

## Golden 951

### Chapter 951 Picking the Peaches? (Part Two)

"Three...three hundred million US dollars?"

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Director Dou jumped up as if his pants were on fire. This... wasn't this extortion? How could a single salvage operation possibly cost three hundred million US dollars?

It's worth noting that the total cost of salvaging the Nanhai No. 1 shipwreck in several attempts by China was only slightly over 30 million RMB.

The recent salvage operation of the Nanhai No. 1 shipwreck showed the greatest determination, yet the budget did not exceed 150 million. Okay, even if Zhuang Rui's costs were high, the figure of 300 million US dollars is still a bit ridiculous.

"President Zhuang, I know you've invested a great deal and made significant contributions to this salvage operation, but the impact of this successful deep-sea salvage is immense. Therefore, I hope you can consider sharing this honor with the nation..."

Director Dou gave a wry smile. He had no reason to accuse the other party of extortion. He was the one who made the request first, and the other party had just made up a number without any basis.

However, Director Dou was thick-skinned enough to simply pretend he hadn't heard, and changed the subject to national honor, never mentioning the ownership of the ship again.

"This...isn't this a bit inappropriate? Director Dou, I've already prepared the press release regarding this matter. If I hadn't been so busy yesterday, it would have been released already..."

Moreover, you really didn't put in much effort on this matter. Didn't Chairman Mao teach us to be pragmatic and realistic back then?

Zhuang Rui cursed the old fox in his heart, but he refused to budge, and his words even carried a threatening tone.

Where did he spend 300 million US dollars on this salvage operation? It didn't even cost 300 million RMB. Moreover, the platform and floating crane are not disposable items; they will continue to play a role in future salvage operations.

Zhuang Rui, however, didn't want to let the other party take advantage of him for nothing. He could also see that this Director Dou definitely didn't represent the country; at most, he was representing a leader from a certain department trying to steal the credit.

If it were someone else, they might have to give Director Dou some face, since they still need to make a living in China, right?

But Zhuang Rui was different. He had enough confidence to ignore the other party. Did the Ministry of Transportation have the right to prevent his car from driving on the road in the future?

"Is the press release ready?"

Director Dou was stunned upon hearing this. Regardless of whether Zhuang Rui's words were true or false, he couldn't bear the wrath of his superiors after the news was released. He quickly said, "President Zhuang, Mr. Zhuang, please make your request. This matter... we can discuss it..."

Director Dou was sweating profusely. The salvage operation of the "Nanhai No. 1" shipwreck, which had been the subject of much domestic media hype, had failed for various reasons, already causing the leadership to lose face. If something like Zhuang Rui's incident were to happen, it would be even more impossible to explain to the public.

Director Dou wished he could slap himself twice. Why did he bully Zhuang Rui because he was young? Now he had no way to save face and was completely controlled by others.

"Requirements? I don't have any requirements..."

Zhuang Rui raised an eyebrow and decisively refused Director Dou's offer. He was not short of money. He had already received more than 100 million US dollars from Liu Minghui, which offset the cost of the salvage operation and made him a fortune. What could he possibly ask for?

Moreover, Zhuang Rui had some concerns. If he announced that this was a joint salvage operation with the state, he was afraid that these people would take advantage of the situation and try to take possession of the cultural relics.

It's worth noting that the ceramic and gold and silver artifacts unearthed so far are worth hundreds of millions of RMB, not to mention the well-preserved ancient ship from the Song Dynasty, whose value is immeasurable.

"Mr. Zhuang, please reconsider. We can discuss anything as long as you agree..."

As the saying goes, "He who has no desires is invincible." Zhuang Rui's attitude left Director Dou completely bewildered. He lacked neither money nor power, hadn't committed any illegal acts, and had no weaknesses to be exploited. 0SHUX.COM

So even if Director Dou's superior is just a department head, or even if he's two levels higher, there's nothing he can do about Zhuang Rui. At worst, he can just buy a small island abroad and live the same life.

"There's no need to discuss that. Since Director Dou is here, I can have someone share some of the relevant experience from this salvage operation with you. I believe it will be helpful for the upcoming salvage of the 'Nanhai No. 1' shipwreck..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand, ending the conversation. He really had nothing in common with this bureaucrat. In China, they could control everything, but abroad, whether he paid them any attention depended on his mood.

After Zhuang Rui left, Director Dou picked up the teacup on the table and was about to smash it on the ground, but when he raised his hand halfway, he gave a wry smile and put it down.

Director Dou finally understood that the sense of superiority he had in front of some department leaders or successful businessmen in China was a complete joke in front of Zhuang Rui.

In terms of power, the other person has a central government background; in terms of wealth, the value of that museum alone is staggering. For a mere bureau chief like myself to try to outsmart the other person is simply overestimating my abilities.

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Zhuang Rui didn't take these trivial matters to heart. After a long day of work, he didn't go back to the shipwreck to continue cleaning the artifacts. Instead, he went back to his room, took a shower, and went straight to sleep.

"Who is it? Calling so early in the morning?"

Zhuang Rui was awakened from his sleep by a ringing phone. When he opened his eyes, Qin Xuanbing was no longer in bed, and the phone call was coming from the living room.

"It's Fourth Brother. Zhuang Rui went to bed a little late last night. If there's anything you need, please tell me, and I'll pass it on to him..."

Zhuang Rui has been spending day and night in the monitoring room these past few days, which makes Qin Xuanbing feel sorry for him. When she saw that it was Ouyang Jun calling, she immediately took over the matter. Mainly, Ouyang Jun never has anything important to say when he calls Zhuang Rui.

"Xuanbing, I'm up. Give me the phone..."

Zhuang Rui came out of the room. He hadn't seen Ouyang Jun for a while, so he guessed he had something to discuss with him.

"Why didn't you sleep a little longer..."

Qin Xuanbing glanced at Zhuang Rui, but still handed the phone over.

"It's alright, your husband is in good health. Didn't you get to experience it yesterday?" Zhuang Rui's words made Qin Xuanbing pause, and she walked away with a blush on her face.

After taking the phone, Zhuang Rui sat comfortably on the sofa and said lazily, "Fourth Brother, it's not fair to let someone sleep soundly..."

"You little rascal, not only have you disappeared lately, but you've also managed to steal your wife away?"

Ouyang Jun was very dissatisfied with Zhuang Rui. It was said that this guy was sailing all over the world in a big cruise ship without telling him, and he even took his wife and children with him, leaving his son without any playmates.

"What's wrong, jealous? Come on..."

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this. Of his mother's relatives, he was most familiar with Ouyang Jun. The others were all in the system, and their speech and actions were very formal and rigid, making it far less relaxed than chatting with Ouyang Jun.

"Alright, I'm too busy to go. Oh, by the way, I have something to tell you. Didn't you salvage a Song Dynasty shipwreck? I..."

"Wait, Fourth Brother, who told you this?"

Before Ouyang Jun could finish speaking, Zhuang Rui interrupted him. The sunken ship was only brought to the surface yesterday noon, and Ouyang Jun already knew about it. Could it be that Fourth Brother Ouyang had planted spies on the ship?

"Hey kid, wait until I finish..."

Ouyang Jun said with dissatisfaction that when he was on the phone, few people dared to interrupt him, but this younger brother was unscrupulous and did not treat him, the chairman, as a leader.

“Alright, you say it...” Zhuang Rui laughed. He just loved arguing with Ouyang Jun.

"Here's the thing, your boat was salvaged, and some people wanted to get some benefits, but they heard you refused them, so they came to me..."

"Damn, Fourth Brother, you're getting involved in this too? I spent hundreds of millions to salvage this item, and you think someone can just take it away with a single sentence?"

This time, Ouyang Jun was interrupted by Zhuang Rui before he could finish speaking, which made Ouyang's fourth brother very frustrated. Why is his younger brother getting more and more temperamental as he gets older?

"Let me finish what I have to say, you brat..."

Ouyang Jun was really angry. Although he didn't know how much Zhuang Rui had spent on this salvage operation, even if Zhuang Rui hadn't spent a single penny, he couldn't let others take advantage of him. This was simply judging a gentleman by the standards of a petty person.

"Nobody wants to take your ship. Just adding your name to the salvage company's list is a boost to the country's reputation, isn't it? Besides, helping others with this kind of thing will naturally bring you benefits in the future..."

Fearing that Zhuang Rui would interrupt him again, Ouyang Jun finished speaking in one breath this time. He had received a call from a high-ranking minister early this morning, and it was about this matter.

The person who made the call was someone on par with his father, personally calling to plead for him, which gave Ouyang Jun a lot of face. So, although Ouyang Jun was usually quite arrogant, he still agreed to the request. These days, it's always better to have more friends than more enemies.

"Fourth Brother, I refused this request yesterday, so please don't bring it up again. Why should I, who salvaged this shipwreck all by myself, have several names written on my name? I don't need anything, and I have no one to ask for help from..."

To Ouyang Jun's surprise, Zhuang Rui dared to disrespect him and shut the matter down with a single sentence, which made Chairman Ouyang, who originally thought that a single sentence could solve the problem, somewhat anxious.

He had readily agreed to that person's request. If he couldn't get past Zhuang Rui, Ouyang Jun would lose face in front of outsiders. Besides, he and Zhuang Rui were relatives. If he couldn't get this done, countless people would laugh at him behind his back.

"Hey kid, you think you've got too much influence now? You're not even going to give Fourth Brother face anymore? You have to agree to this..."

Ouyang Jun yelled into the phone, then lowered his voice and said gently, "Fifth Brother, just consider this a favor from your Fourth Brother. When have you ever asked your Fourth Brother to do something for you and I haven't done it well?"

It must have been quite difficult for Ouyang Jun, having to play both the bad cop and the good cop all by himself.

Chapter 952 Picking the Peaches? (Part 3)

"Well, Fourth Brother, what you're saying really makes me feel ashamed..."

Zhuang Rui quickly interrupted Ouyang Jun, saying that he had indeed troubled this man quite a bit, and now that he was asking for his help, he couldn't refuse.

"Fourth Brother, you know perfectly well how difficult those people are to deal with. If I agree to let them participate in the salvage operation, what if they turn their backs on me when we get back to China and devour me whole?"

Zhuang Rui refused outright yesterday and today because he had concerns about this. If the relevant departments changed their minds after he returned to China and these items were handed over to the state, wouldn't Zhuang Rui be the one who got ripped off?

"They dare? Brother, do you think I'm made of clay? Nobody dares to bully our family. That guy just wants to achieve something during his term. There's nothing to worry about. You can make an agreement with them first, that'll do..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Ouyang Jun couldn't help but laugh and cry. This younger brother was truly honest. In China, it was already considered good enough that the Ouyang family members didn't bully others. Even if that high-ranking minister had the guts, he wouldn't dare to do such a thing.

"Sigh, let's not talk about that now, Fourth Brother. There are some things that are really giving me a headache lately. We've salvaged such a huge ship, but there's nowhere to put it..."

Zhuang Rui suddenly changed the subject, leaving Ouyang Jun somewhat confused. He couldn't help but interrupt Zhuang Rui, saying, "What are you up to now? Fourth Brother rarely asks you for a favor, are you really going to put on airs?"

Zhuang Rui quickly denied it, saying, "How could that be, Fourth Brother? I would definitely agree to this for your sake. But Fourth Brother, the swimming pool and fitness area in the residential complex we're developing are right next to the museum, so security won't be easy..."

"You little rascal, you've got your eye on that piece of land, haven't you?"

Upon hearing this, Ouyang Jun immediately understood Zhuang Rui's intentions. He said irritably, "Alright, you've been eyeing that place for more than a day or two. If I don't give it to you now, who knows what kind of trouble you'll cause in the future?"

