't help but recall those scenes in movies where female spies strapped a gun to their thighs, and he shuddered with dread. But then he thought it was impossible; Chinese men don't usually wear kilts, so he couldn't possibly take off his pants every time he needed to draw a gun.

Peng Fei had no idea what Zhuang Rui was thinking. He lifted the shirt behind his waist, inserted the gun muzzle downwards into his waistband, then put the shirt back down and said, "Control the muscles in your waist and contract them inwards, then it won't be noticeable from the outside..."

Zhuang Rui moved behind Peng Fei and couldn't see any bulge in his lower back. He lifted Peng Fei's clothes and saw that the muscles in his waist where the pistol was inserted were indeed tucked in, which made Zhuang Rui marvel.

"By the way, Peng Fei, where did you get all these guns?"

Zhuang Rui watched as Peng Fei pulled out five more magazines, all filled with gleaming yellow bullets. He couldn't help but ask curiously, "How did he manage to get two weapons that can kill people in just one afternoon? If it were me, I probably wouldn't even have figured out the way to Mandalay."

"Bought them. A gun was \$200, a magazine with eight bullets was \$20, and this thing was \$50 each. I bought ten..."

As Peng Fei spoke, he opened his black briefcase, took out a dark, iron ball, and tossed it in his hand. Zhuang Rui's hair stood on end at the sight. "Good heavens, isn't that a hand grenade?"

"Peng Fei, we're not going to war, why are you bringing all this stuff? Put it away quickly, or it'll explode..."

Zhuang Rui was genuinely startled. Who throws a grenade around like a melon? If it were to explode accidentally, he'd be carrying the huge word "wronged" on his head when he met the King of Hell.

Peng Fei nodded seriously and said, "Brother Zhuang, if we're just going to the mining area, there's naturally no need to prepare these things. But since we're going into the jungle, it's best to be well-equipped, just in case..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's expression of wanting to avoid it at all costs, Peng Fei chuckled and said, "This is an American M68 grenade. It has good performance and is very safe. Brother Zhuang, you don't need to worry about it detonating automatically. In addition, this kind of grenade can be used for both offense and defense, and it can also be used for demolition."

I also bought a few plastic explosives. Hmm, Zhuang, these things cost a total of \$1,300. That guy even had a grenade launcher for only \$7,000. If it weren't so inconvenient to carry, I would have bought it. What a pity..."

As Peng Fei spoke, a look of regret appeared on his face. He had dealt with these things all day long in the army, and hadn't touched them for over a year after his discharge. Now that he had picked them up again, he couldn't help but feel a surge of excitement.

"Alright, put your things away carefully, so Brother Hu doesn't find them. Otherwise, people will think we went to rob someone. Okay, go take a shower and go to bed..."

Zhuang Rui felt uneasy as soon as he heard the name "plastic bomb." He remembered clearly that last year in Shaanxi, Boss Yu was strapped with these kinds of things, and he didn't want to go through that again.

Furthermore, although Zhuang Rui knew that Peng Fei was a special forces soldier, he did not expect that Peng Fei, who looked like a boy next door, would be so crazy about weapons, even howitzers. Did he really think he was going to war?

Zhuang Rui tossed and turned all night, barely getting a good night's sleep. It would be strange if he slept well; sleeping next to a gun might provide a sense of security, but sleeping next to a pile of explosives would only induce panic.

Because the stone-cutting went on too late last night, Hu Rong didn't call until noon the next day. Although Zhuang Rui hadn't slept very well, he was still young and became energetic after a few hours of rest. On the contrary, Hu Rong, who came to pick him up, still looked tired.

"Brother Zhuang, this is Professor Feng, and this is Professor Chen. They are both geological experts I invited from China. They are here to help me take a look at that jade mine..."

In the hotel lobby, Hu Rong introduced Zhuang Rui to two elderly men, both around fifty years old. Although he had previously said he wanted Zhuang Rui to inspect the mine, he had still used his connections and spent a lot of money to bring in two experts from China.

After all, Hu Rong had already invested nearly 300 million yuan in that jade mine, so it was impossible for him to place his hopes on Zhuang Rui, this young upstart. Being good at gambling on stones doesn't necessarily mean he can identify a mine vein.

Zhuang Rui didn't try to guess Hu Rong's thoughts. His purpose in going to Hpakant was also not related to the jade mine. However, Zhuang Rui was very happy to see two of his own people in a foreign land.

Zhuang Rui's grandfather was a geological expert. When he talked with the two professors from China University of Mining and Technology, he discovered that they had both studied Zhuang Rui's grandfather's works. Once this connection was established, the two professors immediately lost their arrogance as experts. In addition, since they also lived in Pengcheng, they got along very well with Zhuang Rui.

Professors Feng and Chen were very pleased to be able to come to Myanmar to investigate jade mines. Both of them study the formation of jade, but their research has been stalled because they have never been to a jade mine.

It's important to know that the Myanmar government has always been extremely wary of jade mines and strictly prohibits foreigners from entering or leaving.

The Myitkyina region in northern Myanmar has been designated as a military restricted area and has never been open to the public. The opportunity to enter the mining area this time is a result of the Myanmar military government's control over most of the forces in northern Myanmar and Hu Rong's efforts at the top levels of Myanmar. Otherwise, it would be very difficult for outsiders to enter.

