

Golden 491

Chapter 491 The King of Jade

After a night's rest, although the two professors still looked tired, they were no longer hindered in their movements and were eager to see the origin of the King of Jade.

Myanmar's unique geological features hold an irresistible allure for all geologists.

After meeting up with Hu Rong and others at the Yudu Hotel, the convoy of seven vehicles drove out of Hpakant City and headed upstream along the clear Uru River.

Although the banks of the Uru River have long been mined beyond recognition, this river that nurtured the Hpakant people remains crystal clear, flowing quietly through the city of Hpakant.

The car drove upstream along the Wulu River, and the scenery along the way was very beautiful, with large banana trees, dense forests, and the babbling river, just like a painting.

At regular intervals along the Uru River, there is a suspension bridge with wooden planks laid across it. Many people cross the river, most of them heading to the Hpakant market.

These people include locals from Hpakant who have farmed for generations, as well as many people of varying character who come here to make a living. It should be noted that Hpakant is the crossroads of Mandalay, Mogaung, and the important northern Myanmar town of Putao.

Besides jade, Hpakant also contains abundant gold, silver, and copper mines, as well as teak trees in its forests, all of which are tradable resources that attract all sorts of people with various motives to Hpakant.

In addition to these, when people talk about Hpakant, they always say that Hpakant is formed by three lines: the white line, the red line, and the green line.

The white line refers to heroin. This area is close to the border between India and China and has always been a hotbed for drug traffickers. Many drug lords wanted by Interpol are hiding in places like Hpakant.

The red line refers to the rubies, a specialty of Myanmar, which are famous worldwide, while the green line is naturally jadeite.

Along the 150-kilometer stretch of the Uru River, centered around Hpakant, lie hundreds of jade mines of varying sizes, including Longtang, Xiangba, Huika, Mogang, Dakanmu, Dongmo, and Haujiang.

Among them are the ten famous mines with a long history, all located in the vicinity of the Uru River. The new mines are mostly in the East Mo area, where the mines are bare, with a large number of exposed raw stones directly on the outside, but without the outer skin of the old mines.

After driving for more than an hour, the convoy arrived at the foot of a mountain. After the people in the cars in front got out and negotiated, the checkpoint at the foot of the mountain moved the roadbed blocking the way.

The convoy drove along a not-so-wide mountain road to the middle of the mountain, where it stopped on a flat slope, and everyone got out.

"Brother Hu, is this your mine? It's truly magnificent..."

Half of the mountain opposite had been flattened. Below Zhuang Rui and the others, hundreds of people were busy at work, and excavators called "excavators" were making a roaring sound, constantly pulling stones out of the mountain wall.

Skilled workers nearby immediately stepped forward to identify the stones that the excavator had pulled out. Some were hammered, while others were identified by sight. As long as the stone seemed valuable, it was immediately loaded onto the truck. Once the truck was full, it was transported out in a unified manner.

"This is not my mine. This mine belongs to the Myanmar government. I'll take you to see the world's largest 'King of Jade' right here..." Hu Rong said, while gesturing for everyone to follow him up the mountain path.

"The world's largest jadeite? Does it weigh 300 kilograms?"

Zhuang Rui asked curiously, "Although jadeite is not measured in 'carats' like diamonds, it is still a rare gemstone. Zhuang Rui has handled quite a few rough stones, and the most he has ever extracted was only a little over 100 kilograms of jadeite from one of them."

300 kilograms???

Hu Rong stopped and laughed, "Brother, you're underestimating the world's king of jade. 300 kilograms multiplied by 10,000, that's roughly the weight of that piece of jade..."

"How many?"

Zhuang Rui stumbled from Hu Rong's words, nearly tripping over the scattered stones on the ground.

"300 kilograms multiplied by 10,000 equals 300 million kilograms? That's 3,000 tons!"

Zhuang Rui is very good with numbers and immediately converted 3 million kilograms into a more intuitive 3,000 tons. However, even so, he still couldn't imagine what such a large piece of jade would look like.

"We've heard about this jadeite. A piece this big must have come from a primary mine. Let's go take a look..."

Upon hearing Hu Rong's words, Professor Feng was filled with excitement. The fatigue from the past two days seemed to vanish in that instant. He pulled Hu Rong along and they walked briskly up the mountain.

Zhuang Rui knew that primary minerals refer to a type of mineral that first existed in the Earth's crust and remained in the soil after weathering. Usually, the jadeite produced from these primary minerals is mostly colorless.

Moreover, the quality and texture of primary mineral jadeite are often quite average, far inferior to jadeite produced from secondary minerals such as iron and copper. This is because the formation of

jadeite's color requires the presence of secondary minerals, so the environment in which those brightly colored jadeites grow must have associated minerals.

Five minutes later, the group rounded a mountain path and were immediately stunned by the sight before them.

From that side, the mountain still appears intact, but after going around the mountain path, the landscape in front of you is flat, with half of the mountain having been leveled and several deep pits remaining underground.

Upon seeing the approaching group, several soldiers guarding the perimeter immediately surrounded them. After negotiating with Hu Rong's men, they did not demand a body search, but instead stood not far from the group with their guns drawn, watching their every move.

"This...this is all jade?"

In a large pit that was over fifty meters long and forty meters wide, Zhuang Rui climbed a ladder to the bottom and looked at the "jade" stone in front of him in disbelief.

The surface of this jadeite, which is as big as a small mountain, is covered with white crystalline material. If you look closely at these crystals, you can occasionally find some green, but the texture and quality are extremely poor, not even reaching the level of bean-type jadeite, and it belongs to low-grade jadeite.

Zhuang Rui walked around the giant jadeite, which was tens of meters long and wide, and found that there were deep holes drilled into various parts of the jadeite, presumably to check the quality of the jadeite inside.

However, this piece of material was consistent inside and out. Zhuang Rui observed it with his spiritual energy and found that it did contain a large amount of jadeite, but the quality was the same as what he saw on the outside, which was a low-grade jadeite variety.

If this jadeite were cut open, the material would only be enough to make small ornaments worth a few dozen dollars at most. It would be better to just leave it as is. If the Burmese government could find a way to move it out and build a museum to display it to the public, they could make a fortune.

"It is 58 meters long, 6 meters high, and extends 9 meters inward. It's incredible. The reason why this original mine has color is probably because in the late stage of jade formation, the earth's crust moved and liquid invaded into it, which produced ionization and created these green vein-like jade."

This also damaged the entire structure of the jadeite, but such a large piece of jadeite is equivalent to a small mine vein, it's incredible..."

Professor Feng and Professor Chen went down to the bottom of the mine and started measuring with a tape measure. After working for more than ten minutes, they finally measured the size of the "King of Jade" and explained the formation of the jade to Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei, who had gone down into the mine with them.

"It's big, but the material is too poor. The finished piece will only be worth ten or eight yuan. If it were glass-type jade, it would be worth a lot of money..."

Zhuang Rui said with a smile, but his words drew disdainful looks from the two professors. Glass type? Are you kidding me!

If this were a piece of high-quality jadeite, it could buy the entire Myanmar government. Why would it be stuck here unretrievable? Given how poor the Myanmar government is, it would have already dismantled it into countless pieces and sold them off.

"Just kidding, just kidding..."

Zhuang Rui smiled awkwardly. He knew it was impossible. Otherwise, let alone Hu Rong's face, even if George W. Bush came, he might not give him face.

"Let's go, Zhuang Rui, come on up..."

More than half an hour later, Hu Rong called out to a few people upstairs. He had invited Professors Feng and Chen here mainly to help him find mineral veins, and bringing them here for a visit was just a side thing. This old mine had already stopped production, and apart from this so-called "King of Jadeite," there was nothing else to see.

Zhuang Rui was in the same car with two experts. After looking at the jade, the two were in high spirits and didn't feel the bumpy ride anymore. They kept talking about the jade.

Zhuang Rui, who was standing next to him, also learned something. He used to only know that jadeite was mined from stones, but now he at least understands some of the factors and environments that contribute to its formation.

After descending the mountain, the convoy left the Wulu River and turned onto a side road. The road became increasingly difficult to navigate. After nearly two hours, they stopped at the entrance to a barren mountain, but it was surrounded by lush forests.

At the foot of the mountain, there were several large trucks, more than twenty wooden houses, and more than a dozen armed men walking around. When they saw the convoy arrive, they all gathered around.

"Everyone, let's get off the bus and take the cable car up..."

This mountain path is very steep, and it won't be easy to climb it.

The cable car that Hu Rong referred to was a four-track railway built from the bottom of the mountain to the top, with electric switches controlling the cable car's movement up and down, somewhat like the coal mine in the Hong Kong movie "Police Story".

Chapter 492 The Beggar Holding a Golden Bowl

It's more accurate to call it a railcar than a cable car. The railcar is about 1.5 meters wide, with a large cargo bed that can comfortably accommodate three or four people standing side-by-side. Hu Rong accompanied Professors Feng and Chen onto one of the trains. The power was switched on, and the railcar slowly began its ascent up the mountain.

Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei were in the second wave to go up. There were only the two of them on this train, and it was quite spacious inside. Although the train was not fast, it rose to the middle of the mountain after a few minutes. The figures of people below the mountain had become smaller.

"Brother Zhuang, about thirty kilometers from here is the location marked on the map where that batch of gold is buried..."

Peng Fei's words startled Zhuang Rui. He quickly looked up and down and saw that the two railcars were still dozens of meters away from him. Then he looked in the direction Peng Fei was pointing.

"That's the Savage Mountain?"

In the direction Peng Fei pointed, Zhuang Rui could only see the continuous mountain range, lush forests, and towering trees that rose from the ground, giving people a mysterious and tranquil feeling.

"Yes, that's the direction, there's no mistake..."

With the people in front and behind him far away, Peng Fei wasn't worried about being overheard. Pointing to a distant hilltop, he said, "If I'm not mistaken, thirty kilometers is roughly the distance from here to that hilltop..."

"hiss....."

Although Zhuang Rui was mentally prepared, he still gasped when he looked at the mountain. He didn't think that just because he could see it from here, he could easily find it. As the saying goes, "looking at a mountain makes a horse run itself to death," and this 30-kilometer distance was much more difficult to travel than he had imagined.

"Actually, this place is already considered part of the Savage Mountain. You can get there from the foot of the mountain, but I don't know if there's a trail. Otherwise, it would probably take three or four hours to make the round trip..."

Peng Fei frowned. The entire route from here was mountainous and densely forested. Peng Fei wasn't afraid of getting lost, but the wild animals, venomous snakes, and miasma in the jungle could be deadly. He wasn't very confident he could protect Zhuang Rui if he took him along. ♡●6⑨ㄎ(h)ⓧ.Com
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"We'll see how it goes; maybe we'll go back tonight..."

Hearing Peng Fei's words, Zhuang Rui's heart sank. Although gold was tempting, his life was more important. Zhuang Rui was not short of money. He had only come here out of curiosity. Now, seeing the situation, he was already having second thoughts.

Peng Fei nodded silently. He only cared about Zhuang Rui's safety. Although he was curious about the gold, he was not greedy. Just think, he had never been tempted by heroin worth hundreds of millions in the past.

The train ascended very slowly. The mountain didn't look very high, but the slope was very long. It took half an hour to reach the top of the mountain.

The entire mountaintop has been leveled and turned into a huge platform, where thousands of people are working busily. There are still seven or eight excavators working there. I really don't know how Hu Rong managed to transport them up here.

