

## Golden 891

### Chapter 891 Stone Coffin

The stone coffin placed in the center of the tomb chamber has a painting of cranes and deer on its front. Two snow-white cranes soar above the glazed tile hall, flanked by lush, verdant pines and cypresses.

In front of the coffin head is a fragrant and vibrant green lawn, with a stone staircase leading to the hall in the middle of the lawn, which appears very clean and elegant. The whole picture decorates the coffin head like a fairyland, a quiet villa.

On either side of the coffin are painted two phoenixes circling in the sky, chasing and playing with a precious pearl. From this, we can tell that the owner of the coffin should be a woman.

"Xiao Zhuang, in our ancient times, a coffin was also called an 'old house,' and this coffin is just like that. It's surrounded by flowers, trees, cranes, and pine trees, just like a royal garden..."

When Professor Meng saw Zhuang Rui filming the relief patterns on the stone coffin with a camera, he explained to him that Chinese culture is profound and extensive, and every pattern is not random but has its own hidden meaning.

"Teacher, are there many stone coffins unearthed from the tombs?" Zhuang Rui asked.

"Not many, just the existence of stone coffins found in Eastern Han Dynasty tombs..."

After circling the stone coffin a few times, Professor Meng looked at Dr. Ren and said, "Xiao Ren, this stone coffin can be pushed open directly. Go up and try it. When you're halfway open, tie a rope to it and be careful not to fall to the ground..."

Since the stone coffin itself is very heavy, it doesn't have the locking pegs of a wooden coffin and should be able to be pushed open directly.

Before Dr. Ren opened the coffin, Zhuang Rui took a small knife and tried to insert it into the connection between the coffin lid and the coffin itself, but found that even though it was as thin as a blade, he still couldn't insert it.

"Xiao Zhuang, don't even try. You might not even be able to stuff it in with a piece of paper..."

Professor Meng couldn't help but laugh when he saw Zhuang Rui's actions. Many ancient crafts were exquisite, let alone those used by the royal family. How could those craftsmen not put their hearts into making them?

"Teacher, this... I can't push it!"

Dr. Ren, wearing gloves, stood in front of the coffin head and pushed back with all his might, but even as his face turned red from straining, the coffin lid remained completely still.

Professor Meng shook his head and said, "You're not strong enough, Xiao Liu, why don't you lend a hand..."

Even with Xiao Liu's help, before the coffin lid could be opened, Zhuang Rui saw the situation and said, "Teacher, let me try..."

After handing the camera to Dr. Ren, Zhuang Rui put on a pair of gloves, placed his hands on the front of the coffin, and with a forceful push, a "crackling" sound of stones rubbing together rang out. The coffin lid, which fit perfectly with the coffin itself, slowly moved backward.

"It's really not light..."

Zhuang Rui weighed it in his hand; the coffin lid must have weighed several hundred kilograms. He wondered how the ancients had managed to move it up the mountain and place it in this tomb.

"Depend on!"

When a crack appeared in the coffin beneath him, a stench that Zhuang Rui couldn't describe in words wafted out of the coffin, causing him to quickly release his hands and back away.

"Ugh... ugh..."

Leaning against the wall covered with reliefs, Zhuang Rui bent over and gagged several times. The smell was so awful that he almost fainted.

Dr. Ren took a bottle of medicated oil and rubbed some on Zhuang Rui's nose and temples, saying apologetically, "Zhuang Rui, I forgot to tell you, when we open the coffin, try to hold your breath..."

"This, this smells awful! It's been a thousand or two thousand years, how come the smell hasn't dissipated yet?"

It took Zhuang Rui five or six minutes to catch his breath. Looking at the stone coffin with a crack, he simply didn't have the courage to go forward anymore.

Seeing Zhuang Rui's appearance, Professor Meng smiled and said, "This stone coffin is very well sealed, and since this tomb hasn't been opened for one or two thousand years, the smell has all accumulated inside. Xiao Zhuang, it's alright. Although the smell is unpleasant, it's not poisonous..."

Professor Meng has led numerous scientific expeditions involving the excavation of coffins, and in the last century, he participated as a staff member in the excavation of the Ming Tombs. He's encountered all sorts of foul odors, yet here he stands not far from the coffin, seemingly oblivious to the smell emanating from it.

Zhuang Rui caught a whiff of that smell again, which even his medicated oil couldn't mask. He quickly said, "I'll just pull the coffin lid down from the back..."

"Be careful, Xiao Ren and Xiao Liu. Get the rope and bar ready. Lower it gently later..."

Professor Meng directed everyone to stand at the bottom of the coffin. Stone coffins are extremely rare in ancient tombs, and with such exquisite reliefs on them, they are a precious work of art in themselves.

When Zhuang Rui pulled the coffin lid out about a meter, Dr. Ren and the others secured it with ropes. The four of them stood on both sides and lifted it up. Instantly, the stench became even stronger, filling the entire tomb chamber.

Zhuang Rui had already put on a mask and sprayed a lot of Tiger Balm on it, but he still felt a little uncomfortable. He said, "Teacher, should we use a blower to circulate the air in the tomb first?"

The soft tubing they brought in for the blower was over a hundred meters long, long enough to be pulled into the tomb chamber.

"No, the stench means the items in the museum aren't severely decayed. If fresh air comes in, there probably won't be anything left..."

Professor Meng shook his head. At this moment, he also put on a mask and leather gloves, in case there were corrosive substances in the building.

"Brocade?!"

Under the light, Professor Meng looked into the stone coffin and let out a gasp, which sounded somewhat muffled through his mask.

Although Zhuang Rui disliked the smell inside the coffin, he was genuinely curious about what could have caused the old professor to lose his composure like this. He quickly took a step forward to the stone coffin and peered inside.

"Where are the bodies?"

Zhuang Rui forced himself to endure the foul stench and looked up, only to find some textile-like things inside the building; the corpse he had imagined was nowhere to be seen.

"The body is at the bottom; we need to clear away the things on top first..."

Dr. Ren, also wearing gloves, came to the stone coffin. The cleaning of the artifacts inside the stone coffin was mainly carried out by him and Professor Meng.

The other people were carrying plastic and paper bags, each labeled with a number indicating the order in which the artifacts were unearthed. This is why some research papers specify which artifacts were unearthed from a particular tomb.

"Is the character on this the character for 'longevity'?"

Zhuang Rui saw a large "longevity" character on the brocade inside the coffin, surrounded by many decorative patterns. Although it had been sealed for thousands of years, it was still as good as new.

"This is a longevity quilt made of Han Dynasty brocade. It has been unearthed before, but those tombs have all been looted. This is the first time I have seen such a complete brocade. It is a priceless treasure..."

Professor Meng looked at the brocade and continued, "This is called Two-Color Gold Treasury Brocade. All the patterns on it are woven with gold and silver threads, with gold thread as the main thread and silver thread as a small part of the patterns. In ancient times, only the royal family could use it..."

While Professor Meng was talking to Zhuang Rui, he suddenly saw Ren Chunqiang reach out and lift a corner of the brocade. He hurriedly shouted, "Slow down, don't move..."

Professor Meng called out a little too late. Dr. Ren's hand was already on the brocade. Zhuang Rui saw it clearly. The brightly colored brocade, which looked as if it had just been made, had already turned to ashes in Dr. Ren's hand.

"Sigh, it's not your fault. These textiles are very difficult to preserve. Xiao Zhuang, take pictures of all these brocades for future reference..."

Professor Meng sighed. He had originally wanted to observe for a while longer, but Dr. Ren had already taken action. The colors of the brocade that had been touched were slowly fading. Presumably, once the outside air circulated in, the brocade would all be gone.

Upon hearing this, Zhuang Rui immediately picked up the camera and filmed every pattern of the brocade. He now knew that his master's body was under the brocade quilt.

As the air in the tomb gradually cleared, the brocade inside the stone coffin became increasingly dull in color, a far cry from its previous radiant appearance.

"Alright, let's begin. Be careful, peel it off layer by layer..."

The brocade could not be preserved, which only made Professor Meng feel sad for a while, but the excitement of discovering a complete Han Dynasty tomb surged into his heart again.

It's important to know that most of the Han Dynasty tombs unearthed in modern times are empty. Even the tombs that aren't empty usually have very few items left, as they've been almost entirely looted by tomb robbers throughout history.

Although only a complete burial chamber has been discovered so far, there is sufficient reason to believe that the possibility of the tomb being looted is very small, and perhaps some discoveries that will shock the archaeological world will indeed emerge.

"The first unearthed artifact, a pair of gold-threaded bracelets..."

"Item number three unearthed: a phoenix hairpin..."

"This...this is a golden phoenix crown. Be careful, place it carefully..."

It's unclear how many layers this longevity quilt has, but as each layer was lifted, burial objects were revealed on almost every layer, mostly for women. After the head of the coffin was cleared out first, the most important artifact of the day finally appeared.

Zhuang Rui saw through the camera that it was a phoenix crown. The entire crown was woven with gold and silver wire, with a hollowed-out shape and a three-dimensional feel. It was also inlaid with dozens of pearls and gemstones.

The crown has two phoenixes that sing loudly, with jeweled ornaments in their beaks. The pearls and gold and silver reflect each other, making it extremely magnificent.

After Professor Meng removed the phoenix crown from one side of the skull, the entire tomb chamber shone brightly.

After carefully storing the phoenix crown, Professor Meng and Dr. Ren gradually cleaned the brocade. More than two hours had passed, and they had actually found 231 cultural relics in just this one coffin.

The skeleton of a woman, with black hair still remaining near her head, was finally revealed to everyone.

#### Chapter 892 Human Sacrifice

To be honest, seeing the corpses inside the eerie coffin in this gloomy tomb chamber, so different from the skeletons he'd seen outside, even Zhuang Rui, an atheist, couldn't help but feel a chill run down his spine.

It is estimated that Zhuang Rui is the only person in the room who is participating in an on-site archaeological excavation for the first time. Apart from him, everyone else ignores the skeleton. Professor Meng is even wearing gloves and has already begun to examine the teeth of the skeleton.

When Zhuang Rui saw Professor Meng take out a magnifying glass and almost put his face right up to the skull, his hair nearly stood on end. Zhuang Rui asked himself honestly, he probably couldn't be that dedicated.

Archaeologists need to have a wide range of knowledge, including not only history and chemistry, but also some basic knowledge of medical anatomy, so that when they see a dead person, they can tell whether the death was natural or unnatural.

"Judging from the wear and tear on this woman's teeth, she shouldn't be very old, no more than thirty. Could she have been buried alive with someone?"

After examining the remains, Professor Meng's expression turned somewhat grave. Everyone present knew that burying living people with the deceased was a common custom in ancient funerals. Sometimes, the deceased's wives, concubines, and servants were buried with them, which was called human sacrifice.

The practice of burying living people with the dead can be described as a cruel and barbaric system in ancient China. It was somewhat curbed after the Qin and Han dynasties, and was often replaced by wooden or terracotta figurines. After the Qin and Han dynasties, it was rare for people to be buried alive with the dead.

However, the practice of human sacrifice resurfaced during the Ming Dynasty. Emperor Taizu of Ming set a precedent, and Emperor Yingzong of Ming ended the practice of human sacrifice. Human sacrifice continued during the reigns of Emperors Huang Taiji and Shunzhi of the Qing Dynasty, and it was not until the reign of Emperor Kangxi that the feudal practice of human sacrifice was finally ended.

"Teacher, could it be that they died later and were reburied?"

Dr. Ren had a slightly different opinion. Before the Qin and Han dynasties, human sacrifices were not buried in such elaborate ways. Most of the time, people were buried alive in a burial pit, or the people were driven into the tomb chamber, the tomb door was closed, and they died inside.

Only during the Ming and Qing dynasties were concubines forced to commit suicide, and then they were given coffins and buried in the tombs flanking the emperor. However, it's clear this is definitely not a Ming or Qing dynasty burial site.