However, after Hu Rong introduced the soldiers behind him, Zhuang Rui realized that these people who were ostensibly protecting him were actually there to monitor their activities in the mining area.

#### Chapter 487 Arrival in Myitkyina

The group boarded Hu Rong's RV and headed towards the suburbs. Normally, the only way to travel from Mandalay to Myitkyina is by train, but this 600-700 kilometer distance would likely take dozens of hours by train, as Myanmar's train speeds are still at the level of China's 1950s and 60s.

Therefore, Hu Rong used his connections to request a military helicopter from the Myanmar military.

The RV drove directly to a military camp on the outskirts of Mandalay. Soldiers with guns were all around. Zhuang Rui tightened his grip on his bag, where a pistol was still lying. If the soldiers found it, who knew what kind of trouble it would cause.

When Zhuang Rui looked at Peng Fei beside him, he calmed down a little. The kid was carrying his slightly worn backpack with an air of nonchalance, looking around as if the bag contained not bombs, but candy and gifts to bring from a friend's house.

Zhuang Rui now understands what it means to have a guilty conscience. He used to hear people say that those who committed crimes and went on the run often couldn't eat or sleep for years or even decades. Zhuang Rui didn't believe it then, but now he understands. Even though he hadn't done anything wrong, just having a gun in his bag made him uneasy.

Fortunately, from the moment they got off the bus until they boarded the helicopter, no one asked to check Zhuang Rui and the others' belongings, which greatly relieved Zhuang Rui.

Hu Rong, who followed Zhuang Rui onto the helicopter, was carrying a wooden box about 50 or 60 centimeters long. Inside was Zhuang Rui's tree-shaped jade, which he was going to take home and carve slowly.

"Brother Zhuang, this is a Mi-8 Russian-made military transport helicopter, produced in the 1960s or 70s. It's quite an antique, but its performance is still pretty good. It can seat more than 20 people..."

Peng Fei surveyed the transport plane, whispering his introduction to Zhuang Rui. However, he immediately stopped talking when the Burmese soldiers boarded.

Zhuang Rui knew that before the collapse of the Soviet Union in the last century, a fleet had been stationed in a Burmese port for its global strategic position. However, due to economic difficulties, Russia withdrew the fleet back to its home country, but left behind many military facilities bearing Russian marks in Myanmar.

The Mi-8 military transport helicopter has a speed of about 300 kilometers per hour, which is not very fast, but its advantages are that it has a large fuel capacity, a longer range than ordinary helicopters, and ample internal space.

Hu Rongzhuang, Ruihe, and the others, along with the few people sent by the Burmese military, made up a total of eight people. They sat in the cabin without feeling crowded at all, and there was even room for them to recline and take a nap.

However, Zhuang Rui could only dream about it. When the helicopter's rotors started spinning, the huge roar made the people in the cabin blush and open their mouths to relieve the discomfort in their ears. Only the Burmese soldiers and Hu Rong behaved normally. As for Peng Fei, Zhuang Rui guessed that he was definitely faking it.

However, Zhuang Rui and the two professors were truly suffering, their eardrums feeling as if they were about to burst.

Zhuang Rui had flown in helicopters before, but the soundproofing of this military helicopter was really poor. There was a door on one side, but no door on the other side. The sight made the group very nervous. They quickly fastened their seat belts, fearing that if the helicopter tilted, they would roll out.

The two professors, who had originally planned to continue chatting on the helicopter, turned pale and fell silent after the helicopter took off. The wind outside was blowing into the cabin so hard that you could not even open your mouth without being filled with the smell of tropical rainforest air.

Thankfully, winter temperatures in Myanmar are consistently above 20 degrees Celsius; otherwise, everyone in the cabin would have been frozen solid.

After leaving the military camp, about half an hour later, Zhuang Rui felt a bit more comfortable and looked down at the ground through the cabin window. However, all he could see were tall trees and dense forests, with no scenery to speak of.

It was the dry season in Myanmar, and the tall, broad-leaved trees looked somewhat withered, with very few leaves on their trunks. After looking down for more than ten minutes, Zhuang Rui did not see a single person, making the place seem rather desolate.

However, now is also the best time to mine jade in Myanmar, because when the rainy season comes, the mountain roads become very difficult to travel, and even livestock cannot pass through, let alone people. Therefore, now is the busiest time in the mining area.

The mountains in Myanmar are not particularly steep, but they are continuous, with one peak after another, covered in dense jungle. Zhuang Rui believed that if he were thrown off here, he probably wouldn't be able to escape for a year or two.

Looking at the towering trees below the plane, Zhuang Rui felt quite incredulous about the social structure of Myanmar. Myanmar itself is located by a seaport, with a very important geographical location, and its inland areas are rich in gemstones and precious teak. Yet the people of Myanmar are so poor. He wondered what the root cause of this was.

More than an hour later, the helicopter slowed down and came to a stop on a hilltop. Zhuang Rui thought they had arrived at their destination, so he quickly unbuckled his seatbelt and jumped out of the helicopter. But his legs gave way, and if he hadn't braced himself with his hands, he would have fallen to the ground.