The work on the hilltop was divided into several types. Some people followed behind the excavator to inspect the jadeite rough stones, some people drilled holes and blasted on the mountain, and some people went up and down in several deep pits. In short, apart from Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei who had just come up, even Hu Rong and the two professors were busy.

The two professors were squatting on the ground examining the excavated rocks to determine their formation age and the state of the earth's crust at that time, in order to analyze whether this was an environment conducive to the growth of jade. They estimated that they would have to go down into the mine to investigate later.

"Well, brother, this is the jade mine. This is our territory. You can look around as you please. Nobody will stop you. Also, help your brother see if this is an abandoned mine."

Upon seeing Zhuang Rui arrive, Hu Rong called over a steward from the mountain to accompany the two professors, and then walked towards Zhuang Rui himself.

"Brother Hu, I'm just here for fun, I don't have the skills to inspect any mines..."

"It's alright, feel free to wander around. At most, we'll just shut down the mine..."

Hu Rong gave a bitter smile. It was easy to say, but if it were really shut down, the Hu family would suffer a great loss.

"If the investment isn't much, shutting it down isn't necessarily a bad thing..." Zhuang Rui said casually.

Upon hearing this, Hu Rong nearly jumped up like a cat whose tail had been stepped on. His composure vanished as he glared at him, saying, "Not much investment? Brother, I've invested a full eighty million US dollars! Aside from the money paid to the government, these infrastructure projects alone have cost nearly twenty million US dollars. If we can't mass-produce jade this time, I'm in big trouble..."

Zhuang Rui was one of their own, so Hu Rong wasn't afraid to expose his weaknesses and finally said what he had been holding back for a long time.

"Eight...eighty million US dollars? That much?"

Zhuang Rui was startled when he heard this. According to the current market exchange rate, 80 million US dollars is roughly equivalent to 650 million RMB. This number is really not small. His Xinjiang jade mine is only worth about 1.5 billion RMB, and the investment is only tens of millions. He did not expect that the investment in this jade mine is so huge.

"Sigh, brother, I miscalculated this time..."

Hu Rong sighed and explained the whole story to Zhuang Rui.

It turns out that this new mine was jointly explored by major jade companies and the government in Myanmar. At the time, various exploration results indicated that the mine contained extremely rich jade veins and could be called Myanmar's largest mine. Therefore, during the later bidding process, it attracted a lot of bids from major companies.

Since the Hu Rong family's original old mines had been almost fully exploited, they continued to expand their business by opening new mines. When this mine was being explored, some people from the Hu family company also participated and unanimously agreed that it was a rich mine. Therefore, Hu Rong spent a lot of money to acquire the mining rights for this mine.

In addition to paying the nearly \$20 million in exploration fees to all the original companies combined, they also paid a \$30 million deposit to the Myanmar government.

Adding to the initial miscellaneous investments, the total cost has already reached \$80 million. If there is no return, the Hu Company will suffer a huge loss this time.

Because the Burmese military government still holds a 10% stake, the tender document clearly states the minimum profit-sharing amount. Even without production, Hu's company still needs to pay the government unless it sells the mine. However, given the current situation, no one is foolish enough to take it on.

"Brother Hu, isn't the price you paid for this mine a bit too high? Paying exploration fees is understandable, and paying a deposit is normal, but the government's 10% stake and waiting for dividends is too harsh. Who can guarantee a profit until the jade is mined?"

After understanding the ins and outs of the matter, Zhuang Rui shook his head repeatedly. The jade mine he was cooperating with the Jade Prince had nothing to do with the government at all. However, he heard that a document had recently been issued, and the government was going to start to rectify the situation. But the mines that had already been mined in the early stages would not be touched.

"Sigh, the competition was too fierce back then. If I hadn't added that condition, I wouldn't have been able to secure the mine at all..."

Even without Zhuang Rui saying it, Hu Rong was already filled with regret. However, the contract had already been signed, and if he unilaterally broke it, he would be suppressed by the Myanmar

government and all the mining companies. The consequences of that would be far more serious than paying the Myanmar government a small amount of money every year.

"Brother Hu, didn't the government contribute any money to your initial investment?"

"Let them pay? What a joke, they're so poor they're hoping to squeeze money out of our pockets..." Hu Rong said irritably.

The military government in Myanmar, to put it bluntly, doesn't care about anything. In Myanmar, there isn't even the concept of taxation, so the Myanmar government is almost as poor as a beggar. In order to support the army, it can only desperately sell resources.

The main source of revenue naturally comes from these resource companies. To mine new mines, you must obtain government approval and offer sufficient benefits. They only care about money and don't ask any questions. Even if you mine the entire country of Myanmar, they won't ask a single question.

"This...this works too?" Zhuang Rui was dumbfounded.

"What's so special about this? If we're talking about trade between Myanmar and China, that's even more outrageous. Do you even know what the trade distribution model between the two sides is like?"

Zhuang Rui shook his head.

"That means the Chinese take everything, and the Burmese get nothing..." Hu Rong said, unsure whether he should be proud of his country or saddened by the state of Myanmar.

Zhuang Rui was completely dumbfounded. So doing business this way was possible?

As mentioned earlier, Myanmar is essentially a semi-divided, anarchic country with a central government annual revenue of only 2.5 billion RMB. In China, this amount of money could probably build half a university or 20 kilometers of high-speed railway. In short, for a country, this amount of money is practically nothing.

Therefore, the Burmese government is neither capable of quelling separatism—war is an unimaginable luxury for them—nor can it cope with disasters. In contrast, the Chinese government's compensation for an earthquake is often calculated in the hundreds of billions of yuan.

Myanmar is even less capable of maintaining its economic sovereignty; any large Chinese company is richer than the Myanmar government.

Meanwhile, since Myanmar has traditionally had no tax burden, the military government, in order to maintain political stability, dared not levy any taxes, resulting in the tax law being rendered ineffective and the national treasury having no source of revenue.

Given Myanmar's specific national circumstances, the government even struggles to maintain the financial resources necessary to keep the state a mere formality. Therefore, from the central to the local level, the only way out for governments at all levels is to sell resources.

Chapter 493 Kindness

Zhuang Rui never imagined that Burma, a country that had always been a tributary state of China in ancient times, would be so poor.

Myanmar has a small population and a large land area, but it is extremely rich in resources, especially precious timber and underground gemstones, which rank among the top in the world.

According to Hu Rong, the main content of the current China-Myanmar border trade is as follows: Burmese people dig out jadeite ore from deep in the mountains, cut down precious trees such as teak and yew, and sell them to Chinese merchants who are waiting nearby. The Chinese then transport the jadeite back to China to make jewelry and furniture, and use the money they earn to help the Burmese build roads so that they can dig for more jadeite and cut down more trees in the deeper mountains.

As a result, the Burmese people used their labor to extract their own resources and gave them to the Chinese. In the end, all they got was a road, and this road is likely to be controlled by Chinese businessmen. In the future, the Burmese people's descendants may have to pay money to use this road!

"Brother Hu, you can't be telling the truth, can you?"

Zhuang Rui never dreamed of the things Hu Rong mentioned. It turns out our country is so powerful. Of course, the methods used are a bit underhanded.

"Why isn't it true? Just ask your friends in the border trade business. Actually, Chinese people are quite honest and kind..."

Of all the countries Hu Rong has lived in, this is probably the day he's sighed the most. Talking about these things, his feelings are quite complicated. After all, one country is his root, while the other is the place that gave him birth and nurtured him. He can't quite say which side he's leaning towards.

"kind?"

Zhuang Rui was confused by Hu Rong's words. Earning other people's money and using other people's things, how could that be related to the word "honesty"?

After Hu Rong's explanation, Zhuang Rui finally understood that China's trade practices were indeed quite fair.

Because China has ultimately left behind some tangible assets in Myanmar, these assets will help Myanmar gradually achieve economic integration with China. Perhaps in the future, Myanmar will be able to board the Chinese ship and gain some substantial benefits.

Compared to the trade practices between China and Myanmar, the United States' methods of controlling Latin America are far more egregious. It has brought a resource-rich country like Brazil to the brink of collapse, not only taking away its resources for nothing but also leaving Brazilians with a mountain of debt.

From Hu Rong, Zhuang Rui heard something that seemed like a fantasy: Brazil was once forced to use more than 50 percent of its national tax revenue to repay the interest on loans from the United States... well, just enough to cover the interest.

Compared to the US, China is indeed quite generous. Zhuang Rui also realized that the US always wants to be the international policeman, fighting wars in the east and sending troops to the west, which is also something they can gain.

The Burmese military junta can only turn to these domestic resource companies for now. They control domestic resources very tightly because it is related to whether the government will have food to eat.

Zhuang Rui couldn't believe that a country's government had fallen to such a state.

This jade mine has been in operation for nearly three months, and Hu Rong has indeed been having trouble eating and sleeping lately. So far, the amount of jadeite contained in the rough stones that have been dug out is quite small. Although it cannot be ruled out that the vein has not been found, it is also very likely that it is an abandoned mine.

In recent years, Hu Rong has established jewelry companies in Southeast Asia, China, and Taiwan, with substantial investments. However, due to the short operating history of these companies, they have not yet started generating profits. After spending the \$80 million, he has become somewhat strapped for cash.

The Hu family's ability to maintain a foothold in Myanmar requires money; aside from other factors, the annual expenses of the Chinatown alone amount to an astronomical figure.

"These are things we can't worry about. I just need to ensure that the Hu family can stand firm in Myanmar..."

Hu Rong concluded by saying that his thinking was simple: as long as his family members could live well, he didn't care about the raging storms outside.

If the mine is indeed a dead mine, Hu Rong is prepared to make a tough decision and hand it back to the Myanmar government. He will consider his previous investment a loss, which is better than continuing to pour money into it like a bottomless pit.

Zhuang Rui nodded and said, "Brother Hu, if all else fails, go to Hong Kong, or come to the mainland. I can still help out..."

"Let's talk about that later. There's still a way to deal with it right now..."

With Hu's wealth, investing in immigration would be incredibly easy for him. However, they have been rooted in Myanmar for over a century and have many followers, making it impossible for them to simply leave.

Seeing that while the two were talking, people kept coming in to ask Hu Rong for instructions, Zhuang Rui said, "Brother Hu, I'll go take a look around by myself. You go ahead and do your work..."

"Okay, his name is Zhu Fanpo, he's Thai, speaks excellent Mandarin, and is very knowledgeable about identifying rough stones. Let him show you around..."

Hu Rong was indeed very busy. He beckoned over a man who appeared to be a foreman and was fairly fair-skinned, and introduced him to Zhuang Rui.

"In Thailand, they call someone a 'cook'?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned. There was someone with that name?

"Wow, this boss is really funny, he even knows my nickname..."

The man named Zhu Fanpo gave Zhuang Rui a very "charming" smile, which made Zhuang Rui's hair stand on end, his hair almost stand up, his skin covered in goosebumps, and his forehead instantly covered with beads of sweat. Was this a man or a woman?

"This is my cousin. Put away your act and take him for a walk. Yeah, bro, he had hormone injections when he was a kid, you know..."

Hu Rong smiled awkwardly at Zhuang Rui. Although this man was Thai and a bit effeminate, he was very loyal to him and had excellent judgment. He had been with him for five or six years and was now a manager with about a hundred people under him.

"Brother Hu, no... you don't need to accompany me. Peng Fei and I will wander around by ourselves..."