Dr. Ren's point about reburying the deceased after death is a common practice in the Ming and Qing dynasties, especially the Qing dynasty. After the emperor built his mausoleum, if the empress died early, she would be placed in the mausoleum first, and then the tomb would be opened and she would be reburied after the emperor died.

This is precisely why the locations of the Qing Dynasty emperors' tombs are the clearest and most widely known; otherwise, Sun Dianying wouldn't have been able to so easily loot the tombs of Empress Dowager Cixi and Emperor Qianlong.

Professor Meng shook his head and said, "Impossible. This cliff tomb is very difficult to open after it was sealed. It must have been a funerary sacrifice. However, with such a stone coffin, this woman must have been of very high status..."

The tombs of ancient emperors, especially those of the Qin and Han dynasties and the Yuan dynasty, were extremely secretive. Generally, only the royal family knew about them, and the records were incomplete, only showing the general location. Once a tomb was sealed, it would never be opened again.

After Professor Meng finished speaking, he carefully searched inside the coffin again, hoping to find some items that could identify the owner. Unfortunately, apart from the burial objects, there were no inscriptions.

"Alright, take out all the jade plugs from the nine orifices. These are the things tomb raiders love most..."

With the discovery of the woman's remains, Professor Meng's interest in the ancient tomb grew even stronger. He was now certain that there was a main burial chamber inside, and even many other burial chambers like this one, since it was impossible for the tomb owner to have only one wife.

In layman's terms, the "nine orifices" refer to the two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, mouth, anterior urethra, and posterior anus of the human body. The jade plugs on the bones of the corpse had basically fallen into the coffin and were quickly picked out.

The jade plug at the anus was removed by two staff members after they had collected the remains into a bag.

Zhuang Rui took the jade cicada and examined it. It was a jade cicada, also called a "king's mouth," traditionally believed to be placed in the mouth of an emperor after his death.

This is a jade cicada with a large head and eyes, and a narrow, elongated trapezoidal body and wings. The carving is exquisite. When the jade cicada is held upside down, it vaguely resembles the character "八" (eight), a typical example of Han Dynasty eight-stroke carving.

The jade cicada's head has no holes; it was purely used as a burial jade. The jade material is top-grade white jade, but it has blood stains on it. The entire surface of the jade cicada is slightly reddish, and the

stains have penetrated deep into the jade. When you hold it in your hand, the blood-red light flows, and it is clearly not an ordinary item.

"What's wrong, Zhuang Rui? You've got it all stuck in your head, haha..."

After Dr. Ren finished cleaning up the contents of the coffin, he saw Zhuang Rui playing with the jade cicada with great affection. He couldn't help but say that he knew Zhuang Rui had developed his expertise from collecting antiques to archaeology. Seeing these things was like a teacher seeing documents in an ancient tomb; he wanted to take them home and study them slowly.

"Hehe, Brother Ren, it's true. Do you know how much such a small gadget costs?"

Zhuang Rui smiled. This jade cicada was the best he had ever seen, both in terms of its carving and the quality of its jade. If the identity of the tomb's owner could be verified, this single item alone could fetch an astronomical price.

"One hundred thousand? That's about right, isn't it?"

Dr. Ren was also curious after hearing Zhuang Rui's words. He usually focused his attention on academics. Although he could authenticate some cultural relics, he didn't know much about the market price of antiques.

So even this price of 100,000 was just Dr. Ren exaggerating. In his opinion, since this jade wasn't cultured white jade and its texture was stained with blood, it probably wouldn't fetch a high price.

"One hundred thousand? Brother Ren, one hundred thousand yuan can't even buy the carving skills of this jade cicada..."

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this, rubbed the jade cicada with his thumb, and continued, "The patina is natural blood-red, white jade with a reddish tinge, and it's carved with the Han Eight Cuts technique by a famous master. If such a jade cicada were to go to auction, the starting price would be over 2 million..."

"Two...two million? This...this little thing can...can be worth that much money?"

Ren Chunqiang almost thought he had misheard. He had also excavated many ancient tombs with Professor Meng. Almost as long as the remains were intact, jade artifacts could be unearthed. There were at least dozens of such artifacts by now. However, he did not expect that such an inconspicuous item would be so expensive.

"Hehe, Brother Ren, 2 million is just the starting price. It's quite normal for it to end up costing five or six million..."

However, ordinary jade pieces aren't that valuable; most can be bought for around 100,000 yuan. It's just that this one has a very beautiful patina, excellent craftsmanship, and good jade quality, which is why it's a bit more expensive..."

Burial jade also varies in quality. Burial jade from before the Qin and Han dynasties was actually very cheap because it was not pure jade. It was almost entirely half stone and half jade, with more than half being stone, so it was naturally not worth much money.

Therefore, the price of burial jade in the market is very unstable. High-quality burial jade can be extremely expensive, while low-quality jade may be so cheap that no one wants it.

However, the jade cicada in Zhuang Rui's hand is definitely a top-quality burial jade. If he saw such a beautiful jade cicada at an auction, he would definitely acquire it regardless of the cost.

Hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Dr. Ren was dumbfounded. He now truly understood why those tomb raiders dared to take the risk of excavating ancient tombs. It was simply a matter of risk-free profit. As long as they put in a little effort, the returns were incredibly generous.

Looking at the jade cicada in Zhuang Rui's hand, Dr. Ren's eyes had changed. He only earned a little over 100,000 or 200,000 yuan a year, but this small item could almost guarantee him a life of comfort.

"Alas, wealth can be tempting. Xiao Ren, Xiao Liu, remember, these things are relics of the nation's historical heritage, reference points that bear witness to history. You must not be tempted by them..."

Professor Meng, listening to Zhuang Rui and Ren Chunqiang's conversation, suddenly interjected with a remark that made Ren Chunqiang and the other staff members present realize the situation and nod in agreement.

Professor Meng's words were by no means unfounded. Among the many museums in the country, there are not a few bad apples who sell precious cultural relics from the museums to cultural relic smugglers. This has happened many times before.

The harm caused by these people is even more unforgivable than that of tomb raiders. They knowingly break the law and have caused some national treasures to be lost overseas, which is basically impossible to recover.

In terms of mindset, Zhuang Rui probably has the best mindset among these people. He simply likes these objects that carry history, and money is no longer of great significance to him.

"Alright, it's already noon. Let's hurry up and find the tomb doors leading to the other chambers, then go out for lunch and a rest, and continue working in the afternoon..."

After Zhuang Rui returned the jade cicada, Professor Meng began assigning tasks. Everyone, including Zhuang Rui, took a small wooden mallet and started tapping on the surrounding walls.

"Here, teacher, the sound I hear is a bit hollow..."

Three or four minutes later, Zhuang Rui's voice rang out. In fact, he had seen the tomb door as soon as he entered the tomb chamber; he was just putting on an act.

The tomb entrance is made of two large bluestones, with patterns carved on them, blending seamlessly with the surrounding stone walls. If it weren't for the hollow echoes coming from behind, it would be quite difficult to spot.

It was difficult to open the tomb door from the outside, but it was easy to open it from the inside out. It was a trapdoor with three grooves in the ground. In the innermost groove was a long strip of sealing stone. After Zhuang Rui lifted the stone strip out, the tomb door could be opened directly.

"Alright, everyone, get out of here. There's another passageway ahead. Come back in after you've eaten. Be careful, everyone. If no one has walked through this passageway before, there's a high chance there are traps or mechanisms inside..."

After the tomb door was opened, a stench of decaying soil wafted out, causing everyone to back away.

Chapter 893 Everlasting Lamp

Lunch was personally delivered by Old Zhang. He went to town that morning to buy a few pounds of meat and made a big pot of braised pork with potatoes. The staple food was steamed buns, and there was also a bucket of egg drop and seaweed soup.

Although Old Zhang's cooking skills were not as good as those of the chefs in big hotels, everyone was very tired after working all morning, so the food tasted especially delicious.

The morning's harvest was quite substantial, and everyone was somewhat excited. Judging from the current signs, the ancient tomb had not been looted. An undiscovered Han Dynasty tomb would surely shock the entire Chinese archaeological community.

Excavated tombs in China, such as the Mancheng Han Tomb and the Guishan Han Tomb, have been looted more than ten or even dozens of times over the course of more than two thousand years. Most of the contents of these tombs have been looted by tomb raiders.

Even so, tens of thousands of artifacts were still unearthed. One can imagine how many unknown treasures might be inside a complete Han Dynasty tomb.

"Zhuang Rui, when you go down, take the probe and ladder with you. The tomb passage behind us might not be very safe..."

After resting for a while at the top of the mountain, everyone tied ropes around their waists, preparing to go down again. All the cultural relics that had just been unearthed were placed in the tent of the armed police officers, and were guarded by an armed police officer.

While Zhuang Rui and the others were eating, the blower kept running. When they went down into the tomb passage again, the air had become very fresh, and even the unpleasant smell in the tomb chamber had disappeared, leaving only a faint smell of decaying soil.

"Xiao Ren, you go first. Watch the ground and both sides of the passage. The arrow traps should be useless now, but be careful of the traps and the dragon-slaying stones..."

Before even reaching the first tomb chamber, Professor Meng began assigning tasks. Ren Chunqiang was relatively more experienced and younger, so Professor Meng had him lead the way.

"Teacher, let me go first. I'm younger than Brother Ren, and my eyesight is better. If there are any problems, I can back out..."

Zhuang Rui volunteered. He had already thoroughly explored the tomb passage behind the door, and if he needed someone to guide him, he was the perfect choice.

"Alright, then be careful. Use the probe to check the ground before you take a step..."

Professor Meng nodded upon hearing this. To become a true archaeologist, one cannot simply observe; one must experience things firsthand. This is how experience is gained.

Zhuang Rui had just entered the first tomb chamber when he suddenly saw a faint light coming from inside. He quickly turned around and asked, "Teacher, did we take all the lamps with us when we went out?"

Professor Meng turned around and asked, "Did anyone leave their lamp in the tomb when they went out?"

"No, I brought mine with me..."

"I brought mine out too..."

"Xiao Zhuang, is this your own light fixture?"

The group replied one after another, but none of them left a lamp in the tomb. This made Zhuang Rui's scalp tingle. He quickly released his spiritual energy to observe, but found nothing.

Apart from the abundant spiritual energy emanating from the burial objects in the distant tomb, there seemed to be no human presence. It was precisely because of this that Zhuang Rui became increasingly nervous.

"T-Teacher, there are lights inside, but when we left, we took the lights with us..."

Zhuang Rui's speech became somewhat stammering. It wasn't that he was timid; it was just that this matter was too bizarre. In such a sealed tomb, they had only left for a short while, and lights had appeared inside. Could it be...?

Before Zhuang Rui could finish speaking, there seemed to be only one explanation: the person lit the candle and the ghost blew it out. The ghosts in the tomb wandered out and lit the eternal lamps on the walls of the passageway!

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the others felt a chill run down their spines and looked around nervously. Even the normally normal sound of the blower had become eerie, like the wailing of ghosts.

Although Zhuang Rui was quite bold, this fact was truly inexplicable. People have always been extremely afraid of the unknown. For example, ghosts have been talked about for thousands of years, but no one has ever seen one. However, the living still fear such ethereal and unpredictable things from the bottom of their hearts.

"Xiao Zhuang, what are you afraid of? Move aside, I'll go in first. There are so many living people here, how can we be scared by ghosts?!"

Professor Meng's voice suddenly rang out. Zhuang Rui had his back to him and didn't see the faint smile on Professor Meng's face.

"T-Teacher, it's alright, let me go first..."

Upon hearing Professor Meng's words, Zhuang Rui blushed slightly, gripped the probe in his hand tightly, gritted his teeth, and squeezed through the broken stone door into the tomb chamber.

Once inside the tomb chamber, Zhuang Rui could see more clearly that the faint light was indeed coming from the tomb passage that he and the others had opened when they left. The light was dim and seemed like it could go out at any moment.