"But let's get this straight: you can have that land, but you have to build me a gym and swimming pool behind the complex, otherwise the property management will be in big trouble..."

"Definitely, Fourth Brother, don't worry, I'll handle it perfectly for you, I guarantee you'll be satisfied. Alright, Director Dou will be coming to see me again soon, I'll hang up now..."

After hanging up the phone, Zhuang Rui smiled. Trading a hollow title for tangible benefits was still a worthwhile deal, especially since that piece of land was crucial for the development of Zhuang Rui's museum.

Because Zhuang Rui has been constantly adding to the museum's collection over the past few years, the 20,000-square-meter exhibition hall is now a bit stretched thin. Although the Song Dynasty shipwreck has been salvaged, as he said, there really isn't anywhere to put it.

Zhuang Rui had long had his eye on a plot of land next to the museum, but it had been designated as a community fitness area. He had mentioned it to Ouyang Jun several times, but Ouyang Jun hadn't agreed. This time, however, Zhuang Rui got the land for the sake of saving face.

"Damn it, I'm supposed to pay people out of their own pockets when they ask me for favors?"

After hanging up the phone, Ouyang Jun felt uneasy. He glanced outside and shouted, "Wife, take our son to your sister-in-law's for dinner. We'll stay there..."

The big star was puzzled by her husband's apparent intention to bankrupt Zhuang Rui's family. Little did she know that Ouyang Sige was simply unhappy and wanted to make up for it.

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Around noon, Director Dou indeed came again, his attitude even more flattering than yesterday. Zhuang Rui didn't go too far; after signing an agreement, he agreed to add the name of a certain domestic ministry to the salvage company's records.

The agreement states that a certain ministry was a key member of the salvage operation and provided strong support during the exploration and salvage of the sunken ship. However, since Zhuang Rui was the one who discovered the sunken ship, the ship still belongs to Zhuang Rui personally.

With this agreement in place, Zhuang Rui was no longer worried about any tricks the other party might play. Moreover, when negotiating with Director Dou, the other party was very cooperative and offered

to help Zhuang Rui obtain the necessary qualifications for a domestic underwater salvage company. With this qualification, he would be able to salvage sunken ships in Chinese waters.

Although according to domestic salvage laws, items salvaged from domestic rivers or seas belong to the state, there are still many loopholes. By manipulating the declaration process, those items may still become private property.

In this way, everyone is happy. Director Dou got the honor he wanted and completed the task assigned by his superiors, while Zhuang Rui did not lose out either. He only added a few words to his name and gained so many benefits. It can be considered a win-win situation.

Although Zhuang Rui still felt a little resistant to this kind of behavior of using public resources to curry favor, that's just how things are in China. If it weren't for his powerful connections, he probably would have been the one to reap the benefits this time.

The intense work of cleaning the shipwreck quickly made Zhuang Rui forget about the matter. With tens of thousands of shipwreck artifacts to be sorted by only a dozen people, the workload was enormous.

Even though Zhuang Rui worked more than 18 hours a day, it still took him almost a week to clean up all the cultural relics and organize them into their respective rooms.

After examination by domestic shipbuilding experts, ceramics experts, and history experts, they unanimously agreed that this Song Dynasty shipwreck is the oldest, largest, and best-preserved ocean-going merchant ship discovered in the world to date.

After careful cleaning, a total of 82,388 artifacts were recovered from the ship's hold, including more than 51,000 gold and silver items, which can be divided into 30 categories. The gold and silver items are mainly divided into bracelets, earrings, small pink boxes, etc.

There are also some bronze artifacts, such as copper coins, bronze mirrors, and bronze beads. Most of the bronze artifacts are copper coins, and the vast majority are from the Northern Song Dynasty, with a small number of Kaiyuan Tongbao coins from the Tang Dynasty. These items are not of great value, and Zhuang Rui left them for experts to study.

However, among the gold and silver artifacts, there was one that Zhuang Rui absolutely adored: a gilded dragon-patterned bracelet. The bracelet was made of pure silver and gilded, and the entire bracelet was shaped like a dragon, making it exceptionally exquisite.

Zhuang Rui immediately kept this thing for himself upon seeing it, putting it on his son's wrist and bringing it home.

In addition, the most numerous cultural relics recovered were ceramics, totaling more than 30,000 pieces. They were diverse, including white porcelain, celadon, bluish-white porcelain, as well as brown-glazed and green-glazed porcelain. Almost all folk porcelain from the Tang and Song dynasties could be found among them.

This delighted Professor Tian, who insisted on having Zhuang Rui select more than twenty complete sets of porcelain, intending to take them back to the Palace Museum to study and compare the differences between these export porcelains and the official kilns of the time.

Not only Professor Tian, but all the experts who participated in the later stages of the shipwreck cleanup work also gained a lot. According to Professor Meng, the shipwreck and the artifacts recovered confirmed the existence of the Maritime Silk Road more than a thousand years ago.

Like the land-based Silk Road, the maritime Silk Road was also a trade route between China and foreign countries. However, the latter, which was formed in the early Western Han Dynasty, was used throughout the entire ancient Chinese society. In the more than 2,000 years of Sino-foreign trade history, China's main exports were sometimes silk, sometimes porcelain, or other goods.

Foreign trade goods were even more diverse, so some scholars also called it the Porcelain Road, or the Leather Road, or the Silk Road, etc. Since the Silk Road has been a common name, it is simply called the Maritime Silk Road.

However, due to the imperfections in China's deep-sea salvage technology, there have not been many physical objects to prove this point. These artifacts recovered from the water provide a very complete set of physical historical materials for the study of the Maritime Silk Road, and they contain a wealth of archaeological and historical information.

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More than a week later, Zhuang Rui's "Xuan Rui" had returned to port, but instead of going back to Macau, it docked directly at Tianjin Port, which is very close to Beijing. This made it much easier for Zhuang Rui to move the cultural relics that had sunk on the ship.

Of course, the ministry that belatedly realized the situation but gained considerable advantage by managing to dock the ship here without discovering the weapons hidden on board deserves great credit.

The news that a certain ministry and a well-known private museum in China had jointly salvaged an ancient shipwreck that was thousands of years old was now filling the major newspapers across the country. Since they wanted to show off their achievements, they naturally had to publicize it vigorously.

One by one, precious unearthed cultural relics were photographed and appeared in major newspapers and television reports, creating a marine archaeology craze among the public, which also led to a significant increase in the price of salvaged porcelain at auctions.

Some old friends, like Mr. Qian, even called Zhuang Rui directly, wanting to get some auction items from him. However, Zhuang Rui had no intention of selling these things and politely declined them one by one.

Although this series of reports uses the name of Dingguang Museum, those old friends know the real story: Zhuang Rui's name has once again resounded throughout the entire antique industry.

For a time, the cruise ship docked at Tianjin Port was crowded with reporters from home and abroad, which annoyed Zhuang Rui to no end. He simply left Huangfuyun to receive them and took a whole truckload of cultural relics back to Beijing.

As for the sunken ship, it has been lifted off the cruise ship and is now placed in a warehouse in the port.

Due to the limitations of the exhibition hall, the shipwreck can only be transported back to Beijing after the ancient shipbuilding hall in the Zhuang Rui Ding Guang Museum is completed. Otherwise, there really wouldn't be anywhere to put this massive vessel, which is over 30 meters long.

However, Zhuang Rui had just returned to Beijing and hadn't even had a chance to catch his breath when he was stopped by Gu Yun and Hu Rong, who had been looking for him for several days.

#### Chapter 953 Accountability

"Hey, Brother Hu, Brother Gu, what brings you two together for tea?"

Zhuang Rui heard from his mother that Hu Rong had been staying at the courtyard house for two days, and Gu Yun had been coming over every day to see if Zhuang Rui had returned. When he got home today, he found the two brothers drinking tea and chatting under the big locust tree in their courtyard house.

Zhuang Rui hadn't seen Hu Rong for over a year, but Hu Rong's reputation as a jade designer was growing internationally. Moreover, the jade mine he developed a couple of years ago was a rare and rich mine in Myanmar, making him one of Myanmar's leading mining tycoons.

Furthermore, Hu Rong's jewelry design company has opened dozens of stores in Southeast Asia, and its reputation abroad is even greater than that of Zhuang Rui, the "Jade King" of the North. At this moment, Hu Rong sat there, exuding the demeanor of a master, and his expression was more composed than it had been two years ago.

With Zhuang Rui's help, Gu Yun undertook many state-owned and private museum restoration projects, and his company quickly became a leading enterprise in the restoration of ancient buildings in China, far from the small company that did odd jobs back then.

These two brothers are not idle people. One is in charge of the Hu Clan Chinese City in Myanmar, and the other is a big boss of a company. It's no wonder that Zhuang Rui is surprised that they've come together today.

Upon seeing Zhuang Rui, Gu Yun's boss-like demeanor vanished. He stood up, grabbed Zhuang Rui, and said anxiously, "Brother Zhuang, you're too busy! I've been looking for you for a week, and no one answers the phone. If I can't find you soon, I'm going to be in trouble..."

"Brother Gu, don't worry, what's wrong? Is the old man unwell?"

Upon hearing Gu Yun's words, Zhuang Rui was taken aback. Since retiring, the old man's health and energy had declined. After the old man turned seventy, he might pass away at any time. Even if Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy was excellent, he couldn't compete with Yama, the King of Hell, for a life.

Thinking of this, Zhuang Rui became extremely anxious. He grabbed Gu Yun and asked loudly, "Brother Gu, what...what happened to Grandpa?"

Throughout Zhuang Rui's growth, there are two people he is most grateful to: Uncle De from Zhonghai and Grandpa Gu. Both of them treated him like a son or nephew, teaching him knowledge about antiques and jade without reservation.

"Hey, hey, take it easy, you're hurting me to death! What could be wrong with my dad? He just misses you, right? Hey, are you cursing the old man?"

Zhuang Rui lost his father at a young age, and in his heart, these two elders were like fathers to him. At this moment, he was really anxious and grabbed Gu Yun's hand tightly, causing the guy to cry out in pain.

"Damn, why didn't you say so earlier? You scared me half to death..."

After hearing Gu Yun's words, Zhuang Rui released his grip. Gu Yun quickly looked at his wrist and saw several finger marks left by Zhuang Rui, showing how much force Zhuang Rui had used.

"I didn't say anything..." Gu Yun looked at the unexpected injury on her wrist, and with a wry smile, brought up the previous topic: "What have you been doing lately? Why can't I get through to you on the phone?"

"I've been at sea for the past few days, salvaging a shipwreck. I just finished up and came back..."

Because Zhuang Rui has been engrossed in cleaning up the shipwreck artifacts for the past few days, he has basically not returned to his room on the ship to sleep, and his phone has been switched off, so no one can find Zhuang Rui during this period.

After Zhuang Rui finished speaking, he turned to Hu Rong and said, "Brother Hu, please consider yourself at home here. If things aren't too urgent, how about we talk tonight?"

Old Master Gu had been holding his son and waiting for him for two days in a row, and Zhuang Rui felt a little embarrassed. Since getting married, he had spent much less time visiting Old Master Gu than before. He planned to take his two beloved children to visit Old Master Gu now.

"I've long admired the old man, Zhuang Rui. Let's go visit Mr. Gu together..."

Hu Rong's matter wasn't urgent, but hearing Zhuang Rui mention going to Gu Tianfeng's place immediately sparked the idea of paying him a visit.