"Where...where is this? This isn't Myitkyina, is it?"

Zhuang Rui looked around and saw dense forests everywhere. He couldn't help but look at Hu Rong. Even if northern Myanmar was desolate, there couldn't possibly be not a single person in sight.

"We've only gone halfway. The driver needs to rest for a bit. Here, brother, have some water..." Hu Rong smiled and handed Zhuang Rui a bottle of beverage.

It's more accurate to say the helicopter needed a rest than the pilot, because once the helicopter came to a stop, the pilot got busy checking all the components to make sure they were working properly. Keep in mind, this was an old relic from thirty or forty years ago, and it couldn't support a flight that could go on for several hours at a stretch.

If something went wrong in the air, the people on the helicopter would probably be smashed to pieces before their parachutes even opened. However, the military equipment produced by Polar Bear is of reliable quality. At least Hu Rong has ridden in it many times without any problems.

Professor Feng and Professor Chen also helped each other down from the helicopter. Their bodies were not as strong as Zhuang Rui's, and they were already pale. If they hadn't been supporting each other, they probably would have fallen to the ground long ago.

"Are you two alright? I'm so sorry to have troubled you. There are some mines nearby, but it will be a bit of a struggle for us to get to Hpakant. I wonder if you two teachers can hold on a little longer?"

When Hu Rong saw the two professors get off the helicopter, he rushed to greet them. He was only thinking about getting to the Hpakant region of Myitkyina as soon as possible, but he did not expect that the two professors' bodies could not withstand the turbulence of the helicopter.

Actually, taking the train in Myanmar is probably not as good as this helicopter ride. It takes thirty or forty hours to get from Mandalay to Myitkyina, and that train is a "luxury train" left behind by the British in the mid-20th century. You might even suffer more than this.

"It's alright, it's alright, I can hold on. I never imagined that jadeite would grow in such a place. Seeing is believing..."

Professor Feng waved his hand repeatedly, indicating that he was fine. The beauty of jade is well known, but the mining and growth environment behind jade is rarely mentioned internationally, because of the Myanmar government's closed-door policy.

Half a century ago, Zhuang Rui's grandfather had conducted in-depth investigations of jade mines in Myanmar, but due to special historical reasons, his conclusions were never published and remain buried in that wooden box to this day.

The geological formation of jadeite has always been a topic of discussion among domestic geologists. Now that they have the opportunity to see the geological environment in which jadeite grows, the two professors, though tired, are still full of excitement.

After resting for more than an hour, the group boarded the helicopter again. They only drank some water and didn't dare to eat anything, otherwise the turbulence would make them vomit up.

The flight lasted for nearly two hours. From the helicopter, people could be vaguely seen appearing on the ground. Around five o'clock, the helicopter landed at a military camp in Myitkyina. In Myanmar, troops are stationed outside most cities.

"Professors, Brother Zhuang, let's have a welcome dinner for you tomorrow. Please get some rest today..."

After getting off the helicopter, Hu Rong looked at the pale faces of the men and knew they wouldn't be able to eat much that night. He used his car, which was waiting in the military camp, to take them to the most luxurious hotel in Myitkyina.

Looking out from the car, Zhuang Rui saw that Myitkyina was far inferior to Yangon and Mandalay. At least in those two cities, there were some modern buildings, but here, all he could see were low wooden houses, and reinforced concrete buildings were very rare.

The so-called luxury hotel was just a three-story building with no appliances except for a bulky 21-inch color TV. There wasn't even a water heater; the staff had to bring it to the room.

Zhuang Rui and the others were really exhausted. After taking a shower in their room, they all went to bed and fell asleep.

Although Hu Rong also has a house in Myitkyina, the Hu family's roots in Myanmar are in Hpakant, and he is staying at a hotel with Zhuang Rui and the others today.

The next morning, two imported SUVs were parked in front of the hotel.

This is Hu Rong's personal car. If he were to ride in a vehicle provided by the military, it would probably be an old Beijing Jeep 212 made in China. At one point, China provided Myanmar with a batch of such Jeeps.

Chapter 488 Dangerous Jungle

Both SUVs have very large tires, making their chassis appear very high; they look like they've been specially modified.

When Zhuang Rui arrived by helicopter yesterday, he had seen the roads in the area. They were mostly mountain roads. If he had taken Hu Rong's old RV, it would have broken down after less than two miles.

Zhuang Rui, Peng Fei, and Hu Rong were in one car, along with a Burmese soldier who had come from Mandalay. Two other soldiers were in another car with Professors Feng and Chen.

Although the three Burmese soldiers hadn't spoken much and remained silent throughout the journey, Zhuang Rui could still sense that they were watching their every move, monitoring their actions. Moreover, they had openly displayed pistol holsters on their waists, and Zhuang Rui had no doubt that they carried real weapons.

This made Zhuang Rui a little uncomfortable, because his purpose in coming here was not to inspect the jade mine, but to find treasure in the forest. If he followed these soldiers, would he find treasure and present it to the Burmese government?

Zhuang Rui wasn't that noble. He would rather take what the Japanese stole back to China and use it to build Hope Primary Schools than let it fall into the hands of these Burmese warlords.