The others didn't look any better than Zhuang Rui. You could tell from their knuckles as they held the objects that they were unconsciously using force, their knuckles sticking out and turning white, showing how tense they were.

For a moment, no one dared to look into the passageway, as if ghosts were lurking there. In the small tomb chamber, everyone's breathing sounded somewhat heavy.

Of all these people, only Professor Meng seemed to remain calm, his expression unchanged. After glancing at the faces of everyone in the tomb, he looked at Zhuang Rui and asked, "Zhuang, are you scared?"

"Afraid...not afraid, teacher, let me go and scout ahead..."

It would be a lie to say he wasn't afraid. Zhuang Rui's knees weren't exactly weak, but he was completely powerless. This was just too damn strange. When he opened the tomb door, it was pitch black inside, but now there was light coming out. It was just eerie.

Not to mention Zhuang Rui, even the other staff members who had some archaeological experience had never encountered such a situation before. Everyone's eyes were fixed on the passageway behind the door.

"Click...click..."

When he went out, the tomb door was half-open. Zhuang Rui mustered his courage, pulled open the half-open tomb door, glanced into the passageway, and his face immediately turned pale.

About 1.5 meters above the ground, a bronze lamp was burning quietly, and about 3 meters away on the wall, another lamp was burning. Three meters away was a corner, and light was coming from there.

It seemed someone had taken a lighter and walked along, lighting up all the lights in the passageway.

The light illuminated the bronze figure on the kneeling lamp very clearly, and the originally expressionless figure now seemed to be smiling at Zhuang Rui.

"T-Teacher, what...what exactly is going on?"

Although he tried to remain calm, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but stutter when he spoke, and his long-held belief in the atheistic theory began to waver.

"Zhuang Rui, tell me, what is the reason why the oil lamp in the tomb went out?"

Professor Meng did not answer Zhuang Rui's question directly, but instead raised a question.

"You mentioned this in class: if the tomb is well-sealed, the oil lamp will naturally go out because the oxygen runs out. The second reason is that the lamp oil will also go out when it burns out..."

"But teacher, this tomb is so well-sealed, and it's over two thousand years old. There couldn't possibly be an ever-burning lamp here, could there? How much oil would that have burned?"

After talking with Professor Meng, Zhuang Rui's fear dissipated considerably. However, if this question remained unanswered, Zhuang Rui wouldn't dare to enter the passageway. His spiritual energy could observe living beings, but it might not be effective against ghosts.

"Zhuang Rui, do you know what an ever-burning lamp is?"

Professor Meng pushed aside Zhuang Rui, who was blocking his way, and walked into the passageway to carefully examine the lit bronze lamp.

"I know, the eternal lamp is also called the inexhaustible lamp, which is the lamp that burns day and night in front of the Buddha. Although it is also used in the tomb passage, teacher, I have never heard of any eternal lamp in the tomb that is still burning..."

Zhuang Rui looked at Professor Meng in front of him and felt extremely impressed. He and his group of young men didn't dare to step forward, but the teacher didn't care at all.

Professor Meng smiled and shook his head, saying, "Hehe, you guys, when you see something you don't understand, you categorize it as a ghost or god legend. Xiao Ren, you don't even understand the principle behind how an oil lamp is lit, do you?"

"Teacher, I don't believe in ghosts and spirits, but I haven't found this phenomenon in any of the tombs I've excavated. Could you please explain it to us?"

Dr. Ren scratched his head, feeling somewhat embarrassed. His fear just now was even greater than Zhuang Rui's, after all, thinking back to the ancient tombs he had entered before, he was afraid that unknown ghosts might possess him.

"Well, the mystery of the ever-burning lamp has always been a focus of debate in the world's archaeological community. However, after several on-site excavations in our country, the analysis of the materials inside the lamp has yielded results..."

Professor Meng led everyone forward a little and pointed to the wick of the bronze lamp, saying, "This wick contains white phosphorus and other chemicals that are prone to spontaneous combustion when exposed to oxygen, while the sealed tomb is oxygen-deficient."

When someone opened the tomb, a large amount of fresh air containing oxygen rushed into the sealed tomb, causing white phosphorus and other chemicals to spontaneously combust, igniting the eternal flame...

"We opened the tomb door and left, and during that time, these bronze lamps spontaneously combusted. Now that you know how it works, are you still scared?"

Professor Meng's words made Zhuang Rui and the others suddenly realize that these bronze lamps had played a trick on them. If they had stayed in the tomb a little longer, they might have witnessed this spontaneous combustion phenomenon firsthand.

"Teacher, let me go first..."

After understanding the principle, Zhuang Rui was no longer afraid. When he saw Professor Meng about to go inside, he quickly stepped in front of him.

Chapter 894 Sand Refining

In this world, people often scare themselves. Before knowing the principle behind the ever-burning lamps, Zhuang Rui was genuinely terrified. But now that he knows, looking at these spontaneously combusting bronze lamps, his feelings are completely different.

"Xiao Zhuang, be careful. The passageway is the most dangerous part. Given the size of this tomb, there are probably quite a few traps..."

When Professor Meng saw Zhuang Rui rushing inside, he quickly reminded him from behind. Actually, he hadn't explained the principle behind the spontaneous combustion of the ever-burning lamp because he wanted to test his two apprentices' courage.

Professor Meng was fairly satisfied with the result; although Zhuang Rui was scared, he didn't let the team down.

However, Professor Meng was somewhat dissatisfied with the knowledge of his two apprentices. The debate over the eternal lamp had long been discussed in the world academic community, yet his two apprentices had not paid any attention to it.

"Teacher, I understand..."

Zhuang Rui agreed. He was probably the most knowledgeable person in the tomb than anyone else.

Although Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy cannot see physical objects, he can still sense the situation in each tomb chamber through the spiritual energy emitted by different burial objects.

Even those arrow traps emitted faint spiritual energy, and Zhuang Rui had already sensed that things were not quite peaceful underground in this passageway.

Although the light emitted by these eternal lamps in the tomb passage was dim, there were so many of them, one every three meters, that they revealed the entire tomb passage to everyone.

"Teacher, something's not right up there..."

As Zhuang Rui rounded a corner, he stopped. A meter in front of him was a deep trap. Due to the angle, the light from the wall could not shine through, and he could not see what was inside.

"Xiao Ren, get a ladder! Goodness, this trap is no small thing..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Professor Meng stepped forward, shone a powerful flashlight inside, and suddenly exclaimed, "Eh!"

"There's someone inside..."

With the help of Professor Meng's flashlight, Zhuang Rui was able to see the situation inside the trap. The trap was two meters deep and four meters wide, with dozens of swords and spears stuck upside down. Although they were all rusty, they still stood upright at the bottom of the pit.

Zhuang Rui was half right; there was indeed someone inside, but he was dead.

Amidst these sharp blades, a skeleton was clearly visible, the skull and body of the dead man completely separated.

The skull with its two empty eye sockets lay alone at the bottom of the pit, appearing so hollow and deep under the light, as if telling everyone about its tragic fate.

"Another tomb raider..."

Professor Meng frowned deeply, picked up his flashlight and looked up into the passageway. A small hole appeared before them. Clearly, the tomb raider was unlucky; after digging the hole, he fell into a trap.

However, this makes the future of the tomb somewhat uncertain, as no one knows whether tomb robbers have ever visited the burial chamber in front of it.

"Teacher, please move aside, I'll put this ladder over there..."

Zhuang Rui took the alloy ladder handed to him by Dr. Ren, placed it above the trap, and then stepped on it to test its stability.

"Huh?"

Just as Zhuang Rui was about to climb the ladder, his eyes swept over the deep pit used as a trap, and he suddenly stopped.

"Teacher, there seems to be something in there..."

Zhuang Rui discovered that beneath the remains was a small bronze plaque containing a very dense concentration of spiritual energy.

"Where is it?" Professor Meng looked in the direction Zhuang Rui was pointing, but couldn't see it.

"I'll go down and bring it up..."

Zhuang Rui handed the flashlight to Ren Chunqiang and prepared to go down. There were gaps between the swords and spears in the trap; as long as one didn't descend sideways and step into the gaps, they wouldn't suffer the same fate as the tomb raider, who was pierced through the heart by a thousand cuts.

"Xiao Zhuang, let's forget about it. That's probably something left behind by tomb raiders..."

Professor Meng didn't want Zhuang Rui to take any risks; the trap was too deep, and one wrong step could lead to him stepping on a knife's edge.

"It's alright, teacher, I'll be right up..."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he braced his hands on the ground beside the trap and slowly lowered his body down. He touched the swords and spears with his feet, and the blades, which seemed to still be effective, immediately broke in two and fell into the deep pit.

However, the swords below, which were not yet rotten, were still powerful enough to pierce through anyone who fell into the trap. Zhuang Rui dared not be careless at all, and only let go of his hands when his feet touched solid ground.

"Brother Ren, hand me the wooden stick..."

Zhuang Rui reached out to Ren Chunqiang for a wooden stick used for scouting, and poked at the skeleton. The skeleton, except for the skull, immediately crumbled apart.

"Don't be offended, brother, don't be offended..."

Zhuang Rui was startled and quickly clasped his hands in a fist and bowed to the skeleton before reaching out with a wooden stick to push a sign under the skeleton toward him.

"Hey, that's not light at all..."

When he could reach it, Zhuang Rui bent down and took the bronze plaque, which was about the size of a baby's palm, into his hand.

Due to the erosion of time, the bronze plaque has lost its luster, is covered with patina, and has a layer of dark black substance on it.

Standing next to the dead body, Zhuang Rui felt a little uncomfortable. Without bothering to examine it closely, he put the sign in his pocket, exerted force with both hands, and climbed to the ground.

"What did you find?"

Professor Meng was also curious, as ancient tomb raiders were divided into two factions, one in the north and one in the south, and there were also official tomb raiders.

It can be said that the history of tomb raiders developed entirely at the same time as tombs, and there are also special studies on tomb raiders in the archaeological community.

The owners of tombs try every means to prevent theft, while tomb raiders rack their brains to enter the ancient tombs. The two have been fighting wits and courage for thousands of years, but judging from the tombs that have been unearthed, it seems that the tomb raiders have the upper hand.

"It's a bronze medal, teacher, take a look..."

Zhuang Rui took the bronze medal out of his pocket and handed it to Professor Meng.

"Xiao Ren, bring me some clean gauze and sandpaper..."

Professor Meng shone his flashlight on the sign but couldn't find anything. However, when he ran his thumb across it, he felt that it was uneven, as if there were embossed characters.

Taking the water from Ren Chunqiang, Professor Meng first cleaned the bronze plate, then carefully polished its surface with fine sandpaper. The patina was quickly wiped away, revealing a yellow hue.

After wiping away the patina, Professor Meng vigorously rubbed it with gauze. The color indicated that it was a brass plaque.

Professor Meng spread the cleaned bronze plaque out in his palm. Zhuang Rui, who was standing to the side, saw that on the surface of the bronze plaque was a mountain shrouded in mist, with a river flowing through its base.

Professor Meng flipped his hand, revealing the other side of the bronze plaque. There should have been two characters on it, but Zhuang Rui was standing at the wrong angle and couldn't make out what they said.

"Sifting through the sand!"

Before Zhuang Rui could even ask, Professor Meng had already spoken.

"Sand washing? Teacher, what is that?"

Zhuang Rui originally thought it was Cao Cao's tomb raider's token, but he didn't expect to hear two unfamiliar words.

"Hehe, this is also an official position. This trip was worthwhile. It turns out that the sand-panning officials recorded in history really existed..."

Professor Meng laughed upon hearing this, and seeing Zhuang Rui's puzzled expression, continued, "In ancient times, it wasn't just Cao Cao's officials who were bandits. During the Southern Song Dynasty, the Jin Dynasty occupied the Central Plains and once supported a puppet emperor named Liu Yu, whose state was called the Great Qi..."