Hu Rong is an expert in jade jewelry design and also has considerable experience in jade carving. Of course, he wouldn't miss the opportunity to meet the jade carving masters known as "Nan Wu Bei Gu" in China.

"Alright, let's go together then. Please wait for me a moment..."

Zhuang Rui nodded, went to his mother's room to call out, and then found Fang Fang and Yuan Yuan, who were happily playing with the white lion in the backyard. After thinking for a moment, he went down alone to his treasure room, where there were not many items left.

Zhuang Rui thought that the old man was lonely and wanted to find him some material to play with. Once the old man is completely idle, all sorts of ailments will appear. It's better for him to have something to do, which will actually be good for his health.

Which piece of material should we use?

Because of the fundraising efforts some time ago, a lot of Zhuang Rui's treasured jadeite was sold off, so now, apart from the gold bricks, there are not many jadeite pieces left in the basement. There are only four pieces in total, each of which is a rare and precious item.

Two fist-sized pieces of imperial green jadeite, one piece of top-quality blue jadeite with glassy texture, and the other piece of yellow jadeite with a yellow luster like chicken fat.

Although they have not yet been polished, these pieces of raw material, which Zhuang Rui has already cut out, show different colors under the light and emit a shimmering glow.

If these pieces of jade were to appear in the jade trade, they would definitely cause a huge uproar, perhaps even more so than the sensation caused by Zhuang Rui's successful salvage of the Song Dynasty shipwreck in the antique world.

"Alright, you're the one..." After looking it over for a while, Zhuang Rui finally made a decision and held the top-quality yellow jade in his hands.

Imperial green and blue jade are relatively easy to work with; they can be made into necklaces or bracelets. However, Zhuang Rui hadn't decided what to carve this piece of yellow jade into. Now, he doesn't need to worry about it anymore; he can just let the old man figure it out.

"Zhuang Rui, what are you carrying?"

When Gu Yun and Hu Rong saw that Zhuang Rui had brought his wife and children with him, and was also carrying an object wrapped in cloth, they were both a little surprised.

"Hehe, you'll see later, this is for the old man's medical treatment..."

Zhuang Rui laughed, but refused to reveal the item. He carefully hid it under his driver's seat, causing the two men to shake their heads. Hu Rong, however, guessed something: Zhuang Rui was probably holding a piece of jade.

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Several people drove two cars and parked them in the alley where the old man lived in his courtyard. They then rushed into the old man's courtyard.

"Senior Uncle, I've come to see you. You're getting stronger and stronger! I think you should go back to the association and serve another term as president..."

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the courtyard, he saw the old man pruning the flowers and plants. Although it was the hottest day in August, the courtyard was cooler than Zhuang Rui's own courtyard house.

"You brat, it's been half a year since you last came here, hasn't it? And you start joking around with this old man as soon as we meet?"

When the old man saw Zhuang Rui, his expression was not very good. However, when he saw the two little ones walking unsteadily behind him, he immediately smiled, put down the scissors, and picked up the two babies, one in each hand.

Although the two little ones couldn't utter a complete sentence yet, they were very sweet-talking, calling the old man "Grandpa" repeatedly, which made the old man's face full of smiles, and deep lines appeared between his brows.

"He's biased, so biased! I've never seen anyone dote on their grandson like that..."

Gu Yun muttered under his breath, which made Zhuang Rui look at him with disdain and say, "Your son is almost in junior high school, can the old man still carry him?"

"Alright, Fangfang and Yuanyuan, go play with your mom, don't tire Grandpa out..."

Seeing that the old man looked even older than before, Zhuang Rui secretly blamed himself. If he had helped the old man with his body more often, he would never have looked like this.

After the old man put Fang Fang and Yuan Yuan down, Zhuang Rui introduced him to Hu Rong. Upon hearing that Hu Rong was a colleague from Myanmar, the old man was in high spirits and waved his hand, saying, "Xiao Yun, go and prepare some good dishes with your wife. I want to have a good drink with Xiao Hu tonight..."

When Zhuang Rui heard that the old man didn't mention him, he knew that the old man was still angry with him, so he immediately smiled ingratiatingly and said, "Hehe, Uncle-Master, don't worry about me..."

"You brat, you still remember your senior uncle? Alright, let's all go inside and talk..."

Old Gu glanced at Zhuang Rui, but not wanting to neglect Hu Rong in the courtyard, he let Zhuang Rui off the hook. Only Gu Yun stood in the courtyard feeling rather aggrieved. Why was he destined to serve people and run errands?

"Uncle-Master, I've been overseas for a while now, and as soon as I got back, I came to see you..."

As soon as Zhuang Rui entered the room, he consciously started boiling water and laid out the tea set he had given to the old man. The old man was getting on in years, so he needed to be coaxed a bit; as the saying goes, an old man is like a child.

"Zhuang Rui, your senior uncle isn't angry with you, but these past two years you've been involved in museums and overseas Taobao shopping. Although you've been doing all the right things, let me ask you, how much of your duties as a director of the Jade Association have you actually fulfilled?"

Seeing Zhuang Rui's obedient appearance, the old man couldn't stay angry. He paused for a moment and then said, "I have always been fond of jade carving and appreciation. The carving skills have been passed down to someone, but no one has truly mastered my appreciation skills. Only you have some talent, but look at you these past two years, have you even touched jade?"

As Gu Tianfeng spoke, he became a little agitated. Only then did Zhuang Rui understand that the old man was blaming him for not doing his job properly.

Thinking about it, the old man was right. Zhuang Rui made his fortune in jade, but in recent years, he has been doing things that are getting further and further away from the jade business. No wonder the old man was angry.

"Senior Uncle, I was wrong about this. I will pay more attention to the work of the Jade Association in the future..."

Zhuang Rui did feel somewhat guilty. You see, it was Old Master Gu who pushed through all opposition to let Zhuang Rui join the Jade Association.

#### Chapter 954 Pretending to be Confused When You Know the Truth

To be honest, Zhuang Rui felt quite ashamed. He had been a member of the Jade Association for several years, but as a director, his understanding of the association was limited to which way the main gate opened—that was only when he went to pick up an appraisal certificate. He had never attended a single one of the annual meetings.

However, Zhuang Rui has received a lot of benefits from the association. Not to mention the time he used the jade association to participate in the Myanmar jade auction, the appraisal certificates for the jade ornaments in the "Qin Ruilin" shop were basically obtained from the association for free.

Although Zhuang Rui did not fraudulently claim or fill out the forms incorrectly, as a director of the association, he saved a lot of trouble and money every year. If it were someone without connections, even if they wanted to spend money, it would not be an easy thing to obtain these certificates.

Zhuang Rui enjoys the benefits of the Jade Association every year, but he has not fulfilled his obligations. Although Zhuang Rui's reputation in the antique industry has been growing in the past two years, some people in the Jade Association have started to gossip.

Especially since Zhuang Rui made a move in Myanmar more than two years ago, almost everything he has done has been unrelated to jade, which has led many people to question Zhuang Rui's abilities and, consequently, his status as a council member.

"Senior Uncle, I was wrong about this. I will definitely participate in more association activities in the future..."

Zhuang Rui knew that Grandpa Gu had taken a lot of gossip for him. The old man valued his reputation the most. He had introduced himself into the association, and because of him, others had questioned him. Of course, the old man was not in a good mood.

"It's not about asking you to participate in association activities, but rather to pay more attention to the jade industry. A few years ago, you made a name for yourself through gambling on jade stones, but what about the last two years? We haven't heard of you appraising a single piece of jade. No wonder people are gossiping..."

The old man sighed. He had high expectations for Zhuang Rui, especially Zhuang Rui's keen observation skills and intuition for jade, which had once led the old man to consider Zhuang Rui his successor in jade appraisal. However, Zhuang Rui's behavior in the past two years had somewhat disappointed the old man.

"Yes, Zhuang Rui, you were quite famous in Myanmar a few years ago, but after not participating in the auction for two years, few people mention you anymore. I think you need to show your face more often, otherwise you'll be forgotten soon..."

Hu Rong echoed Old Master Gu's words, saying that all professions are essentially the same, much like the entertainment industry. To maintain one's status, one must occasionally make a splash and gain more exposure.

Don't be fooled by the fact that the jade trade is all about professionalism and expertise. There are quite a few people who are not very skilled but want to climb the ladder. Since they can't find Zhuang Rui to evaluate them, they start to speak unethically. Some people even say terrible things about Zhuang Rui, and they think that Zhuang Rui's achievements in the past few years were just good luck.

Hu Rong had heard some rumors over the past two years, but he knew that Zhuang Rui's business was so large that he didn't focus on jade, so he didn't tell Zhuang Rui.

"Show yourself? How? Go gambling on jade again?"

Zhuang Rui smiled bitterly upon hearing this. He was not short of money now. Although it is true that you can never have too much good stuff, in his opinion, gambling on stones was nothing but blatant cheating.

Finding bargains and salvaging sunken ships on Taobao is like picking up items from the hands of God, but gambling on stones is like using spiritual energy to bully people. Zhuang Rui was afraid of being punished for using too much spiritual energy, so he was really a bit wary of it.

Therefore, Zhuang Rui deliberately avoided participating in the Myanmar jade auction in the past two years. Otherwise, with his current financial resources, he could have easily swept up all the valuable jade rough stones at the auction.

"You don't need to gamble on stones; luck plays a bigger role in that than skill. Just participate in some appraisal activities organized by the association when you have free time..."

The old man wasn't truly angry with Zhuang Rui; he simply wanted Zhuang Rui to pay more attention to jade. He had passed on some of his unique jade-appraisal methods to Zhuang Rui, not wanting his decades of experience to go unrecorded.

"Uncle-Master, I understand. I will definitely participate in such opportunities in the future and will not embarrass you..." Zhuang Rui felt a little embarrassed when he heard Hu Rong mention some rumors in the industry.

Although Zhuang Rui has been at the height of his fame in the antique and archaeology circles in recent years, his reputation in the jade circle has declined, and few people mention his remarkable achievements from a few days ago anymore.

"Ancient methods of jade gambling can actually reveal a person's understanding of jade. In a sense, it's also a form of jade appraisal. Zhuang Rui, if you have the time, you might as well participate in another jade auction. That would surely shut many people up..."

Hu Rong's words startled Zhuang Rui and Gu Tianfeng for a moment, then they remembered that this man was a jade tycoon from Myanmar and couldn't help but laugh.

The old man agreed with Hu Rong's words and said with a smile, "That's right. I trust Xiao Rui to do things. He won't get too caught up in this. Very good. He can try his hand at it again when he has the chance..."

"Hey, Uncle-Master, you were the one who advised me to get involved in jade gambling back then, how come it's the other way around now?" Zhuang Rui joked when he saw that the old man's mood had improved.

"This is directed at people. You rose to fame at the Myanmar jade auction a couple of years ago, but you were able to withdraw gracefully and didn't go to the auction for two years. That kind of perseverance is not something ordinary people can do, so I believe you won't become addicted. Besides, with your wealth, it wouldn't be easy for you to gamble everything away..."

As he spoke, the old man laughed heartily. He was Zhuang Rui's specially appointed honorary consultant for the "Dingguang Museum," and he knew a thing or two about Zhuang Rui's wealth.

"Hehe, that's all thanks to your excellent teaching, Grandpa. If it weren't for your reminder, I might have lost everything, even my underwear..."

Zhuang Rui seized the opportunity to flatter the old man. Seeing that the old man was in a good mood, he reached out and picked up the package at his feet, saying, "Uncle-Master, you've been in good health these past two years. I wonder if your skills... have declined?"