After getting in the car, Zhuang Rui's car drove ahead, slowly heading out of the city. Although Myitkyina is relatively poor, it has a large population. The narrow streets are full of naked children running around, so the car could not accelerate at all. It took nearly half an hour to travel just a few kilometers.

Thinking about the family planning policy that China started in the late 1970s, it was still very necessary. Otherwise, after these decades, the population would probably not be 1.6 billion now, and it is very likely to have doubled. Just thinking about that situation made Zhuang Rui shudder.

Zhuang Rui had initially thought that once they reached the outskirts of the city, they could speed up, but when he saw the road paved with small pebbles, he couldn't help but smile wryly. This kind of road was impossible to drive fast on; otherwise, the tires probably wouldn't have even made it to Hpakant.

Myitkyina is still the capital of Kachin State, yet the road conditions are so poor. I suppose those warlords are too busy seizing territory to care about these things.

Kachin State is actually home to the Jingpo ethnic group in my country. However, the Jingpo people are much happier than us; at least they don't have to roll around in the mud when they go out in the rain.

After walking along a gravel road, Zhuang Rui realized that he had underestimated the journey to Hpakant. The road ahead was completely dirt, with many bumps and jolts. The people in the car were tossed and turned with the car's jolting. If it weren't for the steep terrain, Zhuang Rui would have preferred to take a helicopter again.

The bumps were bearable, but the thought of the plastic bombs and grenades in Peng Fei's bag made Zhuang Rui uneasy. He felt as if he were sitting on a bomb.

Zhuang Rui wasn't a military enthusiast and didn't know that plastic bombs wouldn't explode even when burned without special detonation, so his efforts were in vain.

"Brother Hu... I think we should send people from the Burmese government to... to the rural areas of China to take a look. The roads here are really terrible..."

Zhuang Rui's words were broken into several parts by the jolting of the car. He had seen children running around in the low wooden houses on both sides of the road, and couldn't help but think of a phrase he often saw in rural China:

"If you want to get rich, have fewer children and build more roads."

This statement is particularly apt when applied to Myanmar. Despite having gold, silver, copper mines and numerous gemstone mines, the people's standard of living is comparable to that of war-torn African countries. The root cause of this lies with the government.

"Brother, it's easy for you to say that, but who cares? Everyone here is minding their own business, not the other way around..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hu Rong couldn't help but smile wryly. He was speaking Mandarin with Zhuang Rui, and wasn't worried about being overheard by the soldier. Even if he were, it wouldn't matter; the Hu Rong family had stood strong in Myanmar for over a century, and that wasn't just due to money.

The Hu Rong family has been rooted in Myanmar for over a century, witnessing the country's ups and downs, making them arguably the best witnesses and observers.

In the early 20th century, Myanmar was a British colony. Later, the British Empire lost its power and was driven out of Myanmar by Japan. With China's help, Myanmar re-established its government and broke away from British rule.

However, due to the large number of ethnic groups in Myanmar, in addition to the government army, each region basically has its own local army. Coupled with the Kuomintang defeated soldiers in the Golden Triangle, Myanmar has always been a land of warlordism, constant warfare, and each region ruling its own territory.

In the late 1980s, the value of jadeite mines gradually became apparent, and the Myitkyina region became the focus of contention between the government forces and local powers. This conflict has not been completely resolved to this day.

Although Zhuang Rui and his group currently see a peaceful and prosperous scene, with everyone seemingly happy under the government's control, the reality within the 150-kilometer-long jade mining area of Myitkyina is extremely complex, with small-scale conflicts frequently erupting. Of course, these matters are not suitable for public announcement.

Hu Rong and his family belong to the local power. The mine protection team trained by his family can transform into an army at any time and compete with the government army. The current peace is just the result of compromise between various forces.

Under such circumstances, no force, including Hu Rong's family, would be willing to invest in infrastructure. They reason that if they build the land today, it might be taken away by someone else tomorrow. Who would want to do something that is thankless and exhausting?

Even if Hu Rong knew about the weapons Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei carried, he wouldn't care. Compared to his armory, those things were insignificant. The security guards patrolling around his house were carrying Soviet-era AK-47 assault rifles.

In this area, people without connections or backgrounds dare not venture deep into it, otherwise they might be kidnapped and taken hostage. If they are lucky, they might be able to pay to ransom them, but if they are unlucky, they will become fertilizer for the flowers, plants, and trees in the jungle.

The car was shaking so badly that Zhuang Rui lost the will to speak. He gripped the passenger handrail tightly and looked around the car aimlessly, which led him to notice some differences.

Zhuang Rui took a closer look. The car doors were reinforced with steel plates, and the windows looked different from ordinary glass; they might be the legendary bulletproof glass.

On the windshield of Zhuang Rui's car, there was a very conspicuous pass. According to Peng Fei's translation, it meant "state guest". Although there weren't many cars along the way, they would all voluntarily pull over to make way for their convoy.

On the road from Myitkyina to Hpakant, there is a checkpoint every 20 to 30 kilometers. Although it is just a vehicle-stopping device made of a few pieces of wood, it is very practical.