When Zhuang Rui saw the "man" named Zhu Fanpo looking at him with a resentful expression, he quickly tugged at Peng Fei's sleeve. Although Peng Fei was ruthless, he was also a little overwhelmed at the moment, and the two of them fled in panic.

"Damn it, how can there really be people like that?"

Zhuang Rui only stopped when the "cook" disappeared from his sight. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with lingering fear. The thought of how the man could smile so "charmingly" sent a chill down Zhuang Rui's spine.

"In Thailand, many boys are raised as girls from birth and given hormone injections. However, many families eventually run out of money to continue the injections, resulting in many boys becoming neither male nor female..."

Peng Fei had previously frequented the border areas between China, Myanmar, and Thailand, so he knew a little about these things. However, this was the first time he had ever seen it. Any man who didn't have homosexual tendencies would avoid this kind of thing.

Zhuang Rui shook his head and secretly vowed in his heart that he would never go to Thailand again.

Once his heartbeat had calmed down, Zhuang Rui began to examine the mined rough stones more closely. He was following a group of people who were in turn following the excavator, using iron bars or their eyes to identify whether the stones shoveled out by the excavator were jadeite rough stones.

Their method of identification was simple: they would poke the surface with an iron rod, look at the marks left, and listen to the sound. Perhaps this mine really was an abandoned mine. Zhuang Rui followed behind them for more than half an hour and saw with the spiritual energy in his eyes that not a single piece of jadeite rough appeared.

These people are quite skilled; at least in the past half hour, they haven't put a single stone on the cart, which must have been determined by their unique method.

After watching for a while, Zhuang Rui got bored and went around to another direction, turning his back to Peng Fei and looking down at the ground.

Zhuang Rui's eyesight was inexplicably enhanced in Mandela's temple, and he can now see through objects nearly thirty meters away. He wants to help Hu Rong by checking if there are any jade veins within this thirty-meter underground area.

After looking at several places, Zhuang Rui shook his head and left. The rock layers here were basically all pyroxene, so there should be mineral veins. However, apart from finding a few scattered pieces of jade, Zhuang Rui did not see any relatively concentrated jade veins.

Although the hill was not small, after wandering around for more than an hour, Zhuang Rui had basically looked through all the underground areas that were being mined, but there were no tempting mineral veins to be found.

To outsiders, Zhuang Rui was just picking up stones and looking at them; not many people paid him any attention. Around six o'clock in the afternoon, Hu Rong called Zhu Fanpo to call Zhuang Rui so they could go down the mountain.

Looking at the "cook" woman's swaying waist as she walked, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a chill. He followed her from a distance until they reached the railcar.

Professors Feng and Chen had already gotten out of the car, while Hu Rong looked rather unwell and was waiting for Zhuang Rui.

"What's wrong, Brother Hu? Don't the two professors think it's a good chance?" Zhuang Rui asked as he stepped forward.

"We'll stay one night and observe for a few more days. However, Professor Feng said that when these pyroxenes were formed under low temperature and high pressure, the pressure might not have been high enough, causing the growth environment of the jadeite to change. If we can't find a vein 20 meters down, it'll basically be a waste mine..."

This news certainly didn't make Hu Rong happy. He had invested a total of \$80 million, and without the mineral vein, all that money would be wasted.

Zhuang Rui had nothing to say to comfort Hu Rong, so he turned around and boarded the railcar with Peng Fei and Hu Rong. The railcar slowly drove down the mountain, and the round trip took almost an hour.

It was getting dark, and there wasn't much scenery to see, so Zhuang Rui listlessly turned his gaze to the mountain wall above.

Chapter 494-495 Investment (Part 1 & 2)

Myanmar's winter is the dry season, with rain often lasting for months. At this time of year, as the sun sets, fiery red clouds appear on the horizon, as if half the sky has been set ablaze—a truly breathtaking sight.

Standing on the track car, Zhuang Rui noticed that Peng Fei and Hu Rong beside him were bathed in a golden light, and even the rocks in front of him were a deep red. The lush forest in the distance was also draped in a golden coat.

The fiery sunset didn't last long, disappearing after a few minutes. The tram was still heading downhill, and it would take about 20 minutes to reach the foot of the mountain.

Because of the mineral vein, Hu Rong was in a bad mood. Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei remained silent, with only the sound of the mountain wind in their ears.

Out of boredom, Zhuang Rui looked at the four balanced railway tracks. The four tracks were about four meters wide, and with the cleared area around them, the total width was more than six meters. The total length of the slope should be nearly a thousand meters.

The trees along the way had all been cut down, and small stones were laid under the rails. The fact that such a track could be carved out on such a steep mountain shows how much Hu Rong had invested in the early stages.

Could there be jade inside this mountain?

A thought suddenly popped into Zhuang Rui's mind: when he was on the mountaintop, he didn't seem to have observed the area around the railcar, so maybe it really was here.

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui focused his mind slightly and looked at the dark rocks that appeared even as night fell.

"One meter...five meters...fifteen meters...twenty meters..."

Zhuang Rui shook his head and looked down to a depth of nearly 20 meters. Inside the rocks he could see, although they were all pyroxene, there were no large chunks of jade. Occasionally, a few flashes of green would appear in Zhuang Rui's eyes, but the color was very faint, and they were just scattered pieces of jade.

Undeterred, Zhuang Rui peered another ten meters into the distance, the maximum distance his spiritual energy could currently reach. However, there was still no sign of the jade vein. Slightly disappointed, Zhuang Rui shifted his gaze downwards and prepared to withdraw his spiritual energy.

"No way?"

Just as Zhuang Rui's gaze shifted downwards, a cold aura was suddenly sensed by his spiritual energy. Moreover, this spiritual energy was extremely pure; Zhuang Rui had only ever sensed it within icy jadeite.

"Fei...Peng Fei..."

Zhuang Rui almost blurted it out, but luckily he reacted quickly and called out Peng Fei's name.

"Brother Zhuang, what's up?"

Peng Fei, who was standing next to him, thought that something had happened to Zhuang Rui.

"It's alright, we'll get some sleep tonight, and tomorrow we won't go up the mountain. Instead, we'll go hunting in the forest..."

Zhuang Rui didn't have any good excuses, so he simply brought it up. Although he had some reservations at first, he thought that it would be a shame not to go after all that golden gold.

However, as Zhuang Rui spoke, his eyes remained fixed on the opposite rock wall. Fortunately, it was already dark, and no one around him noticed that his expression was somewhat off.

If it were daytime, Peng Fei and Hu Rong would have seen that the muscles on Zhuang Rui's face were twitching slightly, and the veins on the back of his hands, gripping the railcar handrail, were bulging from the force, showing how tense he was.

"Brother, if you don't want to go mining tomorrow, I'll have Zhu Fanpo accompany you for a walk in the mountains. He's very familiar with the area. But don't go too far. Although the Savage Mountain is full of treasures, it's also fraught with danger..."

Hu Rong won't be able to go hunting with Zhuang Rui tomorrow. He'll be accompanying the two professors to continue exploring the mine, as this will affect his future decisions.

"Okay, okay, we won't go far..."

Zhuang Rui answered absentmindedly. Peng Fei, standing beside him, couldn't help but nudge him with his elbow. He didn't know why Zhuang Rui had agreed to go into the mountains with Hu Rong and that effeminate man. Peng Fei was also finding it hard to handle that guy.

"Hmm, what is it?"

Zhuang Rui turned his head to look at Peng Fei; he hadn't actually heard what Hu Rong had said.

"Brother Hu said he'd have that 'cook' come with us to the Savage Mountain to hunt..."

"What?!"

Zhuang Rui felt uneasy upon hearing the name and quickly said, "Brother Hu, just give us two guns, and we can just wander around the edge. We don't need that guy to accompany us, right?"

"That won't do. Looking at the two of you like this, you might get lost after walking only a few hundred meters into the mountains. I'm worried about leaving you alone..."

Hu Rong immediately rejected Zhuang Rui's offer. Although Zhuang Rui was tall and strong, he was not familiar with the jungles of Myanmar. As for Peng Fei, he had the appearance of a pretty boy and was probably from a wealthy family. If something happened to him in the Savage Mountain, Hu Rong would not be able to explain it to Qin Haoran.

"Well... let's talk about it tomorrow..."

Zhuang Rui's unusual lack of persistence puzzled Peng Fei, who was standing beside him.

Little did Peng Fei know that Zhuang Rui's mind was completely focused on this mountain.

At the same time Zhuang Rui sensed the spiritual energy, he also saw the scene inside the rock wall. It was a sight that Zhuang Rui found hard to describe in words. As far as the eye could see, it was all green, like being in a vast grassland in spring. Apart from green, there was nothing else to see.

Clumps of jadeite encased within the stone skin emitted a captivating fluorescent light in Zhuang Rui's eyes. At first, Zhuang Rui even wondered if the previous fiery clouds had caused him to have an illusion, but as the railcar moved, the jadeite veins clearly appeared before his eyes.

This vein is about 26 or 27 meters deep into the rock from where Zhuang Rui's railcar is now, and about 200 meters from the mountaintop.

The length of the jade vein, so far, has extended more than sixty meters from where Zhuang Rui first saw it. He couldn't predict the width, but it was at least four meters, because there was still jade at the edge of the distance that his spiritual energy could reach.

Because the railcar was constantly moving, Zhuang Rui couldn't stop to observe the quality of the jadeite in detail. However, the cool aura he sensed indicated that the jadeite from this mine should be of a decent grade. Furthermore, the jadeite pieces he could see were all of bean green or higher, indicating that they were mid-range jadeite raw materials.

That's it?

About a hundred meters further downhill in the railcar, the mineral vein in Zhuang Rui's eyes suddenly disappeared.

"A jade vein that's 160 or 170 meters long, oh my god..."

Zhuang Rui was incredibly excited. A jade mine that was 160 or 170 meters long and at least 4 meters wide—how much could such a mine be worth? A billion? Two billion? Zhuang Rui couldn't even imagine it.

The data mentioned above does not mean that a piece of jade is more than 100 meters long, but rather that the jade grows relatively concentratedly within this length of more than 100 meters, with jade present at intervals, forming a vein.

Hu Rong's earlier statement that this was the largest mine in Myanmar, based on exploration, was not untrue. However, he hadn't found the right location yet and had instead turned the area where the ore vein appeared into a track for transporting raw stones. If they dug in a few dozen meters from here, the ore vein would immediately become visible.

However, Zhuang Rui's idea was a bit simplistic. The slope of this mountain was nearly 1,000 meters long, while the place where Zhuang Rui discovered the mineral vein was located at an altitude of about 600 to 800 meters.

Because the mountain is entirely composed of rock, it's extremely difficult to drill hundreds of meters down from the summit using drilling methods. Therefore, accurately locating a mineral vein on such a vast mountain is incredibly challenging, almost like finding a needle in a haystack.

Although some international experts and scholars have speculated that jadeite is formed in a low-temperature and high-pressure environment, there has never been a definitive conclusion. To date, there is no universally accepted explanation for the growth environment of jadeite, and in actual mining, jadeite veins are also unpredictable and difficult to ascertain.

Take the mineral vein that Zhuang Rui just saw, for example. It's actually located halfway up the mountain. Low temperature and high pressure should be more consistent at the foot of the mountain or the top, but it just happened to be halfway up. I wonder what kind of inferences the geological experts will draw when they learn about this later.