Everyone, including Dr. Ren and others behind him, listened quietly as Professor Meng explained this period of history. It turned out that Liu Yu was originally a prefect of the Southern Song Dynasty. After surrendering to the Jin Dynasty, he was made the ruler of the Great Qi Kingdom.

Although the Great Qi regime was a makeshift organization, it still needed fiscal revenue as its starting capital. Unfortunately, the areas under the jurisdiction of the puppet Qi regime had been repeatedly plundered and ravaged by the Jin army, leaving nine out of ten houses empty and agriculture and commerce severely damaged. As a result, taxes could not be collected much, and the puppet Qi regime was temporarily destitute.

At the same time, the Jin dynasty, which controlled the puppet state of Qi, also faced a problem: was being too rich a problem? Indeed, whether the Jin dynasty plundered the Northern Song or demanded tribute from the Southern Song, it was always in gold and silver.

The problem lies with gold and silver. Unlike the West, China does not produce much silver and gold. Since the pre-Qin period, China has used copper as currency, which is the copper standard monetary system.

Therefore, although the Jin Dynasty possessed vast wealth, it could not exchange goods for gold and silver with the Southern Song Dynasty.

Since the pseudo-Qi Liu Yu had neither copper coins nor gold and silver precious metal currency, this man, who had a habit of stealing since childhood, thought of tomb raiding as a way out.

As a result, Liu Yu established an official tomb-raiding agency called "Taosha Guan" (meaning "Official of Sand Searching"). They first looted the imperial tombs of the Northern Song Dynasty. Taking this as an example, and in order to alleviate the shortage of military funds, Liu Yu's army also began to follow suit and loot ancient tombs on their own.

However, Liu Yu's activities were always confined to the present-day Shandong Province. Now, the discovery of "Taoshaguan" in Henan Province adds substantial evidence to the study of the pseudo-Qi regime of that time.

What puzzled Professor Meng was that official tomb raiders always resorted to violent methods, so why did this official who was digging for sand die here, and why were there no signs of looting around? Could it be that Liu Yu had a change of heart and left?

There are simply too many mysteries left over from ancient times. Professor Meng pondered for a long time but still couldn't figure them out. In the end, he could only shake his head and put the bronze plaque away.

The tomb passage was over twenty meters long. After passing this trap, there was another one ahead, but the wooden planks on top had long since rotted away, rendering the trap ineffective and allowing everyone to easily escape.

"Teacher, this... should be the Dragon-Slaying Stone, right?"

At the end of the passageway, a huge horizontal rock blocked their way.

Chapter 895 Yellow Intestine Tablet (Part 1)

"It's not a dragon-severing stone. Dragon-severing stones are usually placed at the entrance of the tomb. After the burial is completed, someone will put down the dragon-severing stone. Once it falls, the tomb door closes, and the living and the dead are separated..."

Professor Meng examined the horizontal stone in front of him, repeatedly striking it with a hammer. After a while, he said, "Xiao Ren, Xiao Zhuang, let's go back and get the chisels to break through this stone..."

"Break through...?"

Dr. Ren was startled and stammered, "Teacher, instead of drilling through this rock, why don't we dig it out from the side? Judging from the thickness of this rock, it must be several meters thick!"

It's true that the archaeological team needs to dig soil, but breaking through the mountain and breaking rocks is indeed a difficult task for these scholars. Breaking through such a large rock will probably take three to five days to remove.

Professor Meng shook his head and said, "No, the integrity of the tunnel cannot be damaged. How about this, let's go back today, and I'll have someone find a manual rock crusher. It can be cleared in a day..."

According to Professor Meng's idea, after the ancient tomb is excavated, it can be handed over to the local archaeological department as a model of a large Han Dynasty tomb and can also be developed into a tourist attraction. If the passageway is destroyed, where will we find these Han Dynasty bricks to fill it in the future?

Blocked by the boulder, the day's work could not continue. The group could only return to the mountain in a sorry state, taking with them the day's findings, and head back to Zhang Daniu's house.

Apart from the "Taosha" plaque, Professor Meng handed over all the unearthed artifacts to the local archaeological department to take back. As for the bronze plaque, Professor Meng wanted to conduct some further research on it, so after registering it, he kept it.

The next day, the local cultural relics department brought in a stone crusher. After re-entering the tomb passage, Zhuang Rui used the stone crusher to drill holes in different positions on the horizontal stone, and then used a chisel to carve it out.

The group worked for an entire day before finally breaking apart the massive boulder, weighing over several thousand kilograms, to reveal the tomb entrance.

The tomb gate is about two meters high and consists of two doors carved from a single piece of white marble. One door is carved with a dragon soaring through the sky, while the other door depicts a phoenix singing and flying. These two mythical creatures from ancient China are vividly portrayed on the stone doors.

Professor Meng was visibly excited upon seeing the stone gate. He stroked the smooth, jade-like white marble with his hand, muttering to himself, "Unbelievable, unbelievable! This is a major discovery for the archaeological community..."

"Teacher, it's perfectly normal to use white marble for tomb doors..."

Zhuang Rui was quite puzzled by Professor Meng's emotions. He had visited the Ming Tombs before, and the tomb gate in the underground palace was made of white marble, as were many other buildings in the underground palace.

"Xiao Zhuang, you...sigh, you should look at more information about unearthed tombs in the future..."

Professor Meng was getting excited when he was interrupted by his disciple Zhuang Rui. He pointed at Zhuang Rui with a look of exasperation and continued, "Hanbaishi is also called Hanbaiyu. According to historical records, the mining of Hanbaishi took place around the time of the Nanzhao Kingdom in the Tang Dynasty. This Han Dynasty tomb is at least two thousand years old. Do you understand?"

Professor Meng's words made Zhuang Rui suddenly realize that the Tang Dynasty was only a little over a thousand years ago. The discovery of this stone gate pushed back the history of the use of white marble in China by quite a bit, which is indeed a major archaeological discovery.

Seeing Professor Meng peering through the cracks in the white marble door, Zhuang Rui stepped forward and said, "Professor, there shouldn't be any traps or hidden weapons behind this tomb door, right?"

Zhuang Rui had already sensed it with his spiritual energy. There were no stone blocks blocking the door in the groove behind the stone door, and there were no mechanisms on either side of the stone door.

However, inside the tomb chamber behind the stone gate, Zhuang Rui sensed an extremely strong and dense spiritual energy, which is why he spoke up. Actually, Zhuang Rui wanted to see what was inside as soon as possible.

"That's hard to say..."

After observing the white marble door for a while, Professor Meng said, "This stone door should be able to be pushed open directly. Xiao Zhuang, you're strong, stay here and push the door. Remember, after you push the door open, hold your breath and step back. Everyone else, step back a bit. Let the air circulate after the tomb door opens before going in..."

Because the tomb chambers are sealed for many years, some toxic gases will form inside. In ancient times, many tomb raiders would rush into the tomb chambers after breaking through them, but they would often die from suffocation caused by the poisonous gases.

Moreover, some toxins are not transmitted through the air; when they come into contact with people, they can cause some previously unseen diseases.

The widely circulated story about those who died mysteriously upon first entering the Egyptian pyramids is that they were cursed by the pharaoh, and that the pharaoh's ghost took their lives.

In fact, after autopsies and examinations of the deceased, it was found that they were all infected with an unknown virus, which was very likely caused by the pyramids being sealed for many years.

Most of the ancient tombs that Professor Meng had excavated in the past had been looted ten or twenty times, and the air had long been circulating, so he could directly enter the tomb chamber.

However, it seems that this tomb has not been opened yet, and no one knows what is inside. That's why Professor Meng was so careful and repeatedly reminded Zhuang Rui before leading everyone to retreat.

After Professor Meng and the others retreated to the first tomb chamber, Zhuang Rui looked at the pristine white stone door and took a deep breath. Behind this stone door lay an unknown world, a world that had driven countless tomb raiders mad throughout history.

Zhuang Rui braced his hands on the animal heads of the stone door and pushed hard. With a "click," the two stone doors, carved with dragons and phoenixes, slowly opened inward. It was hard to believe that the tomb doors, which had not been opened for more than two thousand years, could still be so flexible.

As he pushed open the stone door, Zhuang Rui stepped back. As he left, he could only see what appeared to be an altar in the center of the tomb chamber by the dim light, but he did not see the coffin he had imagined.

After crawling and scrambling across the trap, Zhuang Rui couldn't hold his breath any longer. He opened his mouth and took a breath of air, and to his surprise, the air seemed to contain a faint, fresh scent of trees.

"Damn, could it be poisoning?"

Zhuang Rui was startled. In martial arts novels, the more potent the poison, the more beautiful it is. For example, poison like arsenic is fatal and incurable.

With a mix of trepidation and anticipation, Zhuang Rui arrived at the first tomb chamber and exclaimed, "Teacher, hurry back out! There's a very strange smell inside; I suspect it's poison gas..."

No matter what, he himself has spiritual energy protecting him, so he might not be afraid of this gas. However, it's hard to say about the teacher and the others. If all of them collapse in the ancient tomb today, it will definitely shock the entire Chinese archaeological community tomorrow.

"A strange taste?"

Professor Meng paused for a moment, but didn't move. He then asked, "What's that smell? A putrid smell or something else?"

Zhuang Rui shook his head upon hearing this and said, "It's not a stench of decay, but rather a pleasant fragrance. Right, it smells a bit like the fresh scent of trees. Teacher, let's go back out first. Who knows where this smell comes from in a place where people are buried..."

"A delicate fragrance?!"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Professor Meng's eyes suddenly widened. Instead of moving backward, he walked towards the tomb passage, sniffing the air as if trying to smell the scent Zhuang Rui had described.

"Senior brother, please persuade the teacher! Hey, I'm telling you, you should..."

Zhuang Rui was taken aback when he saw Professor Meng's actions. He quickly asked Dr. Ren to persuade his mentor, only to find that Ren Chunqiang was walking towards the passageway just like Professor Meng.

"Haha, hahaha, Xiao Zhuang, this is incredible! We've discovered an amazing Han Dynasty tomb..."

Just as Zhuang Rui was feeling somewhat bewildered, Professor Meng suddenly burst into laughter, his hearty laughter echoing through the tomb passage for a long time.

"This isn't poison gas, I didn't expect... no, I should have expected it..."

After smelling the scent, Professor Meng left the passageway and paced back and forth in the tomb chamber, his expression extremely excited, as if he had become decades younger.

Upon hearing Professor Meng's words, Zhuang Rui realized he had probably made a fool of himself and said sheepishly, "Teacher, even if this isn't poisonous gas, it's been accumulating in the tomb for over two thousand years. It's not good to smell it, is it?"

"There's no benefit, but there's nothing seriously wrong either. Let's wait an hour before going in..."

Professor Meng was clearly in a very good mood, pacing back and forth in the tomb chamber. Zhuang Rui was a little confused, so he nudged Dr. Ren, who was also looking excited, and asked, "Brother Ren, what's wrong with Professor Meng?"

"Hehe, Zhuang Rui, this tomb we discovered this time is quite remarkable. It's a large tomb with a 'huangchang ticou' (a type of ancient Chinese tomb structure)..."

Ren Chunqiang was even more excited than Professor Meng, wishing he could rush into the tomb right now. He had only heard of the "Huangchang Ticou" tomb from the Han Dynasty but had never seen it in person.

"Huangchang Ticou?!"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback when he heard this. "Ticou" is a type of burial that originated in ancient times and was more common in the Han Dynasty. It was rarely used after the Han Dynasty. To be more precise, it was used less frequently after the Western Han Dynasty and even during the Eastern Han Dynasty.

Zhuang Rui now understood why the two were so excited. Although large tombs with yellow cypress wood collages have been discovered in China, they are all from the Western Han Dynasty and most of them have been looted and are not very intact.

If this tomb is indeed a "huangchang ticou" (a type of ancient Chinese mausoleum), then the history of ancient emperors building mausoleums in Mangshan since the Eastern Han Dynasty will be rewritten.

"Alright, let's go inside and take a look..."