Each time, when they were far from the checkpoint, Hu Rong would stick his head out and greet them in Burmese. These soldiers, armed with real guns, seemed to recognize Hu Rong. They didn't even glance inside the vehicle before moving the wooden frame to let it pass.

After a bumpy three-hour journey, Zhuang Rui and his group arrived in Mogaung, a key town on the route from Myitkyina to Hpakant, and the site where the Chinese Expeditionary Force launched the Mogaung Valley Campaign.

Here, the Chinese army, commanded by Sun Liren, captured the strategic Bujieban Mountain in just one day, annihilating and killing more than 12,000 Japanese soldiers. General Sun Liren's fame spread far and wide because of this battle.

However, Zhuang Rui did not have time to pay his respects to the deceased anti-Japanese generals this time. After Hu Rong got out of the car to complete some formalities and rested for more than half an hour, the two cars continued to Hpakant.

After passing Menggong, the road became increasingly difficult to travel, with virtually no road surface to speak of. The off-road vehicle simply followed the roadbed created by the large trucks transporting raw stones, struggling to move forward.

According to Hu Rong, decades ago, those jade miners who lacked machinery, just like the jade miners in Xinjiang, relied entirely on carrying jade out of the deep mountains on their shoulders and arms. The only difference was that their tools were changed from donkeys in Xinjiang to elephants from Myanmar.

On both sides of this overgrown road are tall trees whose treetops cannot be seen. These trees are distributed on the mountain, which looks somewhat gloomy. In addition, Hu Rong said that all kinds of dangerous creatures are hidden here, and miasma is generated every evening and morning. Few people who stray into the forest survive.

Hu Rong's words sent chills down Zhuang Rui's spine. He reflected on his treasure hunt, realizing it wasn't as simple as he had thought. The forest, where even the light from the sky couldn't penetrate, seemed like the gaping maw of a monster, darkly devouring everything that entered, whether human or creature.

"Brother Hu, I've heard there are quite a few black bears in Myanmar. We'd like to go hunting; we don't get the chance to do that back home..."

Peng Fei, who had been sitting in the back row without saying a word, suddenly interjected with a curious look on his face. Zhuang Rui couldn't help but turn around and glance at Peng Fei, who had just been having second thoughts.

"We do have black bears, their bile is known as liquid gold, but it's quite rare now. Okay, I'll see if there's a chance in the next few days, I'll take you two to have some fun..."

Hu Rong wasn't an animal rights activist, but after hearing Peng Fei's words, he agreed without much hesitation.

Moreover, hunting is a perfectly normal activity in Myanmar. He would often go into the mountains to fire a few shots and hunt some pheasants to improve his meals.

#### Chapter 489 City Within a City

Hpakant is the earliest jadeite mining area in Myanmar, with records of jadeite mining dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries.

It is said that around the 13th century, a pack animal driver from Yunnan, China, was returning to Tengchong from Myanmar. In order to balance the weight of the load on both sides of the horse, he picked up a stone from the roadside and placed it on the horse in what is now the Hpakant-Monggong area of Myanmar.

When the porter got home, he took a closer look and found that the stone he had picked up along the way seemed to be green and could be used as jade. After polishing, it was indeed a lovely green color, even better than nephrite.

Later, people went to the Hpakant-Mong Kung area to mine this gemstone. Since then, Myanmar has been a major producer of high-quality jadeite in the world. At least until now, no other place in the world has been found to produce jadeite.

By the 1780s, Emperor Qianlong had expanded the territory to the Hpakant region in northern Myanmar, where rich jadeite mines were discovered. From then on, jadeite was used extensively as a type of jade artifact, and its glory and prestige quickly surpassed that of nephrite.

There are approximately 160,000 people living here now, of whom 60,000 are native Burmese, while the other 100,000 are jade miners for various companies in Myanmar.

There are many Burmese Chinese living in Hpakant, some of whom have lived there for over a hundred years. The Hu family is the most prominent. Hu Rong once ran a Chinese school a few years ago, and now there are six or seven hundred Chinese students studying there.

After a long journey of nearly eight hours, the two vehicles finally entered the Hpakant region, the birthplace of Myanmar jade.

After entering the Hpakant region, the roads became increasingly difficult to navigate. The roads would inexplicably be blasted open, all done by various jade mining companies, forcing off-road vehicles to frequently take detours.

Excavators, which Hu Rong calls "monsters," are a common sight. They don't recognize the "VIP" passes on SUVs and often block the road for over half an hour.

Two more hours passed before the car finally entered Hpakant town. Zhuang Rui checked his watch; they had set off at around 8 a.m. and it was now almost 6 p.m., meaning they had been on the road for nearly 10 hours.

Zhuang Rui used his spiritual energy to soothe his numb body from time to time along the way. He was in relatively good condition, but he was a little mentally exhausted.

The two professors, on the other hand, were in a rather unpleasant state. Yesterday their faces were pale, but today they had turned ashen. They had vomited several times during the journey and had to be helped off the bus by the two soldiers. However, the soldiers themselves did not look too well either.

Seeing the two professors' appearance, Hu Rong felt a little embarrassed. After settling them in the only hotel in Hpakant, "Yudu Hotel," he ran around arranging for the hotel kitchen to cook porridge for them, and didn't have time to greet Zhuang Rui for a while.