In the few hundred meters of the mountainside below, Zhuang Rui found no more jade veins. He regained his composure and began to think about how to tell Hu Rong the news.

Being able to see but not talk about it has always been a source of frustration for Zhuang Rui. He couldn't very well drag Hu Rong to the mountainside with the mineral veins and tell him directly that there was jade more than 20 meters deep inside, could he? That would be suicidal.

Moreover, the rocks exposed on the mountainside were all normal, showing no signs of jadeite. I couldn't just tell like I did with the jade king in Xinjiang, claiming to have seen jadeite in a certain spot; there was absolutely no basis for it.

The forty or fifty people living at the foot of the mountain are all fully armed mine protection teams. The workers on the mountain usually don't come down. There are simple accommodations on the mountain, and there is also a chef to cook for them. Apart from the strong mountain winds at night, there are far fewer mosquitoes than at the foot of the mountain.

Following Zhuang Rui were the foreman Zhu Fanpo and a young man. They weren't supposed to come down the mountain, but Hu Rong had specifically called them down using a walkie-talkie so they could accompany Zhuang Rui into the Savage Mountain tomorrow.

Two bonfires had already been lit at the foot of the mountain. Some members of the mining team had gone into the mountains in the afternoon to hunt a wild boar and some birds. They had already been skinned and skewered with iron forks and roasted over the fire. On another small bonfire, a pot was set up, and something seemed to be cooking inside.

Although Hu Rong had her own thoughts, she still mustered her spirits and invited Zhuang Rui and the two professors to sit on the prepared ground. A low table was placed in front of them, and people would bring the barbecued food to the table from time to time.

The liquor they were drinking was brought out by a mine security guard; it was bulk spirits in a large, transparent glass container. However, the colorful, spotted snake inside, as thick as a baby's wrist, startled Zhuang Rui.

"Come on, let's drink this to thank the two professors..."

Hu Rong stood up and toasted the two professors. The two elderly people's work attitude after arriving here is very admirable.

"Brother Zhuang, this wine is fine to drink. It's made by soaking poisonous snakes in alcohol, which can treat rheumatoid arthritis. The more poisonous the snake, the better the wine will be. It won't harm your health..."

When Peng Fei saw Zhuang Rui's eyes glancing at the container of wine from time to time, he knew exactly what was going on. Although Peng Fei didn't drink alcohol, he had eaten plenty of snake gallbladders and knew they were a good thing.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui took a sip. Apart from a slightly sweet taste, he didn't seem to feel any discomfort. He then began to eat and drink heartily, as he was quite hungry after a long afternoon of travel.

Many people came forward to toast them, and the two professors soon became unable to hold their liquor. Hu Rong called for people to help them to the wooden house to rest. Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei immediately became the target of everyone's criticism. The men who guarded the mine all came to Zhuang Rui with their wine bowls.

This liquor, though described as strong, is actually just homemade rice wine from Myanmar. It's not very strong, and Zhuang Rui drank about two jin (1 kg) without getting drunk, though he was a little tipsy. Peng Fei, however, was quick to react and had already hidden far away.

"Boss Zhuang, I'd like to propose a toast to you, you absolutely must drink it..."

A voice reached Zhuang Rui's ears, instantly sobering him up considerably. Looking up, he saw the Thai gentleman gazing at him with affection. Despite the temperature being in the mid-twenties, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but shiver.

"Drink, drink..."

Looking back, Zhuang Rui realized that his loyal friend Peng Fei had long since disappeared. He picked up his bowl, tilted his head back, and drank the rest of his drink before collapsing onto the table. "I can't run away, I can at least pretend to be drunk, right?"

Who knew that this rice wine tasted good and had a low alcohol content, but if you drank too much of it, the aftereffects were no less than those of Erguotou (a type of Chinese liquor). Zhuang Rui collapsed onto the table and immediately felt dizzy and fell into a daze.

Fortunately, Hu Rong had the mine protection team carry him into the wooden hut; otherwise, if the "cook" had taken advantage of him, Zhuang Rui would have suffered a huge loss.

After several hours of noise, the mountains returned to calm, and the roaring campfire went out. Only in the darkness did a few lights occasionally appear, which were the people on night watch of the mining team smoking.

Hu Rong's emphasis on this mine goes without saying. He arranged seven or eight sentry posts, both visible and hidden, along the one-kilometer-long passage leading into the mountain, so that his men could rush over immediately at the slightest sign of trouble.

In the middle of the night, Zhuang Rui woke up. His headache had subsided, but his mouth was incredibly dry and he had a strong urge to urinate. He threw off a blanket that someone had placed over him and sat up on the bamboo bed.

There was a pleasant fragrance in the room; it was mosquito coils made from mosquito-repelling grass, a specialty of Myanmar. One stick of incense could keep a room free of mosquitoes.

"Who is it? Brother Zhuang, you're awake?"

Peng Fei's voice rang out from a corner of Zhuang Rui's wooden house.

"Okay, I'm fine. You can go back to sleep. I'm going to take a break..."

After groping his way to his shoes on the ground and putting them on, Zhuang Rui pushed open the door of the wooden house and walked out down the six or seven wooden steps.

To protect against summer flash floods, the wooden houses built by the Burmese are often one or two meters above the ground. They use thick logs as pillars, and then build the frame of the house on top using a mixture of bamboo and wood. Finally, they put on the roof. There is a wooden staircase between the door and the ground.

When summer floods come, they impact the timbers that form the base of the houses, but they cannot destroy them. Such buildings are common in Myanmar, Laos, and Thailand.

These wooden houses are mostly made without nails, but are bound together with oil-soaked ropes, making them very sturdy. The bark on the wood is not removed, and they look very rugged in the moonlight.

After Zhuang Rui had a good, satisfying pee behind the wooden house, he was about to find some water when he saw a man sitting in the open space surrounded by the wooden house, silently smoking. Upon closer inspection, he recognized him as Hu Rong.

"Your mouth must be dry, here, have some water..."

When Hu Rong saw Zhuang Rui approaching, he picked up a green military water bottle from beside him and handed it to Zhuang Rui.

"Gulp... gulp..."

Zhuang Rui was extremely thirsty. After taking the water bottle, he drank the whole bottle of water in a few gulps. The water in the bottle was spring water from the mountains, which was very sweet.

"Brother Hu, why aren't you sleeping?"

Zhuang Rui sat cross-legged on the ground and casually placed the kettle aside.

The dense, tall trees in the distance appeared dark and menacing. In Myanmar at this time of year, there seemed to be no insects chirping. The surroundings were very quiet, so quiet that it felt somewhat oppressive, as if one were the only person left in the world.

"I can't sleep. I wish I could be like you, get drunk and not care about anything, and just sleep soundly. But there are still a bunch of people who have been with the Hu family for decades. I can't let them go..."

Hu Rong took a deep drag on his cigarette, the butt flashing briefly in the night before he stubbed it out on the ground, a look of worry on his face.

"Brother Hu, there's no need to worry too much. This mine has been surveyed by so many people, so there should be a vein. As long as we dig, we're sure to find jade..."

Although Zhuang Rui knew the location of the jade vein, he couldn't say it openly. When Hu Rong heard this, it was more of a comforting remark.

"Keep digging? Ha! Two or three months might be manageable, but I can't hold on any longer..."

Hu Rong gave a wry smile. These frustrations had been weighing on his mind for a long time, and now he had finally found an outlet to vent them, so he continued to talk to Zhuang Rui at length.

It turns out that the Hu family, which seems to be doing well now, is actually struggling to survive because this jade mine has almost drained all of the Hu family's funds. Moreover, the daily expenses for the hundreds of workers are a considerable sum. If Hu Rong hadn't made some gains at the recent Myanmar jade auction, they probably wouldn't be able to continue operating now.

The price of jadeite skyrocketed starting in the 1980s, and in those 20 years, Mr. Hu accumulated the equivalent of more than one billion RMB. Of course, this figure is quite large in Myanmar.

However, Hu Rong has made some investments in Southeast Asia in recent years, spending hundreds of millions of yuan. Coupled with the current expenditures on this jade mine, it has almost emptied all of Hu's capital. Therefore, the Hu Rong family's cash flow is now almost unsustainable. If the mine does not produce jade, the consequences will be quite serious.

Even if Hu Rong abandons the jade mine now, his financial situation will not improve in the slightest. By the time his investments in Southeast Asia and Taiwan yield returns, the Hu family will probably be unable to sustain themselves.

At this public auction, Hu Rong's desire to smuggle a batch of jadeite rough stones to Qin Haoran was partly motivated by a desire to raise funds. Although it wouldn't be a large sum, it would at least alleviate some of Hu Rong's financial pressure. However, due to Zhuang Rui's interference, who helped Qin Haoran gamble on several good pieces of jadeite, the plan was not successfully completed.

After listening, Zhuang Rui asked in confusion, "Brother Hu, even if this jade mine has now produced a vein, you still won't be able to turn this jade into cash in a short period of time, right?"

The Myanmar military government now strictly controls the export of jadeite rough, so even a big jadeite merchant like Hu Rong can only rely on jadeite auctions to sell large quantities of jadeite rough.

As for the smuggled rough stones, not only are they cheap, but the quantity is also not large, so they do not fundamentally help Hu Rong's current economic situation. That's why Zhuang Rui asked this question.

Hu Rong shook his head and said, "It's different. As long as this mine isn't abandoned, this situation can be reversed immediately..."

Zhuang Rui was unaware that in Myanmar, jade is money, and there are business dealings between major jade companies. Using jade as collateral to raise funds is a very normal business practice.

However, no veins have been found at Hu's mine, and many jade companies are waiting to see it fail, refusing to accept Hu's jade or driving down the price to an extremely low level.

This resulted in Hu Rong having jadeite in his possession, but being unable to convert it into cash in a short period of time. However, if the jadeite mine started producing jadeite rough in large quantities, it would mean that the Hu family had overcome their predicament, and those companies would naturally change their strategies against the Hu family.

"Brother Hu, how long can your current funds last?"

"If we're frugal, we should be able to make it to the next Myanmar gold auction. But if no veins are found by then, then... then..."

Hu Rong didn't continue, but Zhuang Rui understood. This was a bottomless pit. As long as no mineral vein was found, it would keep swallowing up large amounts of money. Hu Rong wanted to quit, but he couldn't bear to give up his initial investment. He was in a dilemma.

Thinking about the more than 100-meter-long mine vein, Zhuang Rui suddenly had an idea and asked, "Brother Hu, can Myanmar accept foreign investment?"

"Sure, some of the jade companies in Myanmar are foreign-owned, but there are many restrictions. In the past few decades, they've only attracted about 500 to 600 million euros in foreign investment. Brother, you wouldn't be thinking of investing in this mine, would you?"

As Hu Rong was speaking, he suddenly raised his head and looked at Zhuang Rui in surprise.

Chapter 496 Investment (Part 3)

Since 1988, approximately 17 years have passed, and Myanmar has attracted less than 500 million euros in foreign investment in its mining sector.

Keep in mind, this is an entire country. Five hundred million euros might only be enough for three or five projects in China, perhaps not even enough to build a port. But for Myanmar, a country rich in resources, it is an incredible investment.

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Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but feel a pang of sympathy for Myanmar.

"Brother Hu, I wanted to ask if there's any possibility of this. After all, this mine has been explored by many jade companies, and they are very optimistic about it. Perhaps if we persevere for a few more months, we'll find jade?"