After waiting anxiously for more than two hours, the usually composed Professor Meng led the way into the passageway. The answer to who the owner of this tomb was might soon be revealed.

#### Chapter 896 Yellow Intestine Tablet (Part Two)

The term "Huangchang" (黄肠) comes from the fact that all the wood used in its construction was cypress rafters (wooden planks) with the bark removed, hence its name due to its pale yellow color.

The term "huangchangti" specifically refers to a wooden wall built around the coffin of a Western Han emperor, topped with a roof, resembling a house, with an outer chamber.

The use of the "Huangchangticou" burial method served two purposes: firstly, it indicated the identity and status of the deceased, and secondly, it helped protect the coffin from damage.

According to the ritual system of the Han Dynasty, the Huangchang Ticou (黄肠题凑) was an important component of the imperial mausoleum, along with the Zigong (梓宫), Bianfang (便房), and Waizangwai (外藏椁). However, with special permission from the court, some meritorious officials and nobles could also use it.

For example, after the death of Huo Guang, a general of the Han Dynasty, Emperor Xuan of Han "bestowed upon him a coffin, a side chamber, and a set of 'huangchang ticou' (a type of ancient Chinese coffin). The earliest record of the name 'huangchang ticou' in historical documents appears in the Biography of Huo Guang in the Book of Han".

"Teacher, it's getting late, how about... we come back tomorrow?"

Zhuang Rui checked the time; it was already 7 p.m. His stomach was growling with hunger, and he was also quite tired after a day of physical labor. Although the Huangchangticou tomb was very attractive, he still needed to rest.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Professor Meng shook his head repeatedly and said, "No, we must go in today. Xiao Liu, go upstairs and bring down the food. Be careful after dark. Or, could you ask the armed police to give us a tent? I'll stay in the tomb tonight..."

The darkness inside the tomb is no different from the daytime; both require electric lighting. The discovery of a large Han Dynasty tomb with a huangchangticou (a type of ancient Chinese tomb structure) in Mangshan is of great significance. It will rewrite much of the history in the archaeological field, which is why Professor Meng is so eager to see it.

"Well... okay, I'll go in and take a look too..."

The teacher, nearly sixty years old, hadn't complained of the hardship, so Zhuang Rui naturally felt embarrassed to continue. The group, flashlights in hand, carefully traversed the trap-filled passage and arrived at the entrance to the white marble tomb.

The white marble, as white as jade, has not dimmed with the passage of time. Under the light, it still appears crystal clear, and the dragon and phoenix patterns on it are so lifelike that they seem to come alive.

Professor Meng walked in front, and after stepping into the tomb chamber, he stood there motionless for a long time, making Zhuang Rui, who was following behind, feel itchy and quickly looked inside from his teacher's shoulder.

"Holy crap, this... this is the Huangchang Ticou?"

By the light from Professor Meng's lamp, Zhuang Rui witnessed a scene he would never forget.

This is a large tomb chamber that is nearly five meters high and more than 100 square meters in size. In the middle of the tomb chamber, there are countless pieces of wood. All the wood has been stripped of its bark and is slightly yellowed under the light.

Zhuang Rui didn't know what kind of wood these were, but the faint fragrance he smelled at the entrance of the tomb was so refreshing that it made him feel much less tired.

What shocked Zhuang Rui was that all the wood had been broken down into strips of the same size and dimensions, which were densely stacked to form a huge house, complete with a roof.

On the ceiling above the roof, the sun, moon and stars are carved. Next to the Huangchangticou (a type of ancient Chinese architecture) is a tall bronze chariot with a terracotta driver on board, which looks almost like real people.

Around the bronze chariot stood six terracotta generals, all the same size as ordinary people, with solemn expressions, their left hands hanging down, while their right hands rested on the swords at their waists, their eyes piercing as they looked around, seemingly guarding their master.

Surrounding the Huangchangticou (a type of ancient Chinese zither), a ring of white marble is used to depict mountains and rivers, with miniature terracotta figures of varying sizes and lifelike appearances, their vibrant colors creating a vivid and realistic effect. At first glance, it seems as if one has entered a miniature world.

On the surrounding walls were more than a dozen luminous pearls that glowed with a soft white light. Although they were not as large and crystal clear as the one Zhuang Rui had obtained from the island's treasure, they were still intact after thousands of years and must not be ordinary.

"Could it be... the tomb of Qin Shi Huang?"

Recalling the descriptions of Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum in historical records, Zhuang Rui blurted out this sentence as if possessed, immediately drawing several disdainful glances. The existence of Qin Shi Huang's tomb has long been a matter of public opinion and cannot be speculated upon casually.

"Zhuang Rui, Qin Shi Huang had a tomb dug into three springs, cast his coffin in bronze, and filled it with palaces, officials, and all sorts of strange and wonderful objects. He used mercury to represent the rivers, lakes, and seas, with mechanisms to circulate it. The upper part depicted the heavens, the lower part the earth, and he used mermaid oil for candles, which were said to burn for a very long time..."

Dr. Ren has an excellent memory and recited the passage from Sima Qian's Records of the Grand Historian describing the Qin Shi Huang Mausoleum. However, he was also shocked by the tomb he saw. It is likely that the owner of this tomb had the idea of imitating the Qin Shi Huang Mausoleum.

Professor Meng had already entered the tomb chamber, quietly observing the mountains and landforms. After a long while, he said, "This is an emperor who rose from the ashes. Look, there's a general holding a weapon, and this map of mountains and rivers—it's the map of the Han Dynasty. The ancient Yangguan Pass, the grasslands beyond the desert—it's all depicted..."

Generally, the furnishings inside a tomb can reveal the approximate status of its owner. For example, the tombs of emperors of peace often contain pottery figurines of maids eating, drinking, and having fun, while the tombs of generals and emperors who rose to power on horseback are often guarded by weapons and guards.

The mountain and river map and the guards with knives in this tomb indicate that the tomb owner must have been a figure who expanded the territory during his lifetime, which is why Professor Meng said this.

"They hollowed out the middle of the mountain, and judging by the appearance, there must be many other burial pits. Such a huge project would probably take at least twenty years to complete. Which emperor was it?"

Professor Meng looked at the tomb chamber in front of him and fell into deep thought.

The tomb is so large that it would take at least six months to excavate it completely, so Professor Meng was not in a hurry to start.

"Teacher, those terracotta figures need to be protected immediately..."

Dr. Ren was the first to regain consciousness and whispered something to Professor Meng.

Upon hearing Ren Chunqiang's words, Professor Meng seemed to wake from a dream and quickly said, "Oh, right, right, Ren, you take them and quickly protect the terracotta figures..."

Due to exposure to the outside air, the adhesion between the painted layer and the surface of the pottery was already very weak when the painted pottery was first unearthed. After being unearthed, the colors of the painted pottery changed and the paint peeled off, and it gradually lost its color and became like a colorless pottery figurine.

Protecting the glaze of Qin and Han dynasty terracotta figurines was once an international challenge. Later, through in-depth and systematic research on the material composition and techniques of the painted decoration, experts revealed the damage mechanism of the painted decoration and developed protective techniques based on this.

Dr. Ren then took a plastic bucket, poured the liquid in the bucket into a basin and stirred it. He then brushed the colorless liquid onto each terracotta figurine. This is one of the methods, which is the combined treatment of anti-wrinkle agent (polyethylene glycol) and reinforcing agent (polyurethane emulsion).

The role of polyethylene glycol is to resist shrinkage. This agent can absorb moisture from the surrounding environment to keep the painted lacquer layer moist, and then slowly lose water, so that the reinforcing agent can act on the painting before the painting is completely dry, thereby achieving the purpose of reinforcement.

Because there were too many terracotta figures in the tomb, Professor Meng also joined in. It took six or seven people three or four hours to apply the reinforcing agent to all the terracotta figures. They didn't even have time to eat the food that Xiao Liu brought.

"Alright, everyone's worked hard today. Let's go upstairs and rest. We'll continue tomorrow..."

Professor Meng is getting old, and after finishing his work, he was so tired that he couldn't even lift his back. Zhuang Rui also realized that he now truly understood the hardships of field archaeology that he used to talk about.

Although these archaeologists are able to see historical artifacts at the first opportunity, the hard work they put in is far beyond what ordinary people can imagine.

Back on the mountain, Professor Meng reported the findings to the State Administration of Cultural Heritage. Such a large-scale Han Dynasty tomb is unparalleled among the tombs discovered in China, and Zhuang Rui and his team's current technical capabilities seem somewhat inadequate.

The relevant leaders immediately issued instructions that a team of experts would be organized to provide assistance by the next day or the day after. This made Professor Meng breathe a sigh of relief, as it was unlikely that they could reveal the tomb to the world in two more years.

After everyone climbed the mountain, it was already past 11 p.m. Everyone was exhausted and unable to return to Old Zhang's house, so they simply snuggled up next to the tent set up by the armed police and fell asleep.

Although it was already very hot in May, everyone was still covered with the white cloths that were meant to wrap the cultural relics. If an unsuspecting person saw this, they would think they had come to a ghost town, with a row of corpses lying there.

"Hey, where are you? I've been calling you for two days straight and I still can't reach you."

Before going to bed, Zhuang Rui made a phone call home. He hadn't had time to charge his phone in the past few days and usually turned it off immediately after making a call. This time, before he could turn it off, Zhonghai Weige called.

"Brother Wei, I'm in Henan Province, excavating an ancient Han Dynasty tomb. Let me tell you, this tomb is incredible! I reckon only the Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor is bigger than it..."

When Zhuang Rui heard that it was Yang Wei calling, he couldn't help but get excited. Although they had graduated for several years, their brotherhood had always been very strong. In addition, he was stimulated by the ancient tomb today, so Zhuang Rui talked on and on on the phone.

"Mr., let's not talk about that now. Fourth Brother is in trouble, did you know?"

Wei Ge sounded a bit anxious and interrupted Zhuang Rui before Zhuang Rui could finish introducing the unparalleled ancient tomb he had discovered.

#### Chapter 897 Big Trouble

"What could possibly have happened to the fourth brother? Did he get another girl pregnant?"

Zhuang Rui was quite annoyed when Wei Ge interrupted his long-winded discussion about ancient tombs.

The fourth brother is the kind of pretty boy from Guangdong. He had messed with many female classmates when he was in school. After returning to the bright lights of Guangdong, he changed girlfriends like clothes. Zhuang Rui had long said that he was going to die from being with women.

The fourth brother was only a few days older than Zhuang Rui and always acted like an older brother. He took good care of Zhuang Rui at school. Apart from the eldest brother, he was closest to the fourth brother. Speaking of which, it was the fourth brother who played matchmaker for Zhuang Rui's relationship that ended without a trace at school.

Now, of the five college brothers, all but the fourth brother have children. Every time that guy comes to Beijing, he always pulls Zhuang Rui aside and tells him all about the advantages of being a eligible bachelor.

"No, it has nothing to do with women. Fourth Brother has gotten himself into big trouble this time..."

Wei Ge's voice was a little deep. His words made Zhuang Rui sit up and ask, "Wei Ge, what big trouble is it?"

Bi Yuntao, the fourth brother, came from a family with considerable influence in Guangdong. They were among the first to engage in friendly trade with Hong Kong. Although he left the mainland early on, he still had connections in both the legitimate and underworld circles in Guangdong.

Generally speaking, as long as Lao Si doesn't traffic drugs or commit murder, no one in Guangdong, especially in the Chaoshan region, can do anything to him. So Zhuang Rui was a little surprised when he heard Yang Wei's words.

"The fourth brother got hooked on gambling sometime ago and has been spending several months in Macau. He fell into a loan shark trap, lost a lot of money, and is now being held captive..."

"What?!"

Upon hearing Yang Wei's words, Zhuang Rui raised his voice, attracting the attention of several people who had already fallen asleep nearby. Zhuang Rui quickly waved his hand, stood up, and walked down the mountain for a while.

"When did the fourth brother develop this problem?"