"Oh, my dear brothers, I'm so sorry to both of you. Let's go home..."

Nearly an hour later, after Professors Feng and Chen had fallen asleep, Hu Rong finally had time to greet Zhuang Rui. Zhuang Rui and the other soldiers were sitting at the front desk of the guesthouse-like hotel.

Before Zhuang Rui could answer, a Burmese soldier suddenly stood up and said a few words to Hu Rong in Burmese.

Upon hearing this, Hu Rong's face immediately showed displeasure. He pointed upwards and spoke with a stern tone. The soldiers did not dare to look Hu Rong in the eye and nodded repeatedly.

"Peng Fei, what did they say?" Zhuang Rui nudged Peng Fei, who was sitting next to him.

"Brother Zhuang, that soldier just said that we're both foreigners and they'll be accompanying us the whole time, which means they'll be monitoring us..."

Peng Fei gestured with his chin toward Hu Rong, whose face was stern, and then said, "Brother Hu is scolding them, saying that we are his relatives and their task is to accompany and protect the two professors, not to accompany the two of us. Brother Hu is asking if they don't want to work anymore?"

Peng Fei's words made Zhuang Rui laugh. No matter the country, they all use power to intimidate others. Hu Rong clearly knew their superiors and was trying to scare them.

In fact, Zhuang Rui did not know that the three Burmese soldiers who were being reprimanded and were sweating profusely were not afraid of their superiors, but were genuinely afraid of Hu Rong in front of them.

If the Burmese government still had some control over Mandela, its influence became almost zero in Hpakant. The forces there were complex and intertwined, and even if Hu Rong sent people to eliminate them, the government would be powerless to do anything about it.

After the soldiers explained repeatedly, Hu Rong's expression gradually improved. He said a few more words, and the soldiers nodded their heads like shrimps, no longer daring to say anything about accompanying him.

"Come on, bro, you look pretty energetic. I'll treat you to a drink tonight to welcome you back..."

Hu Rong called out to Zhuang Rui, and the three of them left the hotel and got into an SUV. The soldiers followed closely behind and saw them off. As the car started, they gave a standard salute, clearly having been frightened by Hu Rong earlier.

Hu Rong's home is located in the northern part of Hpakant. After driving for more than half an hour, Zhuang Rui saw a cluster of buildings in the distance.

It is described as a complex of buildings because the buildings Zhuang Rui saw were surrounded by high walls, resembling a city within a city. The gate was built like a watchtower, with people standing guard with guns on both the top and the bottom. In the middle of the watchtower, there seemed to be a firing point.

Upon seeing Hu Rong, the guards at the gate immediately saluted, their posture and movements even more formal than those of the soldiers from before.

This city within a city covers a considerable area, with a main street in the middle, all paved with cement, even better than the asphalt roads in Hpakant.

The houses in the town were neatly arranged, all of them single-story. Children were playing in front of each house. All Zhuang Rui heard was Mandarin, which made him feel as if he had come to a small town in China.

“This place wasn’t very big before. Construction started in the 1970s. Now, nearly 20,000 Chinese people live here, most of them are family members of our company’s employees...”

Hu Rong introduced his home to Zhuang Rui, his face full of pride.

This city within a city was started by Hu Rong's grandfather and continued for three generations until now. The Chinese community has become the largest force in Hpakant. Not to mention, the miners alone can immediately arm a force of several thousand men once they have weapons.

It took almost five minutes to drive from the gate to Hu Rong's residence. There were already five or six people waiting in front of a large house.

"Grandma, why are you out here..." As soon as Hu Rong got out of the car, he went straight to an old woman.

“Arong, my nephew’s son-in-law is coming, of course I have to go see him...”

The old lady was not tall, and her hair was completely white, but it was neatly combed. She had deep wrinkles on her face and looked to be over seventy years old. As she spoke, she kept looking behind Hu Rong, but her eyes seemed very cloudy.

"Grandma, your eyesight isn't good, look..." Hu Rong helped the old lady up, but didn't finish his sentence.

"Grandma, it's me, Zhuang Rui. How are you doing?"

Zhuang Rui knew that this was Qin Haoran's aunt, so he quickly went forward and took the old lady's other hand.

"Good...good, good boy, you're really tall..."

The old lady spoke with a heavy Cantonese accent. She pulled her other hand out of Hu Rong's hand and touched Zhuang Rui's face, but it was a bit difficult for her to stand on tiptoe. Zhuang Rui quickly squatted down.

"Come on, let's go home..."

The old lady was quite decisive; she took Zhuang Rui's arm and turned to leave, leaving Hu Rong, who had originally wanted to introduce the other people to Zhuang Rui, with nothing to do but shake his head and smile wryly as he followed behind.

Hu Rong lives with his parents, grandmother, and others. As soon as he entered the courtyard, a large group of people, including adults and children, surrounded him. Most of them had never left Myanmar before and were very curious to see their relatives from China. They asked him all sorts of questions, making it quite lively.

Finally, it was the old lady who spoke up, and the group dispersed, giving Hu Rong the opportunity to introduce Zhuang Rui to his father, Hu Junzheng.