What the Myanmar government was like was none of Zhuang Rui's business; he quickly turned his attention to the mine.

"Investment is certainly possible, and I can transfer shares internally, bypassing the Myanmar government, which will save a lot of money. However... however, Brother Zhuang, this is no small matter. What if it really is a dead mine? All the money will be lost..."

Hu Rong had considered attracting investment earlier, but in Myanmar, all the mining companies knew about the condition of the mine, and no one was willing to take it over or invest money in it.

In the eyes of those jade companies, this mine is a bottomless pit that has already dragged the Hu family company into a quagmire, and they don't want to repeat the same mistake.

However, attracting foreign investment is very troublesome because the government also has to get involved. Otherwise, given Myanmar's natural resources, how could the total investment amount only be a few hundred million euros over decades?

Most importantly, Hu Rong is no longer optimistic about this jade mine. He has already leveled nearly 50 meters of hilltop and has not found any veins, which is unimaginable for a rich mine.

Although Hu Rong verbally advised Zhuang Rui, he secretly hoped someone would invest some money to share the risk, which would greatly reduce his pressure. However, he hesitated if it was Zhuang Rui.

In short, Hu Rong is currently in a very conflicted state of mind. He wants to bring in investment, but he doesn't want the person to be Zhuang Rui, since the two families will soon be related.

"I'm broke right now. To be honest, Brother Hu, I've put all my savings into this Myanmar auction..."

Zhuang Rui's words relieved Hu Rong, but also brought a look of disappointment to his face. It seemed that he would have to clean up this mess by himself.

Zhuang Rui suddenly changed the subject and asked, "By the way, Brother Hu, if this mine produces jade, how fast is the cash flow?"

"Of course it will be soon. I'm afraid all the jade companies in Myanmar will be begging me for help. Besides, Myanmar holds three jade auctions a year. If there are enough rough stones, even after deducting the government's cut, making hundreds of millions of euros at a single auction is not uncommon..."

In Myanmar, major jade companies regularly exchange goods and services. It's not that you can only buy rough jade from a particular mine; other companies can also buy it as long as they have the money. As long as the jade leaves Myanmar, the government doesn't interfere with these matters.

"Brother Hu, how much money does this mine need? Can it last another year?"

"It needs at least 40 million euros. I only sold a little over 20 million euros worth of rough stones at this auction. After adding the fees collected by the government, the remaining amount can only last for six months at most..."

These were the company's most confidential matters to Hu Rong, but he wasn't wary of Zhuang Rui. Firstly, Zhuang Rui was a foreigner, and secondly, the two families had a long-standing relationship, so he wasn't afraid that Zhuang Rui would go around talking about it.

"So, another 20 million euros is enough to last another year? Brother Hu, if I put in 20 million euros, what percentage of the shares would I get?"

Zhuang Rui frowned slightly. He was penniless, with only a little over 10 million RMB left. However, he was still unwilling to give up this opportunity, after all, the dazzling jade had actually appeared before his eyes.

"Brother, you...you weren't broke, were you?"

Hu Rong was a little bewildered by Zhuang Rui's actions. Just a moment ago, he said he had no money, but now he was asking about investing in shares.

Zhuang Rui laughed and said, "Brother Hu, just because I don't have money doesn't mean I can't get it. Tell me first..."

Hu Rong tilted his head and looked at Zhuang Rui suspiciously for a long time in the moonlight. He wanted to figure out if Zhuang Rui was still drunk or talking nonsense.

"Brother Hu, please tell me. I'm fine. To be honest, these mines produce pyroxene, which is a necessary condition for the formation of jadeite. I just don't believe that such a big mountain wouldn't have jadeite veins. I just want to take a gamble!"

Zhuang Rui looked at Hu Rong with a determined gaze and said, "Although I'm not very old, having only lived for a little over twenty years, I've been incredibly lucky. My first pot of gold came from finding bargains in antiques and calligraphy, and then I gambled on stones. Gambling on stones is gambling, and I'm gambling that this mine will yield a vein, which is also a gamble. Life and death are predestined, and wealth and honor are determined by fate. It all depends on whether you, Brother Hu, dare to take my bet..."

"Brother, are you... are you serious?" After hearing this, Hu Rong knew that Zhuang Rui was not joking.

Zhuang Rui said decisively, "Of course it's true!"

Hu Rong took out a pack of cigarettes from his pocket, opened the pack and handed one to Zhuang Rui. After lighting it for both of them, he silently smoked. Zhuang Rui didn't urge him on; he knew that Hu Rong was calculating his own gains and losses.

"20 million euros, 20% of the shares, no more than that, and you can't transfer these shares. You can only receive a share based on the jade produced and sold from the mine. If it turns out to be an abandoned mine, then your investment will be completely lost. After the liquidation, you can only get back as much as you can."

"We can sign the contract in China; it has absolutely nothing to do with the Myanmar government..."

After finishing one cigarette, Hu Rong lit another, and continued smoking until his third cigarette. Then he stubbed out the cigarette he had just lit and said the words above.

"Brother Hu, when will this money arrive in your account?"

Zhuang Rui knew that Hu Rong's suggestion to sign the contract in China was to put his mind at ease, because once the contract was signed and notarized in China, it would be protected by Chinese law even if the investment was located in Myanmar.

Hu Rong thought for a moment, then held up one finger and said, "If you can raise this money within a month, I'll go to China to sign the contract with you. Otherwise, I'm prepared to dispose of this mine..."

Although Hu Rong's funds could last for another six months, the Hu family needed money elsewhere and couldn't possibly throw it all into this bottomless pit. Hu Rong invited two Chinese geological experts this time to strengthen his resolve to dispose of the jade mine.

"A month?"

Zhuang Rui frowned. Making 20 million euros a month, which is 200 million RMB, is really difficult. He should be able to get 50 million from Uncle Tian first, but he doesn't know where the remaining 150 million will come from.

However, thinking about that jadeite vein that resembled a celestial river, Zhuang Rui was truly unwilling to give up. What he had seen was only the edge of the vein, and he didn't know how deep it could penetrate. As long as it could penetrate even one centimeter, its value would increase by hundreds of millions.

The jadeite that Zhuang Rui saw was probably worth over 2 billion RMB. With 200 million RMB representing a 20% stake, the investment would yield a 100% profit.

"Okay, it'll be a month, Brother Hu. I've invested in this mine. Please prepare the contract. I should get news within half a month of me returning..."

Zhuang Rui gritted his teeth and agreed. If Hu Rong really sold the mine to someone else, Zhuang Rui would definitely regret it.

As for the funding issue, Zhuang Rui had also thought of it. He would mortgage the courtyard house to the bank and see if he could get a loan. Someone had offered 200 million for his courtyard house, so getting a loan of 150 million shouldn't be a big problem, right?

If this path doesn't work, Zhuang Rui plans to borrow money from Song Jun and Fatty Ma. Both of them are big spenders, especially Fatty Ma. One or two hundred million is something he can easily come up with at any time. He's a resource tycoon in China, and he's doing much better than people in Myanmar.

Even if all else fails, Zhuang Rui still has raw stones. He bought those twenty-odd raw stones not to display them. If all else fails, he can hold a stone appreciation event and invite all the jewelry merchants in the country. If he can cut one or two stones now, it can solve the funding problem. However, this is a last resort, and Zhuang Rui does not plan to use it.

"Brother, are you really sure?"

Hu Rong couldn't describe the feeling in his heart. He was afraid that his bottomless pit would drag Zhuang Rui down with him. If the mine really turned out to be abandoned, he wouldn't know what to say when he saw Qin Haoran in the future.

"It's decided, Brother Hu. I'll treat it like gambling on jade... no, gambling on a mine. I'm betting it will be a huge success..."

Zhuang Rui burst into laughter, attracting the attention of the guards, who all turned to look. Shouts of reprimand came from several rooms, clearly indicating that someone's sweet dreams had been disturbed.

"Alright, Brother Hu, everyone go to your own rooms and get some sleep. Oh, and I'm going hunting tomorrow, so please prepare two good guns for me. Also, whatever you do... whatever you do, don't let that 'cook' follow me..."

Zhuang Rui stood up, patted the dirt off his backside, and turned to walk back to the wooden hut where he slept. He wasn't going to tell Hu Rong the location of the jade mine yet.

After the contract is signed, Zhuang Rui will suggest that Hu Rong re-survey the various parts of the mountain, but he will not give specific directions. Zhuang Rui would rather spend more money than play the role of a fortune teller.

Chapter 497-498 Savage Mountain (Part 1 & 2)

Just after six o'clock the next day, Zhuang Rui got out of bed, stepped out of the cabin, and was immediately captivated by the scenery outside.

Just then, a sliver of light appeared on the horizon. At the foot of the mountain, white mist filled the air, enveloping the entire Savage Mountain in the morning fog. The milky white fog flowed and receded, and through the gaps in the clouds, the dark blue peaks and trees were faintly visible.

After about ten minutes, the fog gradually dissipated, the sky turned a clear blue, and the undulating Yeren Mountain could be seen. The rugged mountain road and the clouds and mist swirling around the mountain made it look so mysterious and unpredictable.

Some members of the mine protection team were already up making breakfast. The rising smoke and the lingering mist created a scene reminiscent of rural life.

"What? What are you looking at, bro? You can't go too deep into the Savage Mountain. Just look around the perimeter to see if there are any animals to hunt..."

As Zhuang Rui was gazing at the Savage Mountain, Hu Rong walked up to him. Seeing that Zhuang Rui was wearing camouflage clothing and high-top combat boots, Hu Rong immediately understood Zhuang Rui's intentions.

Hu Rong's eyes were bloodshot. He had barely slept all night and his mood was extremely complicated. With Zhuang Rui's agreed investment, the pressure on him had been greatly reduced, but at the same time, it had also weighed heavily on his mind. If the mine really turned out to be a waste, it would also harm Zhuang Rui.

"Don't worry, Brother Hu, we'll just take a short drive around the outskirts and have a go at shooting. Having a gun is illegal in China..."

Zhuang Rui said insincerely that after returning to the cabin last night, he chatted with Peng Fei and learned that now is the best time to go into the mountains. If it were the rainy season, it would be impossible to walk in the mountains.

Furthermore, this is the coldest time of year in Myanmar. Although some tropical venomous snakes do not need to hibernate, their activity level will be greatly reduced, and they will not actively attack humans unless attacked.

"Alright, I have plenty of bullets here. I guarantee you'll never want to shoot again. Let's go eat first..."

Hu Rong patted Zhuang Rui on the shoulder and pulled him to have breakfast. Peng Fei was already waiting there. When he saw Zhuang Rui come over, he ladled out a bowl of porridge and handed it to him.

The side dish to accompany the rice was pickled radish strips. Zhuang Rui often ate this when he was a child. Back then, in winter, radishes and cabbage were basically the only vegetables available at home. Zhuang's mother would cut the radishes into strips, pickle them with salt, and then dry them in the sun. They were crunchy when you chewed them.

After drinking three large bowls of porridge and eating two sesame balls, Zhuang Rui finally stopped. This was something Peng Fei had specifically instructed him to do: make sure he was well-fed and watered, because there were many uncertainties after entering the mountains, and things might not go as smoothly as they had hoped. Maintaining physical strength was a basic condition for survival in the forest.

"Brother, since you won't let Zhu Fanpo accompany you, then have a few of them come with you..."

After breakfast, Hu Rong prepared to go up the mountain. However, before going up the mountain, he had to make arrangements for Zhuang Rui's hunting trip. He was absolutely not comfortable letting Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei go alone.