Zhuang Rui was a little angry. He hated gambling and drugs the most. He had been forced to gamble on the gambling ship last time. He never expected that his brother-in-law, Lao Si, would also get sick of this disease.

As the saying goes, a little gambling is harmless, but excessive gambling is harmful. Playing cards with friends and family is fine, but gambling in a casino is a completely wrong mindset.

"Who knows when this happened? Let's not talk about that now, let's hurry up and get the fourth brother out..."

Wei Ge didn't know much about the specifics either. Since graduation, the brothers had only been able to get together occasionally. Apart from a few people attending Zhuang Rui's museum opening, it had been a long time since they had been together.

Zhuang Rui was puzzled by Wei Ge's words and said, "Wei Ge, why are you telling me this? Lao Si's family is quite wealthy. After this happened, aren't his family members asking about it?"

Back in the 1960s and 70s, the fourth son's family started smuggling items like electronic watches and jeans from Hong Kong using a windsurfing boat. Now, their trading group is worth at least several hundred million. Surely they can afford to not even cover the fourth son's gambling debts? Unless his family doesn't want to protect him.

Yang Wei gave a bitter laugh and said, "His family? His family would love to skin him alive, otherwise he wouldn't be hiding in Macau, afraid to go home..."

For high-roller clients who frequently gamble in Macau, the casinos won't go all out. Even if you owe huge sums of money at exorbitant interest rates, the casinos will let you go back. They have agents in various provinces across China who specialize in collecting gambling funds, so they're not afraid you'll run away.

Although the fourth brother still owed the casino a large sum of money, he wasn't being held captive by the casino. He was simply too afraid to leave, fearing he might lose his life if he went home.

According to Wei Ge, Lao Si is currently staying at the Macau Grand Hotel, where he is being treated to good food and drinks by the casino. However, only he knows what he is really feeling.

"How much money did the fourth brother actually lose?"

Hearing Wei Ge's words, Zhuang Rui took a deep breath to calm himself down. It seemed that Lao Si had really messed up this time; he wasn't even afraid to go home.

"It's a total of HK\$380 million, and he still owes the casino HK\$180 million. This kid has some nerve!"

Wei Ge was also very disappointed in his son. If it were 20 or 30 million, he could find a way to help his fourth son cover the difference, but with 180 million, he simply didn't have the authority to use the family's funds, and his family would definitely not agree.

So, out of desperation, Yang Wei searched everywhere for Zhuang Rui, because only Zhuang Rui might be able to scrape together such a large sum of money.

However, Wei Ge was also a little uneasy, after all, they were just classmates, not relatives, and it was still uncertain whether Zhuang Rui would be willing to help.

"Three hundred and eighty million?"

Zhuang Rui's eyes widened upon hearing this. He had originally thought that the fourth brother would only lose 30 to 50 million, but he never expected that this guy would lose so much.

"Damn, does he think he's Cheung Tze-keung?"

Enraged, Zhuang Rui kicked a rock hard, sending it rolling downhill with a jarring sound in the night.

The man Zhuang Rui mentioned, Cheung Tze-keung, was a powerful figure in Hong Kong during the 1980s and 90s. Hong Kong and Taiwan tycoons were terrified of him. Even someone like him would obediently hand over his money to gamble in Macau casinos, which shows how powerful the casinos were.

"Who is it? What do they want?"

The armed police officers on night duty were highly vigilant. As the flashlight shone on Zhuang Rui, the dark muzzles of their guns were also pointed at him.

"It's me, Zhuang Rui, from the archaeological team. Xiao Zhao, I'm so sorry, I accidentally kicked a rock..."

Zhuang Rui quickly raised his hand; it would be truly unjust to be shot for no reason.

"It's Brother Zhuang. Keep your voice down, everyone's asleep..."

They had been together for almost two days. Zhuang Rui often tried to get close to the armed police officers by offering them good cigarettes, and the two sides were quite familiar with each other. When the armed police officer saw that it was Zhuang Rui, he put away his flashlight.

"Brother Wei, telling Lao Si to die? Does he have some nerve? How dare he gamble so much? Where did he get so much money?"

Zhuang Rui was a little exasperated. More than 300 million yuan was something he couldn't come up with right now. The project in Africa had encountered some problems and hadn't generated any revenue. For the past two years, Zhuang Rui had been relying on the museum and the Burmese jade mine to stay afloat. Where was he going to find these hundreds of millions of yuan to fill the gap for his fourth son?

"Sigh, isn't the fourth son the only college graduate in his family, and he studied accounting? So all the family's funds are in his hands. He wasn't originally planning to gamble on this much, but according to him, he was set up and gradually ensnared..."

It turns out that Lao Si was just playing around at first, but later a friend invited him to gamble in the VIP room, saying that the stakes weren't high. Lao Si went, and on his first try, he won more than three million.

Although the fourth brother's family was wealthy, it wasn't his own money. Now that money came so easily, the fourth brother lost his vigilance and gradually started gambling, and the stakes kept increasing.

However, apart from the first few times, Lao Si's luck got worse and worse. He not only lost the seven or eight million he had won earlier, but also put several million out of his own pocket.

Gamblers all have the mentality of wanting to win back their losses, believing that they can win it all back by gambling again. Lao Si had this mentality and gradually became addicted. When he looked back, he realized that he had already lost hundreds of millions.

Upon hearing Wei Ge's words, Zhuang Rui immediately understood. When he was learning antique appraisal from Uncle De, Uncle De had mentioned many insider tips and tricks of the trade.

The term "swindler" doesn't only refer to cheating in gambling. It also includes things like setting traps and rigging schemes, which fall under the scope of their business. They are similar to those in the antique trade.

Wei Ge sighed deeply on the other end of the phone. He couldn't describe how he felt about his former classmate falling into such a predicament. He wanted to help him, but the amount of money involved was not something that ordinary people could afford.

The second brother, Yue Jing, is a low-level civil servant. Although his family has connections, he doesn't have much money. The third brother is even poorer, and he had to rely on Zhuang Rui's help to buy a house. So, the only ones who can help the fourth brother are Wei Ge and Zhuang Rui.

"Young man, I can only scrape together 30 million at most. That's all I can do. If you're having trouble, that's fine, but don't drag yourself into it..."

When Wei Ge heard that Zhuang Rui hadn't responded for a long time, he sighed inwardly. He couldn't blame Zhuang Rui for not helping; it involved hundreds of millions of yuan, which was no joke.

"etc....."

Zhuang Rui stopped Yang Wei. He had been thinking about where to get the money, since more than 2 billion yuan was tied up in the African mines, and Zhuang Rui probably only had about 100 or 200 million yuan available at the moment.

"Here's what we'll do, Wei-ge. Doesn't he still owe 180 million? I'll try to raise the money and then transfer it to you. You go to Macau and bring him to Beijing. Let him stay at my manor and not go anywhere else. We'll talk about it when I get back..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment and figured he should be able to raise more than 100 million yuan. He couldn't just watch his fourth brother's life be in danger, could he?

After hanging up Yang Wei's call, Zhuang Rui sighed and, without caring what time it was, called Huangfu Yun directly.

"Hey boss, you're being way too picky. Either you disappear without a trace, or you disturb my sleep..."

Huangfu Yun grumbled, but judging from his energy and spirit, he didn't seem to be asleep at all.

"Brother Huangfu, it wasn't for you. You can go back to sleep. Give the phone to Yunman..."

Huangfu Yun and Yunman registered their marriage after the New Year and are now living together openly. Zhuang Rui guesses that the two of them are currently trying to conceive.

"Mr. Zhuang, what's the matter?"

Sure enough, Yunman was right next to Huangfuyun, her voice languid as she spoke, which made Zhuang Rui's heart flutter.

Chapter 898 The Psychology of a Gambler

Zhuang Rui, no longer caring about disturbing his sleep, asked directly, "President Yun, how much money do I have in all my accounts combined?"

"Mr. Zhuang, please wait a moment..."

Yunman rarely saw Zhuang Rui proactively inquire about her account; usually, she would report the income and expenses of Zhuang Rui's various businesses to him monthly. Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, she quickly opened her laptop.

"Mr. Zhuang, the museum's accounts show a total of 120 million, but 10 million is needed for museum maintenance and this month's expenses, and another 40 million needs to be allocated for the Kyoto auction next week..."

Qin Ruilin Jewelry has 90 million yuan, but 40 million yuan of that is for goods...

Xuanrui Zhai has 12 million in its accounts, which can be used at any time...

"All the industries in Pengcheng combined have about 30 million yuan in funds that can be mobilized. Uh... let me calculate, the total usable funds are 172 million yuan..."

As Yunman's fingers tapped on the keyboard, a series of numbers reached Zhuang Rui's ears.

"One hundred and seventy million? Mr. Yun, what about the funds from Myanmar?"

Zhuang Rui frowned, wondering if he should withdraw his investment from Africa. He had invested two billion yuan and hadn't seen a single penny of return; it would have been better to leave it in the bank to earn interest.

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Yun Man on the other end of the phone said in surprise, "Mr. Zhuang, the Myanmar side hasn't distributed dividends for over a year, I told you..."

"Yes, yes, I forgot about that..."

Zhuang Rui slapped his forehead, feeling confused by Lao Si's actions today. Due to the continuous rise in jade prices in recent years, Hu Rong had stockpiled a large number of raw stones without selling them, a matter he had discussed with Zhuang Rui.

"Here's what we'll do, Mr. Yun. Tell Brother Huangfu later that he shouldn't participate in next week's auction. I need this money. First thing tomorrow at work, gather all the funds together. I'll contact you again tomorrow..."

Zhuang Rui thought for a moment. The jewelry store's cash reserves couldn't be touched; his only option was to try and access the museum's funds.

"Okay, Mr. Zhuang..." Yun Man didn't care what Zhuang Rui did with the money; she was only responsible for the accounting details. Since the boss had spoken, she naturally had to obey.

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui went back to his sleeping place. He gave the tent to Professor Meng, and the rest of them, including Dr. Ren, slept in the open air.

Lying on the grass covered with a white sheet, looking at the twinkling stars in the sky, Zhuang Rui felt a strange mix of emotions.

I remember eight or nine years ago, my fourth brother and I, after drinking too much, lay on the grass of the school playground looking at the stars like this. That scene seems like it happened just yesterday.

After his initial anger subsided, Zhuang Rui gradually calmed down. Based on his understanding of Lao Si, although Lao Si was a bit of a womanizer, he was still a reliable person. It seemed that he must have fallen into someone's trap this time, otherwise he wouldn't have lost so much money.

Some people might say that it's just that the fourth brother lacks a firm mind, and no one else is to blame. As the saying goes, flies don't land on eggs without cracks. As long as the fourth brother acts uprightly and sits firmly, no one can do anything to him.

That's true, but Zhuang Rui knew that the tricks of the trade in the underworld were impossible to guard against. Those skilled in the trade could lure you into a trap without you even realizing it. The scheme he set up for Shanmu was nothing to a real con artist.

To be honest, someone like Lao Si, who has just graduated and doesn't have much experience, could probably be fooled even by someone like a monkey. So at this moment, Zhuang Rui wasn't so angry anymore, and instead turned his attention to the matter itself.

"Damn it, this is so inconsiderate..."

Without a doubt, someone must have targeted the fourth brother; otherwise, it would have been impossible for him to have incurred such a large gambling debt.

This was also very unethical. In the underworld, it's always best to leave room for maneuver; swindling over 200 million and still not stopping, even owing an IOU for 180 million, is bordering on ruthless.

After working all day, Zhuang Rui was quite tired. With things on his mind, he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning, Zhuang Rui asked Wei Ge for his account number and then instructed Yun Man to transfer the funds into it.

Although Zhuang Rui wanted to go to Macau with Wei Ge to see what was going on, he simply couldn't bring himself to ask. For this large tomb, their numbers were already insufficient, and with reinforcements yet to arrive, Zhuang Rui absolutely could not leave.