While pouring tea for Grandpa Gu, Zhuang Rui noticed that the old man's hands were still very steady, which must mean he usually takes good care of himself. Giving the old man some tea to help him relax should make him happy.

"You brat, I've carved quite a few things for you, haven't I? Bracelets, jade pendants, ornaments, what haven't I made? Still want to bother me?"

Actually, as soon as Zhuang Rui entered, Gu Tianfeng could tell that he was carrying a piece of raw jade, but he was too angry to ask at the time. Now that he felt better, he was also quite curious about what Zhuang Rui had brought.

It should be noted that Zhuang Rui has asked Gu Tianfeng to help him many times, but every time he has brought jade materials, they can be described as top-grade materials, which would be priceless even if sold as ordinary materials.

As one of the top jade carving masters in China, one must also consider the material when carving objects.

People like Mr. Gu would not carve jade if given a piece of rough, inferior material, no matter how much money they were offered. However, if given a rare and precious piece of jade, he would gladly work for free.

The jade materials Zhuang Rui had previously used, whether it was the imperial green jade for pendants or the multicolored Hetian chalcedony for fruit platters, were rare treasures that Gu Tianfeng had rarely seen in decades. Therefore, the old man had high expectations for the materials Zhuang Rui had acquired this time.

Upon hearing the old man's words, Zhuang Rui deliberately feigned indignation and said, "Hey, Uncle-Master, if that's how you see it, I'm not opening this thing. Brother Hu is also into jadeite, I'll just give it to him to have carved..."

"Do you think I care? I've seen all kinds of fine materials in my decades of life, what could be more precious than imperial green?"

The old man pursed his lips. After retiring, he often interacted with his grandchildren and had developed a bit of a childlike personality. He didn't take Zhuang Rui's words seriously.

"Alright, since you put it that way, I'll take a look at it and then take it with me..."

As Zhuang Rui spoke, he grinned mischievously and opened the package, which was wrapped in layers of a makeshift bed sheet.

Old Master Gu didn't bring his reading glasses, so he couldn't see clearly when the package was opened. But Hu Rong, who was sitting next to him, was young. In his forties, he was at the prime of his life and immediately stood up from his chair when he saw the yellow jadeite material that looked like chicken fat.

"This...this material..."

Hu Rong didn't care about being impolite at this moment. He rushed forward, picked up the top-quality yellow jade, and carried it to the doorway, examining it carefully in the sunlight.

"Zhuang Rui, go...go to the inner room and get my glasses..."

Although the old man couldn't see clearly what kind of material it was, he could tell from Hu Rong's behavior that this piece of jade was definitely extraordinary. Otherwise, Hu Rong, who was a powerful figure in the jade-producing area, would never have lost his composure like this.

While Zhuang Rui went inside to get his reading glasses, Hu Rong spoke to Gu Tianfeng, saying, "Grandpa Gu, do you still stand by what you said? Are you going to let this junior carve this piece of material?"

Although he hadn't examined it closely yet, such a top-quality yellow jadeite might only be seen once every hundred years. Hu Rong disregarded any notion of respecting the elderly and caring for the young, and was determined to convince the old man that he had no choice but to stick to his word.

As mentioned earlier, even renowned artists need high-quality materials. To make a name for themselves in the jade industry, they need to have a few representative works that can shock the industry and make people acknowledge their status.

However, while there are many skilled carvers and designers, good raw materials are hard to come by. Now that Hu Rong has seen this top-quality yellow jadeite, he can't care about his reputation as a jadeite design master and has started playing tricks.

"What did I just say? Xiao Hu, look at me, I'm getting old, I forget what I just said. Sigh, I'm getting old, really old..."

What Hu Rong didn't expect was that this old man was like a cunning old fox, completely refusing to fall into his trap and simply pretending to be confused even though he knew the truth.

Chapter 955 Acquisition

"You little punk, I've eaten more salt than you've eaten rice, are you trying to fool me?"

The old man, whose eyes seemed dim with age, sized Hu Rong up and down before smiling and saying, "Young Hu, sit down and have some tea. How could I, an old man, refuse something that Xiao Zhuang brought..."

Hearing Gu Tianfeng's words, Hu Rong was so angry he almost vomited blood. Which old man had just said he didn't care? He changed his mind so quickly! What a shameless old man!

"Old Master, you are a man of great experience and knowledge. You must have handled this material before. Why not let this junior practice his skills? It would be a way to mentor the younger generation, wouldn't it?"

Hu Rong was still somewhat unwilling. Even though he came from a family of jadeite makers in Myanmar, he had never seen this kind of yellow jadeite before. The jadeite roast chicken that appeared at an arts and crafts exhibition a few years ago was of a much lower quality than this piece of material.

Having access to a jade mine gives Hu Rong a significant advantage, allowing him to acquire a considerable amount of top-quality jade. However, for such rare and precious items, he still hopes to design and carve them himself.

"Uncle-Master, your glasses..."

The old man's room wasn't in this main room. As soon as Zhuang Rui walked into the room from the courtyard, he sensed that something was wrong. The old man was staring at Hu Rong with wide eyes, while Hu Rong was holding the yellow jade in his arms like a precious treasure.

"Hey Zhuang Rui, you're really not being fair! We're related, for goodness' sake, and you didn't even tell me you were hiding such a treasure..."

As soon as Zhuang Rui came in, Hu Rong started making a fuss. He blamed himself for not paying attention when he came. If he had just glanced at what Zhuang Rui was carrying, he wouldn't be fighting with the old man for materials now.

"Brother Hu, I only cut it open recently because I needed money. Otherwise, I would have given it to the old man to carve into an object long ago. Don't look at me, there's only one of these. Why don't you discuss it with my master?"

Zhuang Rui brought this piece of jadeite for two reasons: first, to make it a highlight of his jade exhibition hall, and second, to apologize to the old man. Naturally, he wouldn't change his mind because of Hu Rong's words.

"What's there to discuss? Leave the material here. Alright, you can all leave now. Come back in two months to collect your things..."

At this moment, Gu Tianfeng had already put on his reading glasses and carefully examined the piece of yellow jade. His face first showed surprise, and then he was overjoyed. He never expected that even though he was about to be buried, God would give him another piece of material that could be carved into a masterpiece.

Zhuang Rui was displeased upon hearing this and said, "Hey, Uncle-Master, why are you kicking people out? My two children came to visit, and you didn't even bring them anything, let alone give them a meal?"

Actually, Zhuang Rui was worried that the old man would overwork himself. Carving jade pieces is not a problem for the old man, but the preliminary design and drawing work requires a lot of brain cells.

Grandpa Gu was in high spirits after acquiring such a piece of jade. He didn't take Zhuang Rui's words to heart, nodding and smiling as he said, "Yes, yes, let's eat. Everyone stay for dinner, and we'll have a drink together later..."

"Grandpa, you...you..."

Zhuang Rui and Gu Tianfeng were delighted, but Hu Rong was incredibly frustrated. He almost blurted out the word "shameless," but managed to swallow it back. He then said resentfully, "Grandpa, is there anything I can do to help with the design?"

If this carving didn't work, Hu Rong decided to settle for second best. Being able to have his name written in the designer's column of this finished piece of yellow jade would be a great achievement, especially since it was a collaboration with Gu Lao, which would bring him prestige.

"design?"

Gu Tianfeng pondered for a moment upon hearing this. He was getting old, and his mind was indeed not as quick as that of a young person. Design was a real challenge for him.

However, Hu Rong usually traveled around Southeast Asia, and Old Master Gu wasn't very familiar with his reputation. He was considering whether to entrust the design of this item to him.

"Uncle-Master, Brother Hu, I have something to say. Would you two mind if I said something?"

When Zhuang Rui saw Hu Rong make the request, the old man hesitated for a moment before speaking, "Uncle-Master, Brother Hu is a very famous jade designer in Southeast Asia. The jade tree in my museum, from design to carving, was all done by Brother Hu. I believe that having him design this piece will certainly not be a waste of your skills..."

Hu Rong nodded repeatedly upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words. This was truly a kindred spirit. A thousand pieces of gold are easy to find, but a true friend is hard to come by. He would definitely thank Zhuang Rui properly later.

Before Zhuang Rui could finish speaking, he looked at Hu Rong and continued, "Brother Hu, I'm going to say something you might not like to hear, please don't be angry..."

Hu Rong waved his hands repeatedly and said, "Don't be angry, don't be angry. Just say what you have to say. Why are we brothers talking nonsense?"

"Speaking of your jade design skills, Brother Hu, you'd probably rank in the top 3 internationally, no doubt about it. But when it comes to carving, you're nowhere near as good as the old man..."

Hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hu Rong could only nod. The reputation that Old Master Gu had built up over decades in the jade industry was something Hu Rong couldn't possibly challenge.

"So my opinion is that you should design this item and the old man should handle the craftsmanship. The two of you working together will not disgrace this piece. Uncle-Master, Brother Hu, what do you think?"

Zhuang Rui had just remembered this. The jade tree in his museum was absolutely impeccable in terms of design, which was enough to prove Hu Rong's jade design skills. Moreover, this way, the old man would have less to worry about, which would also be good for his health.

"Alright, Xiao Hu, you decide what to carve this piece of material into..."

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, the old man nodded. He knew that Zhuang Rui had a sharp eye. Since he said that the Hu family's design skills were good, there must be some basis for it. Moreover, he had seen the jade tree. The design was novel and the theme was unique. It was clear that the designer had considerable skill.

"Oh, thank you so much, Lao Gu. I'll take the dimensions and then I'll work on the design..."

Hu Rong was overjoyed to find that both Zhuang Rui and the old man agreed to let him design the jade. His main focus was not jade carving, but jade design.

So as long as the object carved from this material can have his name signed in the designer's column, Hu Rong will be satisfied.

Moreover, the jade ornaments he designed were personally carved by Gu Tianfeng, which greatly boosted his reputation. It should be noted that the reputation that Master Gu has built in the jade industry over the past decades is unshakable.

Zhuang Rui's idea delighted both of them, and the atmosphere in the room immediately became harmonious. The old man and Hu Rong talked about the design of jade ornaments, and Hu Rong benefited greatly from his decades of experience.

During dinner that evening, Zhuang Rui deliberately poured a few more drinks for Old Master Gu, which made the old man, who couldn't hold his liquor, leave the table to rest. Taking this opportunity, Zhuang Rui gave the old man a thorough check-up.

...

"Zhuang Rui, you've been keeping this a secret for a while now! When did you get that piece of jade? Was it when you first participated in a jade auction?"

Back in the courtyard, Zhuang Rui and Hu Rong sat down to drink tea. Hu Rong was still thinking about the piece of material; if he hadn't taken the measurements, he probably would have taken it home.

"I got it back then, but it was really just cut out. It's been two years since that public auction. If I had unearthed it earlier, would I have waited until now to start carving it?"

Zhuang Rui nodded in admission. There was no point in hiding it. Nowadays, everyone in the antique business knows that he has a sharp eye and it's normal for him to find a good piece of material.

"Let's not talk about this anymore. When you have time later, just think carefully about what to carve from this material. Working with Master Gu will greatly benefit your reputation..."

Zhuang Rui changed the subject, diverting attention from the matter, and continued, "Brother Hu, you've been waiting for me here for several days. Is there something important that you need to tell me?" Zhuang Rui had been keeping this matter to himself, and now he finally had the chance to ask.

"Hey, I almost forgot about the important thing if you hadn't mentioned it..."

Upon hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Hu Rong slapped his forehead. Ever since he saw that piece of yellow jade, his mind had been filled with images of it, which had really confused him.

"It's about our jade mine. I've come to ask for your opinion..."