"Boss Zhuang, it's been a long time since I've gone hunting either..."

The "cook" looked at Zhuang Rui with a resentful expression, and with her right hand fingers forming a delicate gesture, she pointed at Zhuang Rui, startling him so much that he quickly took a few steps back and almost vomited up the food he had just eaten.

"What's wrong with you...?"

Zhuang Rui cursed inwardly, even thinking he'd pay the guy to go back to Thailand and get it cut off.

"His name is Zhang Guojun, he's Chinese, call him 'Big Brother,' and listen to him. This forest is no joke; many people have gone in and never come out..."

Hu Rong introduced a burly man in dark green camouflage to Zhuang Rui. Zhuang Rui knew that this man was the captain of the mine protection team. He had chatted with him briefly when they were drinking the day before. He was a man with three wives.

"Dajun, I'm entrusting Zhuang Rui to you. You must ensure their safety. If anything happens, I'll hold you accountable..."

Hu Rong turned back and gave Zhang Guojun another instruction. He knew that hunting small animals on the outskirts wasn't dangerous; otherwise, he wouldn't have agreed to Zhuang Rui's request.

"Brother Hu, don't worry, I've been into the Savage Mountain several times, it'll be fine for me to wander around outside..."

Zhang Guojun patted his chest and agreed. Although he didn't know Zhuang Rui's exact identity, he could tell from Hu Rong's attitude towards Zhuang Rui and the two professors that Zhuang Rui should be one of their own.

"Okay, bring some food. If we don't get back by noon, don't go hungry. We'll head up to the mine now..."

Hu Rong wasn't in the mood to go hunting with Zhuang Rui right now. He still needed to take the two professors to continue exploring for jadeite veins, hoping to find them and escape their current predicament.

"Mr. Zhuang, take these two guns, and also carry this ammunition belt. I'll teach you how to use them first..."

After Hu Rong left, Zhang Guojun took two AK47 assault rifles that were about 60-70% new and two heavy military green bullet belts, and handed them to Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei.

"Brother Zhang, just call me Zhuang Rui. We're all on the same side, don't be so formal. I know how to use this gun, I've handled them before..."

After Zhuang Rui took the gun, he skillfully removed the magazine, pulled the bolt to check the gun, which surprised Zhang Guojun. He knew that there weren't many people in China who knew how to handle guns.

"Alright, then I'll call you Brother Zhuang. You two wait a moment, I need to go and give some instructions..."

Zhang Guojun is the captain of the mine protection team. He has to make sure the safety work is done well during this day trip. Although the security situation in Myanmar is not bad, that is in cities where there are no conflicts of interest. In this kind of wild mountain valley, it is hard to say.

"Brother Zhuang, is this any good? If not, give me two magazines..."

Peng Fei skillfully slung the bullet belt over his shoulder. Although he was using an AK47 assault rifle, the bullet belt was a domestic Type 81 rifle bullet belt, which could hold a total of six bullet clips.

Now, these two bullet belts are filled with four magazines, each containing thirty bullets. They are quite heavy, and when they hang on my chest, they feel very heavy.

"It's okay, I'm fine..."

After putting on the bullet belt, Zhuang Rui jumped around a few times on the spot. He didn't feel that it affected his movements. In fact, in terms of physical fitness alone, he was probably stronger than Peng Fei. After all, Zhuang Rui often used his spiritual energy to cleanse his body when he had nothing to do, just like a massage. The feeling of spiritual energy entering his body was very comfortable.

Including the magazines that come with the submachine gun itself, there are a total of five magazines, 150 rounds of 62mm bullets. Hu Rong is being quite generous. In his opinion, these bullets should be enough for Zhuang Rui to satisfy his gun cravings.

"Brother Zhuang, let's go. If we can catch another big one today, we'll be in for a treat..."

After Zhang Guojun finished explaining the work, he came over with four people. The other mine guards all looked at them with envy. You know, going into the mountains to hunt is a good job, much more comfortable than standing guard here.

"Brother Zhang, let me carry this..."

When Peng Fei saw that Zhang Guojun was carrying a bag, he knew that it contained food and water. He quickly stepped forward and snatched the bag from his hand.

"No, no, you're guests. Hey, young man, are you sure you can manage?"

Zhang Guojun was about to decline, but Peng Fei had already snatched the bag away. Zhang Guojun couldn't help but glare at his men, who had no sense at all. How could they let a guest carry things?

However, after some back and forth, the bag was carried by Peng Fei, and the group of five walked along the foot of the mine towards the Savage Mountain to the north.

There's an old saying, "Looking at a mountain makes your horse run itself to death." Zhuang Rui had never experienced this before, but now he truly understood. Standing in the campsite, the Savage Mountain seemed so close, yet it took nearly an hour to reach its edge.

The distance they covered in that hour was only four or five li (about 2.5 kilometers), and that was without going up the mountain, even though everyone quickened their pace.

Peng Fei's face also turned serious at this moment. He realized that his previous calculations had been somewhat flawed.

According to Peng Fei's calculations, it is about 20 kilometers of mountain road from here to the location of the treasure. For him alone, Peng Fei is absolutely confident that he can make a round trip in four or five hours. However, with Zhuang Rui included, it may not even take four or five hours one way.

"Brother Zhuang, if you can't go, then don't go. I'll just sneak over and take a look myself..."

Peng Fei gave Zhuang Rui a wink, and the two of them trailed at the very back of the line.

"What's wrong? Didn't we agree to find a time to get rid of them?"

Everyone has curiosity, and with the submachine gun in his hand and the five magazines full of bullets, Zhuang Rui was brimming with confidence. Even if he were to be surrounded by a pack of wolves again, he wouldn't be afraid now.

In the morning, Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei had already discussed that once they entered the jungle, they would find an opportunity to shake off their pursuers. Zhuang Rui also knew that Hu Rong would not allow the two of them to enter the Savage Mountain, as the legends there were not so pleasant.

"Brother Zhuang, it's about forty kilometers round trip from here. Even for me alone, it would probably take most of the day. If you come with me, then..."

Peng Fei didn't finish his sentence, but Zhuang Rui understood what he meant. He was afraid that Zhuang Rui couldn't keep up with him, and that he was being underestimated.

Zhuang Rui waved his hand with a smile and said, "It's nothing. Your brother Zhuang used to be a long-distance running champion. Running 30 or 40 kilometers is no problem for me..."

Zhuang Rui wasn't bragging. His best time for a 5-kilometer run during his university years was 18 minutes and 22 seconds.

Back then, his eyes hadn't undergone any strange changes. Now, with spiritual energy within him, he could recover from fatigue at any time, so Zhuang Rui no longer cared about the 40-kilometer round trip.

"Brother Zhuang, that's not how it works. This mountain road is hard to run on. You can't pick up the speed. Even for me, I'm lucky if I can walk five kilometers an hour..."

Peng Fei scratched his head. He had oversimplified the trip and made a common-sense mistake: the distances on the map were very different from the actual distances, especially in mountainous environments.

The reason why the Kuomintang always lost battles in the past was largely due to this. That bald Chiang Kai-shek often did this: he would sit in the operations room, pointing at the map and making his troops run around in circles.

What Chiang Kai-shek didn't realize was that the straight-line distance on the map might represent mountains or rivers in reality, all of which would hinder the troops' rapid advance.

Even during the Huaihai Campaign, if Chiang Kai-shek hadn't blown up Huayuankou, causing the Yellow River to change course and creating a flood zone, it wouldn't have been so easy for the People's Liberation Army to encircle and annihilate the fully mechanized Huang Baitao and Huang Wei's army. And these are things that obviously cannot be shown on the map.

Zhuang Rui was also stunned by Peng Fei's words. He was not afraid of physical exertion because he could replenish it with spiritual energy. However, walking five kilometers in an hour was a bit too slow. In that case, even without any other complications, it would take eight hours to go back and forth.

If he really had disappeared in the Savage Mountain for eight hours, Hu Rong would probably have organized a search party. Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but scratch his head.

"Brother Zhuang, we're heading into the mountains now. You two stay close, don't load your guns, keep them pointed downwards. If we encounter any prey, I'll take care of you..."

Looking back, Zhang Guojun saw that Zhuang Rui and the other man were already twenty or thirty meters behind. He shook his head. "These city people just can't keep up. They've only walked a few kilometers and they're already exhausted."

"Brother Zhang, I understand..." Zhuang Rui replied from afar.

"If I go now, I should be back tonight. I'm sorry, Brother Hu..."

Zhuang Rui glanced at his watch; it wasn't even 8 o'clock yet. He made up his mind and whispered to Peng Fei, "Let's leave now and try to get back before dark..."

Although Peng Fei didn't want to take Zhuang Rui along, seeing that Zhuang Rui was determined, he had no choice but to nod and say, "Brother Zhuang, let's be clear from the start. If you can't keep up with me, then we'll turn back, and I'll go alone tonight..."

"Okay, let's do it this way!"

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement and then quickly caught up with Zhang Guojun and the others.

By this time, the six people had entered the forest. The dense tropical jungle broad-leaved trees blocked most of the sunlight from the sky, with only sparse sunlight filtering through the branches and dappling the ground.

The ground was covered with a thick layer of fallen leaves and decaying branches, which felt soft and yielding underfoot, making a rustling sound.

The forest was very quiet. Apart from the footsteps and conversations of the group, there was no other sound. Zhang Guojun was very familiar with the place. The path he was leading Zhuang Rui and the others to was actually a small trail, or rather, a path they had been walking on frequently lately.

After walking for more than half an hour through the towering forest, Zhang Guojun stopped and said, "Let's head northwest. There's a ravine ahead; there are probably some animals inside. That wild boar we caught yesterday was from there..."

"Brother Zhang, Brother Zhang, you go ahead, I really can't hold on any longer, I need to sit down and rest for a while..."

Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei pretended to be panting heavily, looking like they were about to run out of breath. Zhang Guojun glanced back and frowned. They had only walked a short distance, and they were already like this.

However, Zhang Guojun knew that he was only there to accompany Zhuang Rui, so he said, "Why don't we rest for a while and go later? It's a pity that the animals are a bit slow to react in the morning; if we go too late, they'll probably all run away..."

"Brother Zhang... we're fine, we're just... a little tired. We'll just sit here and rest for a bit. Don't worry about us, go and guard the pass first. What if all the animals run away...?"

Zhuang Rui leaned against a large tree, panting as he spoke, while impatiently waving his hand to signal Zhang Guojun to go ahead first, as if he was afraid of missing out on the prey.

"This...this isn't good, is it? If anything happens, Brother Hu won't let me off the hook..."

Zhang Guojun was a straightforward man, and he could never have guessed what Zhuang Rui was thinking. Although he had already been persuaded by Zhuang Rui, he had not forgotten the mission of this trip. After thinking for a while, he decided to wait for Zhuang Rui to go together.

"Brother Zhang, what are we two grown men with guns afraid of? Besides, it's not far from outside, and there aren't any animals around. You guys hurry up and go, otherwise if all the animals run away, we'll have come all this way for nothing..."

Zhuang Rui was really anxious when he saw that Zhang Guojun was unwilling to leave. It was already 8 o'clock, and if he didn't get them to leave soon, today's treasure hunt would probably be ruined.

"Well... alright then, it's less than two miles northwest from here, and you'll see that mountain valley..."