Hu Junzheng appeared to be around fifty-six or fifty-seven years old. According to Hu Rong, his father was in poor health, so when Hu Rong was in his twenties, he handed over the family business to Hu Junzheng.

Zhuang Rui stepped forward and greeted him respectfully. Hu Junzheng was very approachable. After helping his elderly mother to the table, he invited Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei to sit down. Peng Fei was now Zhuang Rui's cousin, so the Hu family treated them as one of their own.

This welcome dinner broadened Zhuang Rui's horizons. He had eaten at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing before, but he couldn't name most of the dishes on the table. It was a veritable feast of delicacies from land and sea.

Braised bear paw, steamed freshwater turtle, and a vegetable sliced into pieces that was very chewy—when Zhuang Rui asked, it turned out to be elephant trunk. There was also braised pangolin meat and some other dishes made from animals he had never even heard of before. And let me tell you, the taste was absolutely amazing.

"Son, drink more. This wine was made from the tiger penis of a tiger I hunted when I was young. You're about to get married, so it's okay for you to drink more. Take a few more with you when you leave; this stuff isn't rare here..."

The wine served to Zhuang Rui was a homemade liquor from the Hu family, which shouldn't have been very strong, but it contained tiger penis.

While urging Zhuang Rui to drink, Grandpa Hu also told him to take a few tiger penises back to China, since they were getting engaged soon. Zhuang Rui blushed and couldn't help but lament in his heart, "I'm still young, it seems... I don't need these things yet."

Chapter 490 The Happy Life of Burmese Men

"What a fine young man! If he were in Myanmar, we'd find him several wives..."

Hu Junzheng's words were somewhat subtle, but the old lady's next words completely petrified Zhuang Rui.

"This... find more wives? Is that really okay?"

Zhuang Rui held a piece of braised pangolin between his lips, but didn't put it in his mouth for a long time. He asked a silly question, which made everyone laugh.

“Polygamy is allowed in Myanmar, but having too many wives isn’t necessarily a good thing. Don’t listen to your grandma...” Hu Rong explained to Zhuang Rui with a smile.

In Myanmar, due to the large number of ethnic groups and their respective customs, there is practically no government law. For example, if a thief is caught, he is often beaten to death by onlookers, which is not illegal in Myanmar.

The Burmese government basically doesn't get involved in anything. For example, internal disputes between villages are mediated by village elders according to local customs, which is generally quite fair.

Moreover, Myanmar seems to have no concept of nationality. It is a truly "free and democratic" land. You don't even need to become a Burmese citizen. You only need to practice in a local temple for 7 days to gain the recognition of local customs. From then on, you will be recognized by Burmese society and will be fully qualified as a Burmese man.

This would grant them the same rights as local residents, except perhaps the right to vote. However, it seems there are no elections in Myanmar, and they could marry and have children locally.

Myanmar is a country with severely low productivity. Survival is the primary issue that ordinary people need to address. In addition, there is no family planning policy here, and most families have many daughters. Some families who cannot afford to raise their children will marry them off. Of course, the marriage partner does not necessarily have to be single.

Myanmar's polygamous system may seem comical, but it actually has its advantages for women.

For example, unless the woman has committed dishonest acts, divorce is absolutely prohibited. You must never abandon her after starting a relationship. As a saying often heard in Western churches goes: whether in poverty or sickness, you must support her for the rest of your life.

Since women are responsible for labor, men are responsible for all housework—cooking, washing clothes, and taking care of children. According to the general standard in Myanmar, if you have 3 wives and 8 children, then you have to do the housework for 11 people.

Zhuang Rui felt a chill run down his spine when he heard this. Just imagining a grown man carrying one child on his back, holding another in his arms, and having a bunch of naked children following behind him made him shudder. These Burmese men must be living a really miserable life.

Some friends might say that the daytime is a bit miserable, but the nighttime is blissful, living the life of a groom every night openly and legitimately, something you can't do in China.

However, this is not necessarily a good thing. In Myanmar, the traditional concept of "fairness" is deeply ingrained in all aspects of family life. You must treat each of your wives equally and take turns in bed with them.

If you marry some of your wives and want to show favoritism to one of them, that's not allowed. It would be met with unanimous condemnation from public opinion. Having sex would become a moral obligation, and many students would probably lose all interest in sex.

"Brother Hu, can't the men go out to work in the fields and the women stay home to take care of the children?" Zhuang Rui asked almost unconsciously. It's better to do some physical labor outside than to stay at home taking care of the children and sweeping the floor, right?

Hu Rong shook his head upon hearing this and said, "Myanmar is different from China. If a man has three wives and lets three women take care of the housework, then the farm work of four people is definitely something that one man cannot handle."

If one man and two women farm, the two women will likely worry that their child won't receive adequate care from the other, potentially leading to conflict.

Therefore, the only reasonable system is to let all women farm, while the men stay at home to take care of the children, and these wives, both senior and junior, generally have very good relationships, almost like sisters..."

Zhuang Rui was dumbfounded by Hu Rong's words. This was too fair! If that's the case, having another woman in the house is like the first wife having an extra helper and less work.