That evening, Hu Rong had also drunk quite a bit of wine. After rinsing his mouth with his teacup, he continued, "Our mine has been operating for almost two years, and the quality of the jadeite it produces has always been the best in Myanmar. We've even produced imperial green jadeite..."

Zhuang Rui, unsure of what Hu Rong wanted to say, waved his hand and said, "Brother Hu, just tell me what's going on. I know all this..."

"That's right. Since the beginning of this year, a British mining and energy company has been very interested in our jade mine, and they have been investigating it for about three months now."

Last week, their boss contacted me and expressed interest in acquiring the entire jade mine...

When Hu Rong talked about serious matters, the alcohol on his face disappeared. This matter was of great importance to him, concerning the future of the Hu family in Myanmar, and he dared not make a decision lightly.

Furthermore, Zhuang Rui also owns a 40% stake in that jade mine. Even if he agrees to sell, it doesn't change Zhuang Rui's mind. Therefore, Hu Rong must come in person to negotiate with Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui hadn't expected Hu Rong to bring up this kind of thing. After pondering it for a moment, he asked, "How much did they offer?"

There is no commodity that cannot be sold. Although the jade mine brought Zhuang Rui and Hu Rong hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars, Zhuang Rui would not mind selling it as long as the British offered a reasonable price.

Chapter 956 Focus

This jade mine has been in operation for almost two years, yet the British company still wants to acquire it. It seems they've put in a lot of effort, and the fact that Hu Rong rushed here suggests their offer is quite high.

"1.2 billion!" Hu Rong said, uttering a number.

"1.2 billion?" Zhuang Rui raised an eyebrow but remained silent.

To be honest, according to Zhuang Rui's previous survey, this jade mine was worth about two billion US dollars. Moreover, at that time, Zhuang Rui's spiritual energy had not been upgraded, so he could not see further and did not know if there were more jade veins inside.

In two years, only 700 million US dollars worth of jadeite has been mined, and there are still at least 1 billion US dollars worth of raw jadeite left. If the British company is only willing to offer 1.2 billion US dollars, Zhuang Rui will not agree to sell it.

"It's £1.2 billion..."

Seeing Zhuang Rui frown, Hu Rong added a comment from the side.

"Damn it, why didn't you say so earlier?"

Zhuang Rui glanced at Hu Rong with dissatisfaction. How could the British pound be compared to the US dollar? 1.2 billion pounds is roughly 150-160 billion RMB, while 1.2 billion US dollars is less than 10 billion. The difference is huge.

You didn't ask either?

Hu Rong chuckled. He wanted to see Zhuang Rui's reaction to the word "pound sterling," but Zhuang Rui disappointed him. He didn't seem particularly excited when he heard it was pounds sterling.

In fact, Zhuang Rui was still a little shocked. He originally thought he was quite rich, but he didn't expect that these foreign resource tycoons would spend hundreds of billions of RMB in one go. Compared with them, he was embarrassed to talk about his own little assets.

"We estimated the mine to be worth around two billion US dollars. If they're really willing to offer 1.2 billion pounds, then we could consider it..."

While thinking, Zhuang Rui said, "Brother Hu, after receiving their quote, you must have re-evaluated the mine, right? What were the results?"

In any cross-border acquisition involving such large sums of money, both parties are quite cautious and will each send an appraisal company to assess the mine's resources. That's why Zhuang Rui asked that question.

"I hired a well-known German mineral assessment consulting firm to do the assessment. Their assessment results are not much different from the British offer, so that's why I'm asking for your opinion..."

Hu Rong is now in a dilemma. From a profit perspective, selling the jade mine would reduce many intermediate links and labor costs, which would undoubtedly maximize profits.

However, selling the jade mine did not benefit the Hu family's development in Myanmar.

Although the Hu family owns seven or eight mines in Myanmar, those mines are all in decline and almost depleted. Only this jade mine is currently the most profitable and largest mine in the Hu family's portfolio. If it is sold, it would mean that the Hu family will withdraw from the competition in Myanmar's mineral resources industry.

Therefore, Hu Rong has been unable to make a decision. Behind him is not just the Hu family, but also the entire Chinese community that has been dependent on the Hu family for hundreds of years. Almost all the Chinese living there rely on mining for a living. If he sells the mine, it will affect the whole community. He cannot help but be cautious.

There was nothing that Hu Rong and Zhuang Rui couldn't talk about, so they shared their thoughts. Although Zhuang Rui was young, he had deep roots in China, and Hu Rong wanted to hear his opinion.

Upon hearing that this matter concerned the future of the Myanmar Chinatown, Zhuang Rui pondered for a moment before asking, "If we sell that jade mine, will there be nowhere to place those Chinese people to work?"

Hu Rong shook his head and said, "That's not entirely true. The Hu family has other businesses in Myanmar, but once this mine is sold, the Hu family's bargaining power in the resource mining industry will be greatly reduced, and it will be difficult to secure good mines in the future..."

Myanmar is an agricultural country, and the Chinatown area has many arable lands in the surrounding region. However, most young people work in the mines, leaving farming primarily to women and the elderly.

Hu Rong hesitated because of the complex situation in Myanmar. If he sold this rich mine, he would likely be ostracized by his peers, making it even more difficult for him to get involved in the jade mining industry again.

"Brother Hu, in your opinion, are there still many valuable jade mines in Myanmar?" Zhuang Rui asked.

"Where are there any valuable mines left? An area spanning dozens of kilometers has been mined for hundreds of years; it's basically all gone. But quite a few gold deposits have been discovered..."

As Hu Rong was speaking, his eyes suddenly lit up. If the jade mine was gone, he could look for gold mines. He would still need miners then.

"How about this, Brother Hu, I'll find some time to go to Hpakant with you again to take a look at that jade mine in person, and then we can decide what to do. Is that alright?"

Zhuang Rui couldn't give an answer to this matter at the moment. He needed to see how much jadeite vein was still contained in that mine.

If it's still the same vein we saw before, and it doesn't extend any further, then Zhuang Rui's idea is naturally to sell it. But if the mine contains other veins, then it certainly shouldn't be allowed to fall into the hands of the British.

"You want to go to Hpakant?"

Hu Rong was surprised that Zhuang Rui would make this request. After thinking for a moment, he said, "If you really want to do an on-site inspection, shall we set off in the next couple of days?"

"So soon? Even if they offer to acquire you, it shouldn't be this quick, right?"

Zhuang Rui was taken aback when he heard this. Such a large acquisition would take at least a year and a half to negotiate. Was there any need to rush?

In addition, Zhuang Rui has other matters to attend to. That Song Dynasty shipwreck is still in a warehouse in Tianjin Port, waiting to be moved in once the exhibition hall is completed.

Hu Rong picked up the teacup in front of him, took a sip of tea, and said, "That matter isn't urgent. To show our sincerity in this acquisition, the jade mine is currently in a state of semi-shutdown. However, in early September, there will be the third jade auction this year. Why don't you take the opportunity to go and take a look?"

"A jade auction?!"

Today brought back many memories for Zhuang Rui. First, there was the unforgettable place of Hpakant, and then the jade auction. For a moment, Zhuang Rui really felt an urge to go to Myanmar.

"Yes, the jade auction in September is the largest and most bustling one yet. Don't you want to go check it out?"

Hu Rong laughed and continued, "Although I'm abroad, I often hear people say that your title of 'Jade King' of the North is undeserved. Don't you want to prove it? Besides, it's said that the 'Jade King' from Yunnan will also be there this time. It'll be a meeting of two kings!"

To be honest, Hu Rong had never been able to figure out Zhuang Rui's skill in gambling on jade. He also wanted to see which of these two "Jade Kings," one old and one young, one from the south and one from the north, was more skilled.

"Early September? There are still four or five days left..."

After thinking for a moment, Zhuang Rui said, "Okay, I'll go. I'll arrange some other things for the next couple of days. Don't rush off either. We'll go together on my private jet..."

For both emotional and rational reasons, Zhuang Rui had to go there, because if he really sold that jade mine, Zhuang Rui's "Qin Ruilin" in the capital, including the jade raw materials of the entire Qin family jewelry, would face a huge crisis.

So Zhuang Rui's trip to Myanmar this time is not only to transport the top-quality jadeite already mined from the Hpakant jadeite mine back to China, but also to bid for enough raw stones at the public auction, at least to ensure the materials for "Qin Ruilin" for the next ten years, right?

As for Beijing, the museum expansion will take at least two months, and the shipwreck artifacts are being studied by Professor Meng and his team, so Zhuang Rui has nothing to do with them.

However, the bet that Zhuang Rui agreed to at the end of the year was causing him some trouble. The other day, the gambling king called to congratulate Zhuang Rui on his successful escape from the sinking ship, and then the conversation turned to the bet, which annoyed Zhuang Rui to no end.

Furthermore, Zhuang Rui felt somewhat indebted to his wife and children. He had originally said he wouldn't travel far, but this time he was going abroad again. Moreover, the situation in Myanmar was complicated, so he couldn't take them with him. This was what was giving Zhuang Rui a headache.

...

Back in their room, Zhuang Rui explained the situation to Qin Xuanbing. Qin Xuanbing was very understanding, and since the matter would also affect the Qin family in Hong Kong, she immediately called her father.

Qin Haoran had already learned about this matter, and he was also preparing to participate in the Myanmar jade auction to stockpile a batch of jade raw materials. He immediately arranged to meet Zhuang Rui in Myanmar over the phone.

The next day, Zhuang Rui drove to the Jade Association and picked up an invitation letter from Myanmar. Without this, he really couldn't have participated in the auction. This allowed Zhuang Rui to enjoy the privileges of a director of the Jade Association.

What Zhuang Rui didn't know was that his participation in the September Myanmar jade auction had been leaked by some internal staff of the Jade Association. This news immediately caused a stir in the domestic jade industry, and many eyes were focused on Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui's status today is no longer that of the naive young man he once was. He has a great reputation in the antique industry, almost on par with Jin Pangzi and others. In the field of archaeology, he is Professor Meng's last disciple. Wherever he goes, he is respected.

Although Zhuang Rui hasn't made many moves in the jade industry in the past two years, giving the impression of a fleeting moment of fame, the upcoming comeback of the young "Jade King" from the North has still alarmed many people.

Many people want to know whether this young man will make a triumphant return and sweep the Myanmar jade auction, or return defeated and prove that he was just lucky back then.

Another highlight is that Yunnan's "Jade King," who was once as famous as Xinjiang's "Jade King" in the jade industry, will also participate in this public auction. Whether this old and young pair will create sparks is something that everyone is eagerly anticipating.

Instantly, invitations to the Myanmar auction became extremely popular, and many people who hadn't originally planned to attend changed their minds, packing their bags and preparing to head to Myanmar.

#### Chapter 957 Questioning

"Brother, your return as the Jade King has certainly caused quite a stir!"

In a manor in Yangon, Myanmar, Hu Rong was teasing Zhuang Rui, who looked worried. Ouyang Jun, Peng Fei, Li Zhen, and others sat nearby.

A day earlier, Zhuang Rui arrived in Yangon on his private jet. This time, he was treated much better than last time. As soon as he left the airport, he was picked up by a car arranged by Hu Rong and taken to a new estate that Hu Rong had acquired in Yangon.

This manor isn't far from the jade auction venue. Qin Haoran will be staying here tomorrow, which will save him the trouble of staying in a hotel and dealing with those familiar jade merchants.

As Zhuang Rui's net worth increased, safety became a top priority when traveling. Although Hu Rong was a local strongman in Myanmar, Peng Fei and Li Zhen still followed him.