Moreover, Zhuang Rui also wanted to see what kind of wealth was inside that Huangchangticou tomb, and whose mausoleum this tomb, which was somewhat modeled after the mountains, rivers and stars of Qin Shi Huang's mausoleum, was.

While waiting for reinforcements to arrive, Zhuang Rui, Professor Meng, and others excavated several side chambers surrounding the Huangchangticou (a type of ancient Chinese architecture), unearthing a large number of cultural relics.

One of the side chambers was a burial pit filled with the remains of animals such as cattle, sheep, pigs, and horses. These items did not serve a significant purpose, only providing some assistance to animal husbandry at the time.

In another side chamber, a large number of terracotta figurines were unearthed, numbering more than three thousand. In order to transport these terracotta figurines out smoothly, the local cultural relics department specially built a pulley cart on the edge of the cliff.

In addition to the terracotta figurines and animal burial pits, a large number of bronze weapons were found in a side chamber, which also contained many iron artifacts and steel artifacts.

This discovery is extremely important, demonstrating that the forging technology in the Han Dynasty was already very advanced. These major discoveries have kept Professor Meng beaming with joy these past two days.

On the third day, more than 20 experts and scholars from Peking University and the State Administration of Cultural Heritage arrived, which temporarily relieved the shortage of manpower. Professor Meng also planned to solve the Huangchang Ticu puzzle the next day.

...

"Fourth brother, can you stop acting like you're about to die? I haven't even said anything to you yet, but if Zhuang Rui sees you like that, he'll definitely slap you across the face..."

Sitting in Zhuang Rui's manor on the outskirts of the city, Bi Yuntao looked ashen-faced. Even when he saw King Kong, he showed no reaction and seemed to have lost all fear.

"Little one...why didn't you call? Are you angry with me?"

Upon hearing Wei Ge mention Zhuang Rui, Bi Yuntao raised his head, a hint of life returning to his eyes. He had really messed up this time; if Zhuang Rui and the boss hadn't pulled him up, he probably would have been sunk to the bottom of the Pearl River by now.

"Nonsense, don't other people need to work? Why would they come here just to serve you?"

Wei Ge was so angry he wanted to slap Lao Si. Ever since he brought this guy back from Macau the day before yesterday, he'd been like this. He'd eat and drink whatever was offered, but his face looked like his mother had died, without a single smile.

Yesterday, the second brother came to visit him at the village. This guy just buried his head in his crotch like an ostrich and didn't say a word until the second brother left. Wei Ge suspected that the kid had been knocked stupid.

"Brother Wei, I'm doomed. My family doesn't know about this yet, but if they find out, I'll..."

The fourth brother's face twitched. He couldn't imagine how his parents, grandparents, and other relatives would react if they found out. And his uncles and elders would definitely want to eat him.

"Wait, what... what did you say? Fourth brother, your family doesn't know about this yet?"

Before Lao Si could finish speaking, Wei Ge interrupted him with an incredulous expression. More than 200 million yuan had been embezzled, and nobody knew? What kind of company is this?

"I didn't know. I was using the family's reserves, which are kept in Switzerland. Normally, these funds aren't used unless there's an emergency, but..."

The fourth brother didn't dare to think any further. He didn't know if he had lost his mind at the time, just gambling away hand after hand. Now that he thought about it, it was clearly a trap set by that guy called Brother Hui.

Lao Si met Hui Ge in Guangzhou. At the time, he felt that Hui Ge was very generous and spent money like water, which suited Lao Si's taste. So when he invited Hui Ge to go to Macau, Lao Si readily agreed.

The first time he went to Macau, Hui gave Lao Si 100,000 yuan in chips. Lao Si actually won 3 million yuan in one night with these 100,000 yuan. This made Lao Si feel unreal, as if those chips were not money and could be bet on at will.

Every gambler has this mentality: once money has been converted into chips, it seems like it's no longer money. If you were given a million dollars in cash to throw on the table, many people would probably stop gambling.

However, a million chips is a psychological barrier that is easy to overcome. No one knows how many Lao Si has thrown onto the gambling table recently.

Looking back now, the fourth brother himself finds it somewhat unbelievable. Several hundred million yuan, converted into 100-yuan bills, could fill a house, and it just slipped through his fingers so easily. However, at that time, his mind seemed to be under a spell, and he was no longer very clear-headed.

"Don't look so gloomy. When the youngest brother comes back, let's ask him what he thinks. Fourth brother, this more than 100 million was all covered by the youngest brother..."

Wei Ge looked at Lao Si and shook his head. If he wasn't afraid that Lao Si would try to kill himself, he would be at home with his wife and son right now, instead of facing this bitter face.

The fourth brother hung his head and said in a muffled voice, "I can't pay it back. When the youngest brother comes back, I'll lend him another million..."

"You still want to win back your losses? Damn it, I'm furious!"

Upon hearing Lao Si's words, Wei Ge immediately stood up. Everyone says that men in Zhonghai have good tempers, but that's because they haven't encountered any troublemakers. When he saw someone like Lao Si, Wei Ge felt the urge to hit him.

"No, I need to hire someone to take care of the person who framed me, otherwise I won't be at peace even if I die!"

A fierce glint appeared in Lao Si's lifeless eyes. Chaoshan people have always been known for their fighting spirit and daring. Lao Si had reached a dead end and had no way out. He only wanted to take Hui Ge down with him.

Chapter 899 Opening the Coffin

"Hey, fourth brother, don't do anything reckless. We brothers should discuss things together. Don't do anything stupid..."

Wei Ge was startled by Lao Si's fierce appearance. He knew from their school days that while Lao Si was loyal to his brothers, he was also ruthless and a man of his word.

Having suffered such a huge loss, not to mention Lao Si, even Wei Ge himself felt like biting the person who set the trap. Give him a knife, and he would definitely stab him without hesitation.

"Brother Wei, thank you so much this time. I know what to do. I have no regrets about knowing you guys in this life. I've caused you enough trouble already..."

"Brother Wei, if you want to help me, give me a million, and I'll handle the rest..."

Tears welled up in the fourth brother's eyes, and he quickly lowered his head so that Yang Wei wouldn't see them.

These days, everyone is obsessed with money. The eldest brother was willing to travel thousands of miles to pick him up, and the youngest brother was willing to take out more than 100 million to protect him. Bi Yuntao felt a mix of emotions, a bittersweet feeling welling up in his heart.

"Bullshit, I'd rather pay you to clean up my own mess than give it to you, kid. Do you think we're capable of doing those kinds of things?"

Yang Wei's eyes widened immediately. This kid's intention to hire someone to kill him hadn't been abandoned yet. It seemed he had to keep an eye on him, otherwise, given Lao Si's personality, he might sneak back to Guangdong to raise money. Speaking of which, his family doesn't know about the embezzlement. 1 million yuan really isn't a large sum.

After hearing Yang Wei's words, Lao Si lowered his head, but his eyes still gleamed with a fierce light. He blamed himself for not being able to resist the temptation, but he hated Hui Ge, who had set him up, even more.

"Fourth brother, let's wait until the youngest brother arrives. Don't get into that mess around. If we run out of money, we can start over. I don't have a lot on hand, but I can still come up with twenty or thirty million..."

Yang Wei tried to persuade Lao Si a few more times, but knowing his brother was a bit stubborn, he immediately took out his phone and dialed Zhuang Rui.

To be honest, Wei Ge also had some resentment towards Zhuang Rui. He just abandoned the fourth brother here and didn't care about him anymore. In the past two days, he even turned off his phone, as if he had disappeared.

At some point, the roles of the five brothers had gradually changed. Zhuang Rui, who was once under the protection of his brothers, had now become the backbone of them.

It seems that the saying "economic strength determines family status" can also be applied to "economic strength determines social status." Although the five brothers still have a good relationship and Zhuang Rui has never said that he looks down on others, changes are still happening quietly.

Leaving aside Viagra, even the second brother in Beijing and the third brother in Shaanxi would call Zhuang Rui to ask for his opinion on anything. However, the fourth brother had relatively less contact with Zhuang Rui.

"Damn, it's just digging up graves, what's the big deal about the phone call..."

No need to ask, the call still didn't go through. Wei Ge was so angry that he almost smashed his phone. Looking at Lao Si, whose chin was drooping to his chest, Wei Ge sighed. It seemed that he would have to be a babysitter for a few more days.

...

Zhuang Rui deliberately didn't answer the phone. He wanted Lao Si to calm down and think about the absurd things he had done. As a brother, he could help once, but he couldn't help forever.

As the saying goes, "Help in an emergency, but not in poverty." A small favor is appreciated, but a large one breeds resentment. If Lao Si still doesn't repent, then Zhuang Rui can only pretend he doesn't have this brother.

Besides, these past few days have been the busiest time. Reinforcements from Beijing have arrived, and as the first group to enter the ancient tomb, they have a lot of work to do. Just labeling the tens of thousands of unearthed artifacts is enough to make one dizzy.

After emerging from the tent, Zhuang Rui stretched his body and walked towards the crowd. It just so happened that the villagers had come to deliver breakfast, and they were all gathered there drinking porridge.

Zhuang Rui has been staying on the mountain for the past few days. Later arrivals brought many tents, and due to the large number of people, the mountaintop has practically become a campsite. An additional squadron of armed police guarding the ancient tomb has also been deployed, maintaining control at various points along the foot of the mountain.

As for the food for these people, Old Zhang's family alone could not solve the problem. The local government mobilized nearby villages. Since the weather had become hot, the villagers delivered meals in two shifts every day. Breakfast and lunch were combined, while dinner was delivered separately.

Seeing Zhuang Rui approach, Professor Meng handed him a steamed bun and said, "Xiao Zhuang, what's wrong? You've seemed a bit distracted these past few days."

Professor Meng placed great emphasis on training his students. During the excavation of the ancient tomb, he gave Zhuang Rui as much hands-on experience as possible, and Professor Meng would answer any questions Zhuang Rui had.

Professor Meng was somewhat surprised by Zhuang Rui's physical strength. He was simply the best candidate for field archaeological excavation. Therefore, he paid more attention to Zhuang Rui and even noticed some of the details of Zhuang Rui's expression.

"Teacher, something came up at home, and I'd like to go back after the Yellow Intestine Tablets are opened..."

After hearing Professor Meng's words, Zhuang Rui simply asked for leave. Although he intended to leave Lao Si aside and let him calm down, Zhuang Rui was still worried.

It will be impossible to see the full picture of this large tomb without several months of excavation, and the matter of the fourth brother cannot be delayed for too long. Zhuang Rui also knows Bi Yuntao very well; he is definitely someone who is prone to extremes.

"Oh? Is your matter important? Xiao Zhuang, such well-preserved large tombs are extremely rare; you might not have another chance like this..."

Professor Meng was taken aback upon hearing this. For him, even an earthquake at home would probably not be as attractive as this large tomb.

"That matter can probably only be resolved if I go there, teacher. I'll try to finish it quickly and come back..."

Zhuang Rui was also curious about the identity of the tomb's occupant. Looking back over China's five thousand years of history, it seems that only the legendary Mausoleum of the First Qin Emperor and the tomb of Genghis Khan can compare with the occupant of this tomb.

"Alright, let's go open the Huangchang Ticou in a bit. We should be done by the afternoon. You can go home tonight..."

Professor Meng also knew that Zhuang Rui had many businesses and could not settle down to do academic research like they could, so he did not force him.

After breakfast, the group of more than twenty people began to descend into the ancient tomb in batches. Those who came later used pulleys to make hanging baskets, so they didn't have to climb down one by one.

Although some suggested excavating from the mountainside to uncover the ancient tomb, Professor Meng rejected this suggestion, wanting to preserve the tomb's original appearance as much as possible.

Even if this tomb is converted into a museum in the future, a cable car can be built down the mountainside so that future generations can more truly understand the wisdom of their ancestors and unveil the mystery of ancient tombs.

Almost all movable objects inside the tomb were moved out, including the two damaged tomb doors, which were then repaired. Perhaps these items will be restored when the tomb is opened to the public in the future.