Zhang Guojun also wanted to ambush a few big guys so he could improve his brothers' meals for the night. They didn't dare to go deep into the Savage Mountain; they usually went to the mountain gully to ambush prey. There was a water source there, and it was usually a gathering place for animals.

Seeing Zhuang Rui waving his gun, Zhang Guojun figured nothing bad would happen. Tigers and bears were practically nonexistent at the edge of the forest. He immediately called out to one of the men behind him, "Ma Liu, you stay here. You know that place. Bring Brother Zhuang and the others over later..."

"Brother Jun, it's not far, less than an hour's journey, do we really need to keep someone here?"

After hearing Zhang Guojun's words, Ma Liu said somewhat reluctantly, "Men always have an extraordinary interest in hunting, and Ma Liu is no exception."

Zhang Guojun glared at Ma Liu and said irritably, "You're not going to listen to me, are you? You're not going to listen to me either?"

"No...no, how could that be? Brother Jun, you guys go ahead..."

Upon hearing Zhang Guojun's words, Ma Liu quickly waved his hand, though he still looked somewhat unwilling.

"Brother Zhuang, come over as soon as you've rested..."

Zhang Guojun greeted Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei, then excitedly led the other three men toward the hunting ravine. In his view, with a gun in hand, there would be almost no danger in the jungle, as there weren't many snakes in this remote area.

"Brother Ma Liu, what kind of animals live in that mountain valley?"

Zhuang Rui was breathing less heavily now, so he took out a pack of cigarettes and offered one to Ma Liu.

"That's hard to say. Last time we encountered two wild boars, but one escaped. Black bears also sometimes come over there to drink water. Oh, and we even saw a tiger once, but by the time we got there, it had vanished. What a pity..."

Ma Liu and his men have been stationed here for almost half a year. They often hunt on the edge of the Savage Mountain and have been to the mountain valley many times. Now they can talk about it as if it were their own home.

When Ma Liu talked about the tiger, he still had a regretful look on his face. You know, if a tiger skin were sold on the China-Myanmar border, it would be worth tens of thousands of RMB. Of course, that was just the price offered to them by Chinese businessmen.

"Sigh, it's all our fault for being physically weak. We're out of breath after running this short distance. How about this, Brother Ma Liu, you come along too. We'll rest for a bit more and then we'll be over..."
Zhuang Rui was now eager to get rid of this person.

"That won't do. If you get lost, Brother Jun will skin me alive..."

Ma Liu shook his head repeatedly. Zhang Guojun still held considerable prestige among this group of Chinese mine protection workers.

"Brother Ma Liu, are you looking down on us? We both have guns, how could we get lost? Here's what we'll do: every four or five trees, you mark a spot on the tree with your bayonet, that way we'll know..."

Zhuang Rui quickly racked his brains, trying to find an excuse for Ma Liu. As for whether Brother Jun would skin him alive, he couldn't worry about that now. However, once the two of them ran away, Ma Liu would inevitably get a scolding.

"That's true..."

Ma Liu's eyes lit up. He picked up his military dagger and chopped at a tree, revealing a mark and white sap on the trunk. He turned to Zhuang Rui and said, "Mr. Zhuang, just follow this mark to find our way here. Actually, you don't even need to mark it; it's in the northwest direction..."

Ma Liu is a bit of a simpleton. Once you enter this forest full of towering trees, unless you're an experienced guide or someone who's received special training, who knows which direction is northwest? Even if you want to use the sun to determine your direction, you need to find a sparsely wooded hillside.

"Mr. Zhuang, hurry up..." Ma Liu shouted back to Zhuang Rui as he chased after Zhang Guojun and the others, his hands busy as he used his military dagger to chop a tree along the way.

"Okay, don't worry, I'll shoot if anything happens..."

Zhuang Rui shouted back, already standing up, while Peng Fei beside him had already taken out his small knife and was using the compass on the handle to determine the direction.

"Brother Zhuang, we're heading due north, this way..."

Once Peng Fei recognized the direction, he sprinted forward, running over twenty meters in an instant, like a nimble ape.

"Hey, slow down a bit..."

Zhuang Rui didn't know that Peng Fei wanted him to give up because he couldn't keep up, so he quickly followed behind and chased after him.

"Ma Liu, what brings you here? Where are Brother Zhuang and the other two?"

Ma Liu chased after them for nearly 20 minutes before catching up with Zhang Guojun and the others.

Chapter 499 Savage Mountain (Part 3)

"Brother Jun...they're still behind us, it's alright, I marked the way..."

Ma Liu took a deep breath, scratched the tree with his military dagger, but dared not look Zhang Guojun in the eye.

"You little brat, you won't listen to me?!"

Zhang Guojun glared and slapped Ma Liu hard across the head. Ma Liu didn't dare to dodge and staggered from the blow. After regaining his balance, he lowered his head and didn't dare to say a word.

"No, if something happens, we brothers can't afford the consequences. Let's go, let's turn back..."

Zhang Guojun understood Zhuang Rui's importance to Hu Rong; if anything happened to him, his entire family would be too ashamed to continue living in Chinatown.

A man standing next to Zhang Guojun hesitated and said, "Brother Jun, we've been here for almost half a year. This outskirts is so remote you can't even spot a rabbit. Nothing bad will happen. They might catch up soon..."

Although these people in the mining protection team lived on the edge of the forest, they didn't have time to go hunting every day. Besides, they had a limited supply of bullets. It was rare for Boss Hu to be so lenient and let them come out to play, so none of them wanted to waste any time.

"Second brother, is that what you mean too?"

After hearing what the man said, Zhang Guojun clearly hesitated. He also thought that nothing would happen on this short distance, otherwise he wouldn't have left only one person behind and led the others to the ravine first.

"Brother, let's block the mountain pass and leave them some supplies to fight. Otherwise, if we arrive late, there won't be anything left, which would spoil the guests' fun."

The second brother was the smarter one and came up with a reason that Zhang Guojun couldn't refuse: Hu Rong wanted them to accompany Zhuang Rui and the others so they could have a good time. If they just went on a trip and climbed mountains without getting anything, what was the point?

"Alright then, let's head to the mountain pass first. You guys, make some more markings on the trees..."

Zhang Guojun thought for a moment and felt that there wouldn't be any problems at this edge, so he decided to go to the ravine to wait for Zhuang Rui and the other person.

"Brother, then I..." Ma Liu looked at Zhang Guojun with his head bowed.

"Damn it, you go first, you little brat. If you disobey again, I'll send you up the mountain to dig a hole..."

Zhang Guojun kicked Ma Liu in annoyance, then casually took the bayonet from his submachine gun and marked the spot where he and his men had just stood.

"Brother Zhuang, we agreed beforehand that if we couldn't keep up today, we wouldn't go. Let's go hunting with them later..."

Peng Fei, who had already run more than 20 meters, stopped after hearing Zhuang Rui's words and looked at Zhuang Rui who was following behind him.

"Hey, you really think I can't outrun you? You underestimate me, Brother Zhuang. Let's go..."

Zhuang Rui tightened his grip on the gun slung over his shoulder and waved for Peng Fei to walk ahead.

"Okay, if you can't hold on, just say so, and we can always turn back..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui's insistence, Peng Fei reluctantly turned and headed north. He was very fast, and he could even run in the dense forest full of towering trees. Otherwise, Peng Fei would not have dared to boast that he could travel 40 kilometers of mountain road in four or five hours.

Zhuang Rui followed suit, not to be outdone. He ran with a much larger range of motion, which took more energy than Peng Fei. However, Zhuang Rui was not afraid of this. When his legs felt weak, he would lower his head and inject a wisp of spiritual energy into them, and he would recover immediately.

However, he sometimes couldn't stop himself and would often bump into trees in front of him. Before long, Zhuang Rui's camouflage uniform was torn in several places, and his face was scratched by tree branches.

As Peng Fei ran, he occasionally made marks on the trees along his path with his military dagger. However, the marks were extremely subtle; these were communication marks used by their special forces, and most people, even if they noticed them, would simply assume it was natural bark peeling off.

After running continuously for more than 40 minutes, the trees in the forest became denser, and the originally flat ground became sloping. However, this did not affect Peng Fei's speed at all. Apart from his breathing becoming slightly louder, Peng Fei was like a tireless machine, his legs swinging incessantly, moving through the dense forest like an ape.

After crashing into the tree several times, Zhuang Rui learned to be more shrewd. When running, he knew to conserve his energy. Although he wasn't as fast as Peng Fei, he could keep up. The two were always more than ten meters apart, and Peng Fei never managed to leave him behind.

"stop....."

After running down a slope, Peng Fei suddenly stopped, and Zhuang Rui, caught off guard, ran a few more steps forward.

Zhuang Rui thought Peng Fei couldn't hold on any longer and wanted to rest, so he panted heavily and said smugly, "Wh...what's wrong? Can't...can't outrun me, huh?"

Although he didn't feel physically tired, Zhuang Rui's heart couldn't withstand such a high-intensity march. So after he stopped, he was panting heavily, and his camouflage uniform was completely soaked with sweat.

Peng Fei's appearance wasn't much better than Zhuang Rui's. His hair was wet and clumps of it hung down his forehead. After stopping, Peng Fei took out his small knife and shaved off the hair that was about to cover his eyes. Zhuang Rui found the sight quite amusing.

However, Peng Fei's breathing was not as rapid as Zhuang Rui's, and his expression did not seem to change much. After tidying his hair, his eyes remained fixed on the trees in front of him.

"Why have you stopped?"

Zhuang Rui took out his water bottle and drank a few sips. He looked at Peng Fei suspiciously. He could tell that Peng Fei was in much better condition than him. After all, Peng Fei didn't have any spiritual energy to regulate his body.

"Look at these trees, something seems off..."

Peng Fei gestured to Zhuang Rui to look ahead.

"There's nothing wrong with it, it's just that it's grown a little crooked..."

Zhuang Rui looked at them for a long time and found that the trees were not very tall and were somewhat tilted. However, this is quite normal in the forest. Trees that are intertwined and shaped like the Duke of Zhou in a ritualistic manner have been photographed before.

"No, those are traces left from an explosion..."

Peng Fei's eyes sharpened. Although the explosion may have happened more than half a century ago, he could still see some clues in the trees. The reason he stopped was that Peng Fei was afraid there were landmines buried ahead. If he accidentally stepped on one, no amount of life would be enough to save him.

Although this possibility is not high, because countless animals must have passed through this area in the past half-century, and even if there were landmines, they would probably have been detonated long ago, Peng Fei had to be cautious because it concerned his life and property.

The Savage Mountain was originally part of Yunnan Province, China. However, the British intervened and ceded it to Myanmar. The name Savage Mountain comes from the fact that the area is mountainous and densely forested, and plagued by miasma. It is said that wild men once roamed there, so this uninhabited area spanning hundreds of miles was called "Savage Mountain".

In Burmese, the Savage Mountain means "the place where demons live".

Deep in the Savage Mountain, with its overlapping peaks, vast forests, endless swamps, towering valleys, and ravines, it is a place teeming with wild beasts and plagued by malaria and other diseases. Both Myanmar and China consider it an extremely dangerous place.

The Hukawng Valley only became known to the world recently after a television program commemorating the Chinese Expeditionary Force's battles in Myanmar was broadcast.

Back then, the 5th Army of the Chinese Expeditionary Force, with 15,000 men, crossed the Hukawng Valley. After reaching India, only 3,000 to 4,000 men remained, less than a fraction of the original number. Of the more than 40 women who retreated with the army, only 4 survived.