As for Ouyang Jun, he was just here to join in the fun. Due to his family connections, he often attracts attention when he goes abroad, so he doesn't travel to many places. In recent years, he has been cooped up in China and insisted on coming out for a stroll.

"Alright, Brother Hu, I didn't expect it to turn out like this either. If I had known, I wouldn't have gone to the association to get the invitation..."

Zhuang Rui shook his head in frustration. When he first participated in the Myanmar auction, he received some special treatment and was able to participate directly even without an invitation from China.

However, in order to show that he was a member of the Jade Association, Zhuang Rui still chose to participate in the public auction as a member of the Jade Association, but he did not expect that this would cause a great stir in China.

These past few days, Zhuang Rui's phone has been ringing off the hook. Anyone he knows, even just a nodding acquaintance, has called to verify his identity, which is driving Zhuang Rui crazy.

"Brother Zhuang, that's not very classy. You sneak off to Myanmar to make your fortune without even calling me, Fatty?"

Just as Zhuang Rui was chuckling wryly, his phone rang again. Upon hearing it was Fatty Ma, Zhuang Rui immediately said irritably, "Brother Ma, why are you getting involved? I'm already overwhelmed. It's just a jade auction, who knows if I'll make a profit or a loss?"

"You can pay for it? I don't believe it even if you beat me to death. You can pick up a random piece of rock and maybe you'll find imperial jade inside."

Fatty Ma scoffed at Zhuang Rui's words. He and Song Jun had only participated in the jade auction as a hobby, but their haul from the auction had them grinning from ear to ear.

At the jade auction that Zhuang Rui attended, Fatty Ma and Song Jun bought over 100 million yuan worth of raw jade. After hoarding it for two years, they made a net profit of five times when they sold it last year. Now, this guy is considered a prominent figure in the jade industry.

However, after that jade auction, Zhuang Rui seemed to disappear from the jade industry. In the subsequent auctions, Fatty Ma and Song Jun, knowing their own capabilities, did not dare to participate.

"Alright, Brother Ma, I mainly came here to check on the mining projects I've invested in in Myanmar. I just happened to be attending the jade auction on the side. Okay, you can continue admiring the beauties in Africa, I'm not going to waste any more time with you..."

Zhuang Rui knew that Fatty Ma had been stationed in Africa for some time and had heard that Song Jun was being bitten by mosquitoes and insects all day long, and had lost more than 20 pounds.

"Damn it, what beautiful women? They're all black girls, and they're not even wearing tops..." Fatty Ma was furious at Zhuang Rui's words, but he didn't expect that Zhuang Rui had already hung up the phone.

The weather in Africa is hot, and basically the women in those tribes have never worn tops since they were young. They just hang their breasts around all day in front of Fatty Ma, which makes Fatty Ma almost want to open a school here to teach these old African women what it means to be immoral.

"Hello? Damn it, are you hanging up on me?"

Before Fatty Ma could finish his grumbling, the phone went dead. Annoyed, he hung up, muttering, "You brat, you're a shareholder in this project too. Next time I'll make sure you go to Africa to see all the beauties..."

Zhuang Rui, far away in Myanmar, shuddered. Without a doubt, Fatty Ma was spreading rumors about him. He just never imagined that he would actually set foot on that land he so deeply hated.

Since the auction was still two days away, Zhuang Rui took Ouyang Jun on a tour around Yangon.

When Zhuang Rui revisited the Shwedagon Pagoda, he tried to find the Burmese Chinese who had sold him the ivory Buddha statue, but he couldn't. Zhuang Rui felt a little disappointed. The Shwedagon Pagoda was still the same, but the old person was no longer there.

"Damn, the weather in Myanmar is so hot. I wish I hadn't come..."

On his third day in Myanmar, the September jade auction finally opened, and Ouyang Jun naturally wanted to go and see it for himself. However, Beijing had already entered autumn and started to cool down, and the weather in Myanmar made him complain endlessly.

"Fourth Brother, you grew up in a honey pot, can't you even endure this little bit of hardship? Look at my father-in-law..."

Zhuang Rui also felt a bit overwhelmed. Compared to the last time he came, the weather was much hotter. Even though he was wearing shorts and a t-shirt, he was covered in sweat, and his clothes were almost clinging to his body.

What impressed Zhuang Rui was that Qin Haoran was still dressed in a suit and tie in such weather. Although he was sweating profusely, he refused to dress like Zhuang Rui. He had heard that Hong Kong people were meticulous, and now he had witnessed it firsthand from his father-in-law.

After hearing Zhuang Rui's words, Ouyang Jun glanced at Qin Haoran walking ahead, pursed his lips, and remained silent. Of course, what he was thinking was unknown to others.

Today is the first day of this public auction. Just like last time, jade merchants from all over the world who are staying at the hotel have gathered at the entrance of the Myanmar National Jade Center.

Due to the decreasing production of jadeite year by year, and the increasing popularity of clear and green jadeite gemstones in Europe and America in recent years, Zhuang Rui observed that the number of participants in this public auction was far greater than that of the year before last.

"Aren't you going to open the door yet? We've been waiting for over half an hour..."

"Yeah, there's a shed inside, it's unbearably hot outside..."

"It's the same every year, what can you do when jade is so scarce? My friend, just stay calm and you'll feel better..."

When Zhuang Rui and his group arrived at the plaza in front of the jade center, it was already packed with people, numbering three to four thousand, several times more than the more than one thousand people the previous year.

However, these people were all complaining. Because of the hot weather, the sun was already high in the sky at seven or eight o'clock, and waiting in this square with few trees felt like being roasted by fire.

Seeing the soldiers with live guns and nuclear weapons around them, these people didn't dare to shout too loudly. In a country under military control, provoking the military is obviously a very unwise thing to do.

"Boss Zhuang, you've arrived!"

"Teacher Zhuang, please stand here, there's a shady spot..."

"Oh my, it really is Brother Zhuang! Over here, brother, come over here. Xiaoqian, don't you have any sense at all? Holding an umbrella for Teacher Zhuang?"

When Zhuang Rui and his group appeared at the entrance of the Myanmar National Jade Exchange Center, they caused a sensation. Almost everyone who recognized Zhuang Rui from the outside crowded around them.

The most enthusiastic among them was naturally Han Haowei, the owner of Han's Jewelry. Unlike those who wanted to see Zhuang Rui make a fool of himself, Mr. Han was completely convinced of Zhuang Rui's skill in gambling on stones.

Putting aside everything else, the two pieces of jadeite that Zhuang Rui sold to him some time ago were top-quality jadeite that are rarely seen in recent years. Zhuang Rui has not participated in any jadeite transactions in the past two years, so the origin of these two pieces of jadeite must be that he gambled on them a few years ago.

This fueled endless speculation in Boss Han's mind. Zhuang Rui could casually produce ten or so pieces of top-quality jadeite; who knew how many other treasures he might be hiding? So even though the rumors about Zhuang Rui were terrible within the industry, Boss Han never uttered a word of complaint.

"Old Han, I can't accept this kind of treatment. I think you're really being presumptuous with a beauty. Well, I'll just stay in the shade..."

Zhuang Rui and Boss Han have a long-standing relationship; otherwise, he wouldn't have thought of him when he was selling jade last time. Seeing a tall, fair-skinned beauty standing behind Han Haowei, holding an umbrella for him, he couldn't help but joke.

"Hehe, Brother Zhuang, look at all this fat on me, do you think I can withstand the sun's heat..."

Han Haowei didn't pay attention to Zhuang Rui's words. In their circle, keeping a mistress was extremely normal. Some people with good kidney function might even keep four, five, six, seven, or eight mistresses. If they didn't, they would be laughed at.

"Hey bro, we're old friends, aren't we? If you find any pieces you like at this auction, you'd better let me know..."

Han Haowei's thoughts were different from those in the industry who questioned Zhuang Rui. He was convinced that Zhuang Rui had unique insights and vision when it came to gambling on stones. From the moment he met Zhuang Rui, he made up his mind to follow closely behind him.

"Forget it, Mr. Han, your eye for talent is so sharp, there's no need for me to introduce you."

Zhuang Rui laughed it off, not taking the doubts from the outside world to heart at all. Moreover, he didn't plan to have the stone cut on the spot this time. As the saying goes, people are afraid of becoming famous, just as pigs are afraid of getting fat. He would just keep to himself and make his fortune quietly.

"Is that the legendary Jade King of the North? How come he's so young?"

"It looks like it's him. Judging by his age, he's probably not even thirty yet. He's probably just lucky..."

"Let's put them to the test and see who has the real skills." The Yunnan Jade King will also be here this time, so let's see who has the real expertise.

There were quite a few people in the room who had doubts about Zhuang Rui, and many of the people standing on the sidelines were already pointing and talking about it.

Occasionally, some of the words drifted to Zhuang Rui's ears, leaving him both amused and exasperated. "What did I do to deserve this? I can't even keep a low profile anymore."

In recent years, due to the popularity of jadeite, many traditional businessmen have also joined the ranks of those gambling on jadeite. They are already wealthy and successful people, and they were quite disdainful when they saw that Zhuang Rui was so young.

#### Chapter 958 Old Tang

The jade gambling business has a relatively low barrier to entry, but it's not particularly high either. There's only one condition: money. This has attracted many people from traditional businesses to get involved.

These people were already successful in their original fields, and they were very arrogant after entering the jade gambling circle. Although they had heard of Zhuang Rui's glorious achievements, they looked down on him now that they saw how young he was.

"Old Tang is here..."

"It really is Old Tang! Quick, let's go take a look..."

Suddenly, a voice rang out from the crowd, and the entire square immediately stirred. Those who had been pointing and whispering around Zhuang Rui stopped commenting on him and rushed to the outer perimeter.

Zhuang Rui also heard the shouts of those people. He turned to look at Han Haowei and asked softly, "Is that Old Tang from Yunnan?"

Zhuang Rui hadn't actually been in the jade industry for very long. Apart from knowing some jade merchants, he didn't know much about the well-known appraisers and experts in the industry.

However, he had heard of Old Tang's name before. Back then, those bored people compared him to Old Tang, calling them the "Jade Kings" of the North and South.

Han Haowei was a thoughtful man. Fearing that Zhuang Rui, being young and impetuous, might still harbor thoughts of comparing himself to Elder Tang, he said, "Brother, Elder Tang has been here for almost half a century. Please don't mind..."

Zhuang Rui laughed upon hearing this. He appraised jadeite rough stones solely based on the spiritual energy in his eyes. He only admired this old man and would never have any other thoughts. He waved his hand and said, "Old Han, Old Tang is a senior in our jade industry, on the same level as Jade King. He is my elder, so how could I be jealous of this old man?"

Zhuang Rui had learned from Old Master Gu that Old Tang was also an old friend of his for decades. During their phone conversations over the past two years, Old Tang had often mentioned Zhuang Rui, but Zhuang Rui seemed to have disappeared from the jade industry, which Old Tang found quite regrettable.

From Old Master Tang's words, Zhuang Rui learned that Old Master Tang liked to mentor younger generations and especially enjoyed helping others when gambling on stones. Such an old man could only inspire Zhuang Rui's respect.

Moreover, Tang Lao's reputation is far superior to Zhuang Rui's fleeting success in jade gambling. He has truly built his reputation over decades, traversing the jade gambling market both in China and abroad. Many of the stories about him are still told today.

Many people know that Yangmei in Guangdong is a large jade trading center in China, where almost every company participates in jade gambling. The initial development of Yangmei was inseparable from the support of Mr. Tang.