Zhuang Rui even suspected that the first wife would not only not prohibit her husband from taking more wives, but might even encourage him to take as many wives as possible. The women in Myanmar work together during the day and rest in the same bed at night. The friendship and trust that women build together through their work is likely to be very close.

Therefore, Hu Rong's statement that his wives were "like sisters" is not an exaggeration at all in reality in Myanmar.

After Hu Rong finished explaining the wedding customs of Myanmar, he smiled and looked at Zhuang Rui, saying, "How about it? Should I find you a temple to stay in for seven days? Then you can enjoy the same treatment as the Burmese. With your wealth, I bet plenty of people would be eager to marry their daughters to you..."

"No, Brother Hu, I wouldn't dare say that to Xuanbing..."

Zhuang Rui raised his hands in a gesture of surrender, which made everyone burst into laughter. Originally, everyone was just joking with Zhuang Rui, and the atmosphere at the table was very harmonious. Even the old lady drank several cups of homemade rice wine.

Although Zhuang Rui said he wouldn't dare, his heart warmed a little. However, he knew that Qin Xuanbing had a cold exterior but a soft heart. If he really did this, it would definitely break her heart.

Besides, if he wanted to marry, he would have to find a girl from China. As he thought of this, the image of Miao Feifei suddenly popped into Zhuang Rui's mind, startling him.

This one is even worse. If this lady were born in Myanmar, and her husband dared to marry a second woman, she would definitely take scissors and cut off his manhood in the middle of the night.

After dinner, Hu Rong arranged for Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei to stay in guest rooms. There was basically no entertainment in Myanmar, and it became very quiet after eight or nine o'clock in the evening. Zhuang Rui, who had drunk some wine and was tired after a long day, took a shower and fell asleep.

When Zhuang Rui woke up the next day, it was already past nine o'clock in the morning. He quickly got up, washed up briefly, and left the room.

Hu Rong happened to walk into the courtyard where Zhuang Rui was staying. After seeing him come out, he greeted him and said, "Xiao Zhuang, go have breakfast. There's no rush to go out this morning. Let the two professors rest more. By the way, I won't keep you company. Go check on the hotel first..."

Zhuang Rui nodded. He knew that the two of them had really been through a lot yesterday. They vomited several times on the way, and even brought up bile. Even by noon, they might not have recovered.

After giving instructions to Zhuang Rui, Hu Rong left in a hurry. After Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei finished their meal, they went into their room and closed the door.

"So, can you tell the difference?"

Zhuang Rui looked at Peng Fei with a slight nervousness. Peng Fei was holding a map of Hpakant and comparing it with the location of the Rising Sun Flag on the digital camera screen.

Seeing the extensive excavation efforts in Hpakant yesterday, Zhuang Rui's hopes were waning. Perhaps the treasure from back then had been unearthed by jade miners.

After examining the map carefully for a while, Peng Fei said confidently, "Brother Zhuang, the location on this map is about 30 kilometers into the Savage Mountain. It should be considered deep in the mountains, a place rarely visited by people. We shouldn't be discovered..."

"Savage Mountain?!"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback upon hearing this. Having read a lot of relevant information before coming to Myanmar, Zhuang Rui was not unfamiliar with this name.

The Savage Mountain was the place where the Chinese Expeditionary Force suffered its first defeat. Tens of thousands of defeated Chinese soldiers were swallowed up by that mountain. Who would have thought that the Japanese would one day be besieged there as well?

The city of Hpakant is located on the edge of the Savage Mountain. The Uru River, the source of jade, flows through the middle of Hpakant. The so-called old mine jade mines are basically located on both banks of this Uru River.

"Thirty kilometers, how about this, let's put this aside for now, and see if we have a chance to go there after we've finished looking at the jade mine..."

Thirty kilometers wasn't a long distance for Zhuang Rui. With his and Peng Fei's physical condition, even in the mountains, three or four hours would be enough for a round trip. He wondered if he could find an excuse to go hunting and go there with Peng Fei to take a look.

Having arrived in Hpakant, the treasure was within reach. Although the two of them couldn't retrieve it, Zhuang Rui wouldn't be satisfied without taking a look. If the treasure was still there, they could always find a way to retrieve it in the future.

Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei had been studying the map. Around noon, they received a call from Hu Rong, who was accompanying two professors. Hu Rong had sent his driver to pick up Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei and repeatedly emphasized that they should wait outside the house and not leave the city.

Hu Rong was thinking about their safety. In Hpakant, the major jade companies are all outwardly friendly but inwardly at odds, and each of them employs a group of mercenaries. Assassinations between them happen frequently. They might have been targeted by some ill-intentioned force when they entered the city yesterday.

Those forces wouldn't dare to assassinate or kidnap Hu Rong, because that would cause unrest throughout Hpakant and even Myanmar. However, some forces are capable of capturing Hu Rong's guests and making threats against them.

After waiting for more than half an hour, the driver I met yesterday drove the car to the gate of the house. There was one car when it came in, but as it drove out of the city center, five more cars followed behind.

The mine we're going to today not only has Hu Rong's own jade mine, but also another company's. Furthermore, we'll be passing through the territories of several powerful factions along the way, so we can't afford to be careless.