Of the 100,000 troops of the Chinese Expeditionary Force who went to Burma to fight, about 10,000 Chinese soldiers sacrificed their lives in battle, but 50,000 died in the Hukawng Valley.

The Savage Mountain not only buried tens of thousands of Chinese soldiers, but the Japanese army also suffered a loss there. Three Japanese divisions, totaling 40,000 men, disappeared there and never returned.

It can be said that this mountain range, spanning hundreds of miles, is littered with bones, with nearly 100,000 people having lost their lives there. Therefore, Peng Fei dared not let his guard down for a moment.

In fact, landmines were not widely used during World War II. Those defeated soldiers didn't care about laying landmines to hinder the pursuers. They were all desperately trying to get into the deep mountains. Well, it might be more accurate to say they were going to their deaths. Du Yuming's decision directly led to the loss of tens of thousands of soldiers.

"It's alright, let's go, Brother Zhuang. I didn't realize you were such a long-distance running champion..."

After checking the area, Peng Fei relaxed and started joking with Zhuang Rui, half-jokingly, though he genuinely admired Zhuang Rui.

You have to understand that Peng Fei had used almost all his strength during that forced march. In those 40 minutes, he had covered six or seven kilometers. Although it was only on the edge of the Savage Mountain and the terrain wasn't particularly difficult, Zhuang Rui's ability to keep up with him step by step still impressed Peng Fei.

Knowing that Zhuang Rui's stamina was no less than his own, Peng Fei slowed down his pace noticeably. This was because they had truly entered the Savage Mountain, a place that had probably not been visited for half a century. The towering trees made the dense forest extremely dark.

As the two continued on their way, Peng Fei took out a long tree branch and used it to probe the path ahead from time to time. He was worried that the accumulated dead branches might form a deep swamp, and it also served to alert any potential predators.

Zhuang Rui saw several times that, with Peng Fei's branches poking at them, several snakes covered in patterns slithered into the depths of the dense forest.

Due to the dense trees blocking the way, the air quality in the forest became very poor. After walking another two or three kilometers, Peng Fei took out a bottle from his camouflage uniform pocket, poured out two pills, swallowed one himself, and then handed it to Zhuang Rui.

Chapter 500 Savage Mountain (Part 4)

"What kind of medicine is this?"

After Zhuang Rui popped the pale yellow pill into his mouth, he asked Peng Fei. The pill tasted bitter, so Zhuang Rui quickly grabbed the water bottle and took a sip.

"Quinine tablets..."

Peng Fei answered casually, and seeing Zhuang Rui's puzzled look, he added, "It's also called quinine, and it's used to prevent malignant malaria. It also has some effect on these miasmas..."

In the jungle in front of Zhuang Rui and Peng Fei, a faint mist lingered, and because it was covered by the dense trees, the miasma never dissipated.

However, things are still relatively good now. If it were the rainy season, the heavy rains would wash out all that decaying matter, and there would be no way for it to stay in the rainforest.

"Approximately how far have we walked?"

Zhuang Rui looked around. Apart from the trees seeming to be a bit denser, the jungle seemed no different from when he first entered it, let alone be able to distinguish east from west.

"There should still be about 12 or 13 kilometers left, but it will definitely be difficult from here on out. Brother Zhuang, are you sure you want to continue?"

Peng Fei took out a map of Hpakant and looked at it for a while. His expression was very serious because he found that the compass had stopped working here. If they went any further, they would have to rely on the sun, which was blocked by trees, to determine their direction.

"Go, why don't you go? You're already here..."

Zhuang Rui had been trekking through the jungle for over two hours. Apart from a few snakes, he hadn't seen a single jackal, tiger, or leopard. There seemed to be no danger, which greatly boosted Zhuang Rui's confidence. Moreover, judging from the way he had traveled, this place was definitely deserted, and perhaps the batch of gold really was still there.

Zhuang Rui's adventurous spirit was also ignited. Having grown up reading Robinson Crusoe, how could he possibly pass up such a great opportunity for a jungle adventure? Danger? It seemed that hadn't appeared yet.

There are quite a few wealthy people in the world who enjoy adventure. Not to mention the Chinese real estate tycoon who climbed Mount Everest several times, even the billionaire scientist who was the first in the world to successfully reproduce a single cell often sails his yacht alone into the ocean.

Adventure has now become a game for the rich. Putting aside everything else, the equipment alone is beyond the reach of ordinary hikers. The real estate tycoon in Shenzhen spent millions of dollars climbing Mount Everest.

"Alright, Brother Zhuang, be careful on the road ahead..."

Seeing that Zhuang Rui was determined to go on, Peng Fei didn't say anything more. Instead, he took out two simple gas masks from his backpack, handed them to Zhuang Rui, and taught him how to put them on.

The extent of this miasma zone is unknown, and relying solely on quinine pills is definitely insufficient. Fortunately, Peng Fei was prepared, and he brought four of these gas masks that can provide sustenance for half an hour.

"Crack..."

Just as Zhuang Rui took a step, he suddenly stepped on something, slipped, and almost fell to the ground.

"What the hell?"

Zhuang Rui poked at it with a twig, and after seeing the object clearly, he was so frightened that he took several steps back.

It was a human skull, the jawbone was missing, leaving only the top of the head and two dark eye sockets, which looked extremely eerie in this dark environment.

A snake with a triangular head and four colors—red, black, yellow, and white—about the thickness of a thumb, emerged from its eye socket. Seemingly displeased that Zhuang Rui had disturbed its dwelling, it raised its head, hissed at Zhuang Rui, and then disappeared back into the thick layer of dead leaves.

"Damn, it's not biting people but just scaring them..."

Zhuang Rui's heart pounded. Luckily, he retreated quickly; otherwise, if he hadn't been bitten, he might have lost his life. Who knew if spiritual energy had any healing effect on toxins?

However, since he had spoken too confidently, Zhuang Rui cautiously followed behind Peng Fei, heading deeper into the Savage Mountain.

As they went further, their pace slowed down as the mountain became steeper and the number of snakes and insects suddenly increased. Every now and then, a brightly colored venomous snake could be seen hanging from the low treetops. Several times, if Peng Fei hadn't been quick-witted, he would have been bitten while scouting ahead.

As for the bones of the dead, Zhuang Rui saw quite a few. Corpses could be seen lying dead in the grass from time to time. Their clothes had long since decayed, and it was impossible to identify them. He didn't know if they were soldiers of the expeditionary force from back then or Japanese devils who went missing in the Savage Mountain.

As they traveled, Zhuang Rui finally came to believe the claim that 100,000 people had been buried in the Savage Mountain. There were several places filled with miasma, and without gas masks, it would have been very difficult to get through. He believed that the defeated troops from back then were definitely not as well-equipped as the two of them.

"Brother Zhuang, take a break..."

Peng Fei glanced at his watch. It was already 1 p.m. They had been walking for more than four hours, and they should not be far from the treasure location. There were still about two or three kilometers to go, but it looked like it would take them more than an hour to walk those two or three kilometers.

This trip to the Savage Mountain was far from as smooth as I had imagined, and I might have to spend the night in the mountains.

However, Peng Fei really didn't expect that Zhuang Rui's physical fitness was so good. Judging from his current appearance, he was even more relaxed than himself. Moreover, when scouting the way, Zhuang Rui also carried the seven or eight-pound food bag on his shoulder. Considering the submachine gun and bullet clip, Zhuang Rui's load had exceeded 20 pounds.

"Okay, let's eat something..."

Zhuang Rui looked around. It was a mountain hollow, about two or three hundred square meters in size, with a pool of water about forty or fifty square meters in the middle. There were steep rock walls on both sides, and only a narrow path leading to the unknown ahead.

"Da...da da..."

Suddenly, Peng Fei raised his gun and fired at a large tree forty or fifty meters away, startling Zhuang Rui, who was just about to sit down, into jumping up.

"What's wrong?"

"It's nothing, it's just a lynx..."

Peng Fei ran to the big tree, picked up a dead cat from the ground, and threw it onto the pond's edge, saying, "This thing is very aggressive; even a regular leopard couldn't beat it. If we don't kill it or scare it away, it'll definitely attack us when we pass by..."

Zhuang Rui saw that the lynx weighed about 30 to 40 pounds and was about the same size as the leopards he had seen on TV. However, its body was covered with gray stripes and fur, and it did not have the golden fur of a leopard. Instead, it was somewhat similar in color to the trees.

There were three bullet holes in the lynx's body, one of which hit its head, ripping open its skull. Zhuang Rui felt nauseous at the sight and quickly retreated.

"Brother Zhuang, have something to eat first. We don't have time today. Otherwise, don't be fooled by the sour taste of this cat meat. If you catch a snake and cook it together, it tastes pretty good. The main ingredient in the 'Dragon and Tiger Fight' dish is not as good as this lynx..."

Peng Fei found a spot near the rock wall, cleared away the surrounding weeds, and then invited Zhuang Rui to sit down. In order to save time, they hadn't eaten anything since morning, and now they were exhausted and needed to replenish their energy.

The food was simple: steamed glutinous rice balls and dried radish. Both of them were starving, and each ate three or four glutinous rice balls and drank some water before their spirits slowly returned.

Although Zhuang Rui's body wasn't particularly tired, his mind was constantly on edge. This trip had certainly broadened his horizons; he had seen more than a dozen kinds of venomous snakes, and he had also met a group of monkeys covered in black fur that didn't look like gorillas.

Zhuang Rui was unaware that this was a black snub-nosed monkey unique to Myanmar, as rare as the golden snub-nosed monkey in China. Many people in Myanmar risk entering the Savage Mountain to capture these monkeys and then sell them to China for a high price.

Of course, the so-called "large price" is just the Burmese people's understanding. For these Burmese people whose average monthly salary is equivalent to 300 RMB, a sum of 10,000 or 20,000 rem is a lot of money.

"Hehe, we brought all this stuff with us. I'm afraid Brother Zhang and the others don't even have anything to eat right now..."

After Zhuang Rui finished eating, he stood up, patted his stomach comfortably, and said smugly to Peng Fei. However, he could guess that Zhang Guojun and the others had no appetite at this moment and were searching for the two of them all over the place.

Although he felt guilty, Zhuang Rui had no choice. He couldn't exactly spread the news of the treasure map all over the world. At most, he could say a few good words about Hu Rong when he got back.

"Brother Zhuang, shh..."

Peng Fei, who was sitting on the ground drinking water, suddenly tensed up, grabbed a submachine gun next to him, and rushed in front of Zhuang Rui.

"Brother Hu, that's what happened. It was my fault for letting Brother Zhuang and Brother Peng get lost. I'll go back and look for them right away..."

Zhang Guojun, who is nearly 190 centimeters tall, stood with his head down in front of the slender Hu Rong, looking ashamed. The row of people standing behind him also had unnatural expressions on their faces.

Upon seeing Hu Rong looking at him, Ma Liu couldn't help but move the several dead birds with colorful feathers behind his back, avoiding Hu Rong's gaze.

Today, Zhang Guojun and his team had quite a good haul. They not only shot seven or eight birds, but also a small wild boar weighing over 40 kilograms. They had cornered it in the ravine with a water source that morning, but unfortunately, the adult wild boar escaped.

However, these spoils did not bring joy to Zhang Guojun and his men, because they waited in the ravine for nearly two hours without seeing Zhuang Rui and his companion.