That happened in the early 1990s. Back then, the domestic jade trading market wasn't as booming as it is now, and Yangmei wasn't the jade trading center it is today. At that time, a jade merchant from Myanmar brought a rough jade weighing over 400 kilograms and planned to sell it in Yunnan.

Since it was almost Chinese New Year, the Burmese businessman was eager to sell, so his asking price wasn't very high, around two million. However, in the early 1990s, this price was considered astronomical.

Many people are eyeing this piece of jade, but not many are making a purchase. Later, a group of women from Yangmei also set their sights on it, but they were unsure, since it was a million-dollar item and a loss could mean they would never recover.

At that time, the group of women from Yangmei asked Old Tang for advice, and Old Tang did not refuse. After carefully examining the material, he honestly told them that it was a rare violet jade stone, and that they could earn at least 10 million yuan after buying it.

Later, through Mr. Tang's mediation, the group spent more than 1.3 million yuan to buy the raw stone. However, when they saw Mr. Tang again a few months later, they never mentioned the jade stone again.

After that incident, every time these women from Yangmei went to see Old Tang, they would buy items worth millions from him. Even if they bought good items elsewhere, they would still take them to Old Tang so he could inspect them first.

Mr. Tang had a friend who originally wanted to buy it but couldn't. Later, the friend resented Mr. Tang and said that the violet jade stone had made more than 100 million yuan. Anyone in Yangmei who had anything to do with the jade stone made a lot of money.

Yangmei Village has now developed into a new high-end jade market and has replaced Hong Kong as the leader in the jade market. Many industry insiders believe that Yangmei started with that piece of violet jade.

One person can drive the development of the local economy and industry, which shows Tang Lao's status and influence in the eyes of people in the industry.

Although this legend may not be true, it has been circulating for more than ten years, and many people still talk about it with great enthusiasm. Moreover, the Yang Meiren group has not come out to deny it, which already says a lot.

...

After a brief commotion on the periphery of the crowd, a group of people surrounded an old man and walked towards the entrance of the jade trading center. Whether it was intentional on the part of the guide or not, their route passed right by the place where Zhuang Rui and the others were standing.

Zhuang Rui looked at the approaching people from afar. Tang Lao, who was walking at the front, was not tall. He was wearing a beige Chinese-style mandarin jacket, was a bit thin, had a full head of white hair and was balding. His eyes were very bright. He kept greeting the people on both sides. He did not have the arrogance of the Jade King and was very kind.

One of the people next to Tang Lao whispered something in Tang Lao's ear after seeing Zhuang Rui and the others. Tang Lao, who was originally walking towards the entrance of the trading center, slowed down and walked towards Zhuang Rui.

Zhuang Rui knew the old man had come for him, so he quickly went to greet him. After reaching Old Tang, he bowed deeply and raised his head, saying, "Old Tang, hello. I am Zhuang Rui, a junior. I have heard Master Gu and Uncle Tian talk about you before, but I have never had the chance to meet you. Today, I am fortunate to finally be able to hear your teachings in person..."

Since Old Master Tang, Old Master Gu, and the Jade King of Xinjiang were all of equal standing, Zhuang Rui naturally had to treat them with the respect due to a disciple. In the eyes of the older generation, this was very important; otherwise, Zhuang Rui would inevitably be reprimanded by Old Master Gu when he returned to Beijing.

However, Zhuang Rui's respectful demeanor towards Old Master Tang, and his humble attitude, surprised some onlookers who had expected a clash between the young and impetuous Zhuang Rui and Old Master Tang.

"Xiao Zhuang, I know your grandfather too. He's kind of my teacher, but there's a hierarchy of learning, and only the most accomplished can be considered a teacher. I, this old man, dare not accept such praise from you..."

Old Tang smiled happily, holding Zhuang Rui's hands tightly and refusing to let go for a long time. When he mentioned Zhuang Rui's grandfather, the onlookers were even more surprised. It turned out that the two were old friends.

Zhuang Rui was also a little surprised. He had only heard some anecdotes about Tang Lao's gambling on stones, but he didn't know much about his experiences. He immediately asked, "Tang Lao, do you... know my grandfather?"

"Yes, I know him. I studied geology in the 1950s. After graduating from university, I was assigned to the Jiangsu Provincial Geological Bureau to conduct geological surveys and prospecting. I worked in metamorphic rock areas for more than 20 years."

I was fortunate enough to attend several of your grandfather's lectures at the time, and his lectures on the relationship between regional metamorphic rocks and jade formation had a significant impact on me later on..."

After Old Tang finished speaking, everyone's faces showed a look of sudden realization. When they looked at Zhuang Rui again, the contempt from before was gone, replaced by a look of understanding.

It's important to understand that both antiques and jade are traditional trades that emphasize a clear lineage. According to Mr. Tang, Zhuang Rui comes from a family of jade dealers, so his current achievements are only natural.

What these people didn't know was that Zhuang Rui had never even met his grandfather. He only learned that his grandfather was engaged in geological research a few years ago from the notes his grandfather left behind. He had never received any teachings from his grandfather.

"Xiao Zhuang, I've heard you're quite famous in the antique business. This old man will definitely have to come and ask you for advice..."

Although Mr. Tang is a jade collector, he has a special fondness for antique collecting and has a considerable collection at home. In his opinion, gambling on stones is just a minor pursuit, while China's long-standing traditional collecting can truly reveal a person's level of appreciation.

"I wouldn't dare accept that. I only have a slight interest. If you have any interesting items, please feel free to discuss them with me anytime..."

Zhuang Rui dared not boast in front of Old Tang. As the saying goes, old people are wise and experienced. These people who have lived most of their lives all have very sharp eyes.

Of course, he wouldn't underestimate himself. With his keen eye for detail, there's no antique in the world that Zhuang Rui can't see through.

"Alright, let's stop standing around like tree stumps being watched. The trade fair has started, let's go in..."

While Tang Lao and Zhuang Rui were talking, the doors of the jade trading center had already opened. The Myanmar jade trade fair is held four to five times a year, and everyone knows the rules, so there is no so-called opening ceremony.

After entering the jade trading center, Zhuang Rui looked around. It hadn't changed much from a few years ago, except that there were more and more people coming to gamble on stones. Almost every area was packed with people.

Seeing this magnificent scene, Zhuang Rui shook his head slightly. Almost 90% of these people were from China, but these 90% of them would probably lose everything. Gambling on stones can make you rich, but it can also bankrupt you.

After entering the jade gambling area, Old Tang frowned slightly, looked at Zhuang Rui beside him, and said, "Xiao Zhuang, there are too many stones here. Let's look at them separately. We can have lunch together later..."

"Yes, Mr. Tang, you must treat me to lunch..."

Zhuang Rui nodded in agreement. His purpose in coming to Myanmar was to stockpile a large quantity of jadeite rough stones to take back. If he stayed with Old Tang all the time, he wouldn't be able to act freely.

After parting ways with Old Tang, Zhuang Rui glanced at the sign and headed straight for the open bidding area. According to the rules, some of the rough stones would be auctioned off in the afternoon, and Zhuang Rui didn't want to miss the opportunity.

#### Chapter 959 Madness (Part 1)

This year's jade trade fair in Myanmar attracted far more people than the previous jade auction held by Zhuang Rui. The vast venue was packed with people, shoulder to shoulder, and the only language heard was Mandarin, a mix of various regional dialects.

If you closed your eyes and just listened to these voices, you would definitely think you were in some tourist destination in China.

Since the open bidding area opens every afternoon, the road to the open bidding area to select raw materials is also crowded with people. Now the price of jadeite changes almost every day, which makes many merchants and investors almost red-eyed when they see the raw stones all over the ground in this venue.

The rise in jade prices in the past two years has also boosted the jade gambling market from another perspective. Almost every Myanmar jade auction has seen people unearth jade pieces that fetch astronomical prices. Talented people emerge in every generation, which is one of the reasons why Zhuang Rui has been gradually forgotten.

Therefore, relatively speaking, speculators prefer to choose materials with open bidding because they can get the raw materials on the same day. If they can get a price increase on the spot, they might be able to make hundreds of millions or even millions in a single transaction. Even drug trafficking is not as fast as this.

Of course, there are many more people who lose everything by gambling on stones, but the gambling industry only reports good news and not bad news. What is circulated is who made tens of thousands from a single stone, but there are very few reports about those unlucky people who lost everything and turned pale.

These days, there are plenty of wealthy people. When one group is eliminated from the circle, another group naturally comes in to fill the gap, and each time the number of people is larger than the last. This Myanmar jade auction is becoming more and more popular with each edition.

When Qin Haoran reached the fork in the road between the open and closed bidding areas, he looked at Zhuang Rui and said, "Zhuang Rui, you stay and look at the open bidding area, I'll go check the closed bidding area..."

Because Zhuang Rui helped Qin's Jewelry acquire a considerable amount of high-quality jadeite at the jadeite auction two years ago, and later Hu Rong's jadeite mine also provided them with a source of raw jadeite through smuggling, Qin's Jewelry not only gained a head start in the mainland jadeite market but also had no worries about raw materials.

However, now that Hu Rong is preparing to sell the jade mine, the situation has changed. Although Qin's Jewelry will not be affected in the short term, from a long-term development perspective, it is now necessary to stockpile a batch of raw materials.

After all, according to the predictions of geological experts from various countries, jade mining in Myanmar can only be sustained until 2016. In other words, after 2016, it is very likely that there will be no mines to mine.

By then, all jade ornaments circulating in the market will become non-renewable rare jewels, and their prices will definitely skyrocket. Whoever has more raw materials and more supply will naturally be able to seize the largest market share.

Therefore, nowadays, no jewelry company, whether in China or Southeast Asia, thinks it has too much raw material stockpiled. Almost every time a public auction is held, a large number of people are sent with ample funds to stockpile raw materials for the company's future development.

Despite Hu Rong's plan to sell the jade mine, he has also been stockpiling a considerable quantity of raw jade stones for his companies in Southeast Asia over the past two years.

Moreover, in the past two years, Hu Rong's mine has rarely participated in the official auctions held by the Myanmar government, which can be seen as a way of preparing for the future.

However, some other Burmese mine owners did not have Hu Rong's foresight. Taking advantage of the booming jadeite rough market, they supplied large quantities of rough stones each time. Because of the

backwardness of Burmese jade processing technology, they felt that they could only feel at ease when they turned these stones, which could not be eaten, into cash.

"Peng Fei, Li Zhen, it's so hot outside, you two shouldn't follow me. Go find a shed and rest there..."

Since September is the hottest time of the year in Myanmar, there is a glass-roofed shed every few steps, with boiling water inside. This would not have been possible for Myanmar a few years ago, so it's quite modern now.

However, having traveled thousands of miles just to make money, every pavilion was empty. No one was willing to waste time selecting raw stones. Those who couldn't bear the scorching sun only went into the pavilion for a drink of water before quickly leaving.

"Brother Zhuang, it's alright, we'll stay with you..."

Li Zhen shook his head. Before coming to Myanmar, Zhuang Rui learned about his mother's illness and immediately took her to Beijing, where she was placed in the General Hospital of the People's Liberation Army and hired a special nurse at a high price.

With his worries gone, Li Zhen didn't say anything in front of Zhuang Rui, but he changed his usual carefree attitude and stayed by Zhuang Rui's side almost every step of the way since arriving in Myanmar.

"No need, you two can sit over there. You two wouldn't understand this rough stone anyway..."

Zhuang Rui waved his hand, indicating that they should find something to do on their own. The number of raw stones at this auction would far exceed the number he had participated in before. If he were to select them one by one, Zhuang Rui simply wouldn't have the time. Therefore, he planned to use his spiritual energy to sense them on a large scale. However, it would be inconvenient to have two people with him.