Next to the burial chamber with the Huangchangticou (a type of ancient Chinese tomb structure), four side chambers have been excavated, yielding a large number of precious cultural relics. However, according to Professor Meng's estimate, there are at least nine side chambers, which would subtly reflect the imperial status of the emperor.

"Everyone be careful. First, set up the ladder and remove the top wooden strips. Then, starting from the top, untangle this 'yellow intestine' layer by layer..."

Upon entering the tomb chamber, Professor Meng began assigning tasks. Because there were so many cypress wood pieces forming the "Huangchang Ticou" (a type of wooden structure), they had to be removed layer by layer. If the bottom pieces were removed first, the entire wooden structure might collapse.

This project is quite massive, after all, the "Huangchang Ticou" occupies nearly half of the entire tomb chamber. Professor Meng estimated that the amount of yellow cypress wood here probably exceeds that of the "Huangchang Ticou" at Dabaotai in the capital.

After the tasks were divided, the group set up ladders around the coffin. The younger people climbed up and, wearing gloves, began to pass down the yellow cypress strips stacked on top of it, one by one.

Although the tomb had been open for several days, the faint fragrance of cypress wood still lingered in the tomb chamber. Zhuang Rui pulled one down from the top and examined it carefully.

This piece of yellowish cypress wood is about one meter long and ten centimeters wide on each side. Although the moisture in the wood has long since evaporated, the grain is still clear, and when you bring it close to your nose, the faint fragrance is refreshing.

How many pieces of yellow cypress wood are there in total?

One by one, the cypress logs were removed and piled up in a corner of the tomb. Someone was specifically tasked with counting the number of cypress logs. After a whole morning, all the cypress logs outside were finally removed.

The statistician, beaming with excitement, shouted, "Professor Meng, there are a total of 21,680 pieces! This far exceeds the scale of the Huangchangticou (a type of ancient Chinese zither) at Dabaotai in Beijing..."

It is worth noting that the Han Dynasty tomb with the most cypress wood unearthed in China is the Dabaotai Han Dynasty tomb in Beijing. To date, no other Han Dynasty tomb has surpassed the scale of that tomb. Therefore, the staff present were all excited about this discovery.

It can be said that the discovery of this Han tomb will rewrite many conclusions of scientific research on Han tombs and will greatly promote further research on Han Dynasty tombs.

"Alright, everyone take a break, let's prepare to open the coffin..."

For a tomb, the coffin is undoubtedly the most important part, because the identity of the tomb's occupant is often revealed inside the coffin.

This is a huge coffin that is nearly 2 meters high and more than 3 meters long. The coffin is made of wood and is carved with many patterns, especially the dragon and phoenix carvings at the head of the coffin, surrounded by clouds and mist, making it look like a fairyland.

Whether it was the protective structure of the outer coffin that worked, this huge coffin was completely undamaged. Both its color and the wood were as good as new, as if it had just been placed there recently.

#### Chapter 900 Copper Coffin Within a Coffin

Judging from where Zhuang Rui was standing, the wood used for the coffin showed no signs of splicing, as if it were made from a single piece of wood. Zhuang Rui couldn't imagine how big a cypress tree it must have been.

The coffin lid and coffin fit together perfectly; someone even tried to slip a piece of paper inside—it was so tight there were almost no gaps.

"This... is a bit difficult..."

Professor Meng circled the coffin several times, his brows furrowed. He had initially thought the coffin was made of mortise and tenon joints, but upon closer inspection, he discovered that there wasn't a single tenon nail on it, which Professor Meng found somewhat unbelievable.

In general, the protruding part of ancient wooden furniture is called a tenon, and the recessed part is called a mortise. This form represents a very high level of craftsmanship in traditional Chinese furniture, and coffins are no exception. However, this huge coffin seems to be a little different.

"Teacher, it looks like they made a hole and poured molten copper in..."

Zhuang Rui used his spiritual energy to observe the outer structure of the coffin and found that in eight places, the structure was completely different from that of the wood. After gently wiping one place with sandpaper, he found that the substance in the hole, which was about two centimeters in diameter, was completely different from the material of the coffin itself.

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Professor Meng walked over, took a small knife, scraped off a layer of substance from the coffin, and after careful examination, said, "That's right, it's molten copper poured in. It's unlikely to be opened from the mortise and tenon joints..."

This makes the coffin more airtight, but it also increases the difficulty of opening the coffin. It is almost impossible to open the coffin lid intact.

Professor Meng circled the coffin for a long time without finding a good solution. In the end, he had no choice but to have people make notches in different parts of the coffin so that they could be used to open it with a crowbar.

"Xiao Liu, you stay at the back, and two more people on the side. Zhuang Rui, you go to the front. Okay, everyone get the crowbars, be careful, don't use too much force, let's pry up the coffin lid together..."

Professor Meng directed the group to insert the crowbar into the gap chiseled open in the coffin lid. At his command, everyone pulled together, and the massive coffin emitted a grating "crackling" sound.

"Get up, get up..."

"Press a little harder, and you'll pry it open..."

"Everyone, stand back a bit, be careful, there might be traps inside..."

Shouts echoed throughout the tomb. Such a large coffin might contain deadly traps and hidden weapons. Professor Meng loudly reminded everyone to be careful.

Getting injured in these ancient tombs would be an extremely unpleasant experience, because after being sealed underground for thousands of years, many substances and bacteria would deteriorate, and once infected, it would be very difficult to cure even with modern medical methods.

Fortunately, after the heavy cypress coffin lid was opened, there seemed to be no movement inside. At the rear of the coffin, two people used iron hooks to pull the lid down.

The coffin, with its lid removed and a heavy base, is over 1.8 meters tall. The interior is not directly visible, but people with ladders nearby have already climbed up to look inside.

"There's also a coffin..."

"Professor Meng, there's also a bronze coffin..."

"Damn it, whose grave is this? It's so complicated!"

Those who saw the scene inside the coffin exclaimed in surprise. Inside the cypress coffin was a bronze coffin. Under the light, the bronze coffin lid revealed several simple stripes, making it appear even more mysterious.

"That's not right. Huangchangticou (a type of traditional Chinese burial chamber) usually uses cypress coffins, so why is there a bronze coffin here?"

Professor Meng also climbed the ladder and took a closer look. His brows were furrowed, clearly unable to figure out the crux of the matter.

It's important to understand that the ancients viewed death as an ascension to heaven, a continuation of life in another world in a different form. Therefore, after death, they prepared elaborate coffins and elaborate burials, hoping to take these things with them to the afterlife.

Because the human body belongs to the element of wood in the Five Elements theory, the ancients were very particular about the choice of coffins and believed that if a person was buried in an iron coffin, their soul would not be able to enter the cycle of reincarnation.

Therefore, the use of bronze coffins, which belong to the metal element in the Five Elements theory, is extremely rare in history.

"Prepare the pulleys to open this bronze coffin..."

After observing for a long time, Professor Meng made a decision: only by opening the coffin could these secrets be revealed and the identity of the tomb's occupant be known.

Due to limited resources, the group used two alloy ladders placed on either side, reinforced the ladders with pulleys, and lowered ropes down from both sides of the bronze coffin. Fortunately, the bottom of the bronze coffin did not fit the cypress coffin perfectly, which allowed the two ropes to be successfully tied to the bronze coffin.

"One, two, three... push!"

If outsiders saw this scene, it would be hard to imagine that these people, who are usually well-dressed scholars, were now like laborers, pulling ropes and using pulleys to lift the bronze coffin, which weighed at least several hundred kilograms, from the cypress coffin.

When the bronze coffin was taller than the cypress coffin, people below carefully moved the ladder and slowly moved the coffin to the open space. This task alone took almost two hours.

"I wonder what's inside?"

"Yes, a coffin within a coffin, the burial goods must have been very abundant..."

"It seems like there's water inside? When I lifted it up just now, I felt like there was water sloshing around inside..."

"Impossible. This tomb is at least two thousand years old; any moisture would have evaporated by now..."

Despite the exhaustion, everyone was excited to have successfully retrieved the coffin. For archaeologists, uncovering one secret after another hidden in the long river of history is undoubtedly the most exhilarating thing.

"Let's rest for a bit, then prepare to open the coffin..."

Professor Meng was also beaming with joy. He had been busy in this place for a week and was finally about to reveal the identity of the tomb owner. While telling everyone to rest, he himself kept circling around the bronze coffin, observing how to open it.

Zhuang Rui sat to the side, looking at the bronze coffin, his brows furrowed. Although he could sense that the coffin contained a large number of antiques, it was indeed, as one of the researchers had just said, that there was some shoddy workmanship inside.

However, Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy can only detect the type of an object through the spiritual energy contained within the object itself. Therefore, he doesn't know what that water, which has no spiritual energy, is. All of this may only be known after the coffin is opened.

Perhaps due to the existence of sufficient anti-theft measures, the bronze coffin was opened very smoothly. After the four latches on both sides, which had remained intact for thousands of years, were pulled up, the bronze coffin could be lifted up.

Even the coffin lid was quite heavy. Professor Meng selected several strong people to stand at the four corners and work together to lift the coffin lid off the bronze coffin.

"What's this?"

Zhuang Rui was one of the four people who lifted the coffin lid. As he lifted the lid, he turned to look inside the coffin and discovered that about seven or eight centimeters from the edge of the coffin, there seemed to be a layer of watery substance that was gently swaying as the coffin was moved.

However, the water was covered in dust, making it impossible to see what the substance was. The crowd that had been waiting nearby crowded around, pushing Zhuang Rui and the other workers outside.

"Mercury, it's mercury..."

"My God, no wonder it was so heavy, the whole coffin was filled with mercury..."

"Excuse me, let me in..."

Hearing the voices coming from inside, Zhuang Rui squeezed in with all his might. He saw Professor Meng stirring something in the coffin with a wooden stick.

The dust on the surface disappeared completely as the mercury flowed, and under the refraction of the light, the bright mercury shone like a mirror, reflecting endless light.

Zhuang Rui once saw a scientific research report that mentioned mercury residue was found in a ceramic coffin in a Han Dynasty tomb in Shandong. However, the tomb had been looted, so no further clues or information were left.

Mercury, scientifically known as mercury, is recorded in many historical documents. Ancient Taoists used it to refine elixirs in pursuit of longevity. Although mercury can indeed be used medicinally to kill insects, detoxify, and treat diseases such as scabies and malignant sores, it is also extremely harmful to the body.

At least three emperors in history died from mercury poisoning. This emperor also seemed to be a believer in so-called Taoist theories, believing that his body would remain incorruptible if soaked in mercury.

Professor Meng picked up the wooden stick, and a few drops of mercury dripped back into the coffin along the stick. After a moment's thought, Professor Meng said, "There's something in the coffin, definitely the tomb's occupant. However, mercury evaporates quickly upon contact with air, and the gas is also highly toxic. Let's put the coffin lid back on..."

After Zhuang Rui and the others put the coffin lid back on, Professor Meng and several experts discussed it and decided to ask the relevant authorities for some gas masks to scoop out all the mercury.

The work could not continue, and everyone retreated back up the mountain. By the time the gas masks and related equipment arrived, it was already the next morning.

"Xiao Zhuang, be careful later, don't let the mercury get on your skin..."

Only eight people went down into the tomb. Besides Zhuang Rui and Dr. Ren, the others were also experts in the field of archaeology in China.

After opening the coffin lid, Zhuang Rui and Dr. Ren, wearing shoulder-length leather gloves, carefully scooped the mercury from inside the coffin into several buckets. This mercury would later be sent for research and analysis to verify the mercury production process from more than two thousand years ago.

To be honest, after this archaeological excavation, Zhuang Rui has become much bolder. The saying that the environment shapes a person is absolutely true. Before, he would never have dared to do anything so big inside a dead person's coffin.

As ladlefuls of flowing, silvery-white liquid were scooped out of the coffin, the objects inside the bronze coffin gradually came to light.