"Alright, Shura, it's safe here, it's fine..."

Peng Fei and Zhuang Rui had been here once before. In fact, countries with military control like this are much safer than developed countries. At least when entering the venue, weapons are not allowed.

"Safety my ass! I brought my Desert Eagle in with me, didn't I?"

Li Zhen muttered something, which startled Zhuang Rui. The gun barrel was so long, and he didn't know where Li Zhen had hidden it. Looking at his whole body, there didn't seem to be anything bulging.

Shaking his head, Zhuang Rui wasn't worried that Li Zhen would cause any trouble. Although Jia Hao was a bit talkative, he was very reliable.

"My darlings, I'm here!"

More than two years later, when Zhuang Rui walked into the open bidding area of the Myanmar public auction again, he couldn't help but feel excited. He started from the position marked one and walked straight in along the path in the middle.

The entire open bidding area covers more than a thousand square meters and is divided into more than twenty rows, each row being hundreds of meters long. Hundreds of thousands of jadeite stones from various mines are displayed, including rough stones with open windows and semi-rough stones, covering the entire venue.

After several upgrades, Zhuang Rui was able to control the spiritual energy in his eyes at will, preventing it from taking effect on the human body rashly. At this moment, Zhuang Rui released the spiritual energy around him, which covered a distance of about five meters. As he walked, the spiritual energy swept through every stone.

"Damn, this is outrageous! Can these pieces of junk even be called jadeite rough?"

After walking about seven or eight meters and looking at about twenty jadeite rough stones, Zhuang Rui couldn't help but curse inwardly. Although it seemed that there were many more rough stones at this auction than before, the quality had dropped considerably.

Of the more than twenty rough stones that Zhuang Rui had just examined, only one contained jadeite, and the quality was extremely poor, not even reaching the level of "flower green" jadeite. If he bought it, he could only carve it into a low-priced ornament worth ten or twenty yuan.

Furthermore, many of these materials do not resemble those mined from original jadeite mines; they look more like roadside paving stones. This makes Zhuang Rui suspicious of the origin of these so-called raw stones.

After walking seven or eight meters, Zhuang Rui noticed that almost every piece of material that showed promise had several people gathered around it, making him shake his head. He thought to himself, "Damn, Myanmar really knows how to make money. They just put a random piece of broken stone here, and I bet someone will bid on it eventually."

Zhuang Rui sighed inwardly. These people were willing to hit and be hit, and he couldn't control them. He just quickened his pace and continued to walk deeper into the Mingbiao area.

Along the way, they occasionally encountered acquaintances, but at this moment no one had time to talk. At most, they would exchange greetings and then continue looking down at their own materials. Some people were afraid that Zhuang Rui would come over to check out the rough stones they liked, and some even didn't look up when they saw Zhuang Rui walking towards them from afar.

Fortunately, almost no one in the room noticed Zhuang Rui's strange behavior. He was holding a notebook and a pen and walked for about thirty or forty minutes, but he didn't stop in front of any of the stones. At most, he would slow down and look at the number of a certain rough stone.

"I won't come again, let's go crazy this time..."

After walking through another row of open bidding areas, Zhuang Rui breathed a sigh of relief. Looking at the densely packed numbers in his notebook, he chuckled to himself. This public auction was very large-scale, and although the quality of the rough stones varied, Zhuang Rui still managed to pick out quite a few good pieces.

Next to the numbers in Zhuang Rui's notebook are listed the words a, b, c, and d, which are his classifications of the raw stones, marked according to their different qualities.

This time, Zhuang Rui wasn't as picky as before. Apart from icy jadeite, he also noted down any slightly better pieces, such as bean green jadeite and flower green jadeite, which he had previously looked down upon.

It's important to understand that a jewelry store doesn't rely solely on top-tier jewelry; items costing a few hundred yuan have a larger market and are indispensable products for every jewelry store.

"Peng Fei, why does it seem like Brother Zhuang hasn't stopped to look at these rocks?"

There were two people who noticed Zhuang Rui during the event: Peng Fei and Li Zhen.

These two were probably the most relaxed people at the Myanmar National Jade Center today, sipping the cool water provided by the organizers and leisurely observing the rough stone merchants who were rushing to and fro, their every step exuding a sense of dynamism.

Even the Burmese soldiers on duty in the distance kept glancing at the two of them, seemingly wondering why they weren't choosing any rough stones.

Peng Fei had complete confidence in Zhuang Rui. He curled his lip and said, "Why do you care so much? Brother Zhuang has a sharp eye. You can ask him to pick out a piece for you, and I guarantee your wife will have a complete set of jewelry..."

"You're just bragging, it's not that amazing..."

Li Zhen laughed upon hearing this, but when he looked in Zhuang Rui's direction, his smile immediately vanished, and he jumped up.

Chapter 960 Madness (Part Two)

"Something's happened, hurry over there..."

Li Zhen's gaze had only been off Zhuang Rui for a dozen seconds when, upon looking back, he found Zhuang Rui had vanished, and a crowd had gathered where he had been.

After kicking Peng Fei, Li Zhen sprang up from the bench and rushed towards the crowd. His right hand unconsciously touched his ribs, but he let go after thinking about it. It didn't seem like the right place to pull out that thing.

The two quickly ran to the crowd and saw that Zhuang Rui, who was surrounded, was safe and sound. They breathed a sigh of relief. Something had indeed happened, but the person who was in trouble was not Zhuang Rui.

"Everyone, make way, give us some space. If everyone crowds here, it will affect the patients..."

Zhuang Rui was also somewhat frustrated at this moment. He had been observing the rough stones all the way, but he never expected that when he got to this particular stone, the person who had been squatting on the ground observing the rough stones would suddenly collapse in front of him without saying a word.

Although Zhuang Rui wasn't exactly a Good Samaritan, judging from the man's appearance, he was probably a domestic colleague. He immediately carried the man to a nearby shed and loudly called out to the staff at the jade trading center.

Zhuang Rui's shout caused a stir among the people who were examining the jadeite rough stones. They thought they had found some good material and crowded around, making the already stagnant air even more polluted.

"Old Wu, this is Old Wu from Fujian, what's going on?"

"It's Old Wu. Looks like he's had heatstroke because of the hot weather."

"Hurry up, spit on my face..."

"Wasn't that Teacher Zhuang who saved the person?"

"Hey young man, do you know first aid? If you're not sure, move aside..."

Chinese people have always loved a good spectacle, and Zhuang Rui's loud call immediately attracted a large crowd. Fainting from gambling on stones is quite rare in a jade gambling market, and the crowd began to discuss and offer their opinions.

The onlookers outside were talking without any real understanding of the situation, which made Zhuang Rui extremely annoyed. Although he couldn't diagnose illnesses and didn't know what was wrong with this person, he couldn't help but have a keen eye for detail.

If Zhuang Rui hadn't used his spiritual energy to cleanse this man's body immediately, he probably would have been dead by now. And now there are people questioning him.

"Does anyone know him? Please keep an eye on him and take him to the hospital later..."

Upon hearing someone outside say they knew this person, Zhuang Rui decided he didn't want to stay any longer. Luckily, this wasn't in China, otherwise people might have blamed him for it.

These days, people on buses are afraid to give up their seats, and those who want to be Good Samaritans are afraid to save lives. If they see an elderly person fall and get hit by a car on the street, they all wish they could stay as far away as possible. Zhuang Rui didn't even know if the person was still alive. He didn't want to get involved in this trouble.

Just as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, a middle-aged man in his forties squeezed in and said, "I know him, we're from the same hometown. Young man, thank you so much..."

"It's nothing, no need to thank me. We're all from China, who wouldn't lend a hand if they saw this?"

Zhuang Rui found the man's words pleasant to hear, showing that everyone still has a sense of justice and that not everyone is an unreasonable and sophistry person.

After handing the patient over to the other person, Zhuang Rui said, "Let's get to the hospital quickly, I just saw that he seemed to have stopped breathing..."

Although Zhuang Rui had learned a smattering of acupuncture, he knew nothing about medicine. However, judging from the man's sallow complexion, he seemed to be quite ill.

"No... I don't want to go to the hospital..."

Just as Zhuang Rui finished speaking, a faint voice came from inside the shed.

"He's awake, that person is awake..."

"Old Wu, what's wrong with you?"

At this moment, Old Wu, who was leaning against the man behind him, struggled to open his eyes and said, "Old Li, I don't need to go to the hospital. I'm fine. It was too hot just now, and I got up a little too quickly. I'm fine now..."

Although he said he was fine, it was obvious to everyone that Old Wu was not in good condition, with large beads of sweat dripping from his forehead.

Old Li was quite loyal; he waved his hand and said, "No, you have to go to the hospital. We came together; if anything happens to you, I won't be able to face your wife when we get back..."

"No, Lao Li, I'll just lie here for a while. You go pick out the raw materials, don't let it interfere with your business..."

Old Wu's complexion improved, and the onlookers dispersed. The auction lasted only fifteen days, and every moment was precious.

Hearing what Lao Wu said, Lao Li advised, "Lao Wu, no matter how important this jade is, is it more important than your life? Don't say anything more. If you don't want to go to the hospital, I'll stay here and watch you for a while..."

"Okay, then I'll trouble you..." Old Wu's illness seemed to be more complicated than he had described. After saying that, he closed his eyes to rest, and the muscles in his face twitched from time to time.

"Brother Zhuang, are you alright?" Peng Fei and Li Zhen walked up to Zhuang Rui, and when they saw that it wasn't Zhuang Rui who was in trouble, the two brothers breathed a sigh of relief.

"It's alright, this guy probably has heatstroke, I'll rest for a bit too..."

Zhuang Rui had been walking for almost an hour. Although he wasn't tired, he was unbearably hot. Even after drinking a bowl of cold water, his throat still felt like it was on fire.

Zhuang Rui was puzzled by the man's behavior of half-lying on the chair and asked the man next to him, "Brother, what's wrong with this guy? Why doesn't he want to go to the hospital?"

Old Li sighed and said, "Sigh, I didn't even want to bring him this time, but he insisted. I've never heard of him having any illnesses before, otherwise I would have tied him up and taken him to the hospital..."

It turns out that this old Wu was originally a building materials businessman from Fujian. His business was quite successful, with a net worth of over ten million yuan, and he was quite famous in the area.

However, the building materials business has not been doing well in the past two years. With some spare money in hand, Lao Wu started thinking about investing in other industries. Perhaps it's because Fujian is close to the Chaoshan region, but somehow he ended up getting into the jade gambling industry.

Old Wu started with small bets, usually cutting materials worth 100,000 to 200,000 yuan. His profits and losses were mixed, but after more than a year, he made more than 2 million yuan. This was much easier than his work in the building materials industry, where he was exposed to all kinds of weather.

Miracles are never lacking in the jade gambling market. People often win big with small stakes, cutting out top-quality jade with very little money. After witnessing this a few times, Lao Wu gradually increased his stakes.

However, as a rare mineral, jadeite is incredibly difficult to mine; how many top-quality pieces are there? For someone like Zhuang Rui to consistently find top-quality jadeite is even harder than winning the lottery. Old Wu certainly doesn't have that kind of luck.

After gambling on various public auctions in China for half a year, Lao Wu suffered a complete defeat. His net worth of over ten million yuan shrank to just over three million yuan. His family business was also ruined, and he couldn't even take care of his wife and children.

Having become obsessed with jade gambling and to the point of madness, Lao Wu eventually mortgaged his car, house, and other real estate to the bank, borrowing more than ten million yuan. He then went to Myanmar, ready to gamble again and win back everything he had lost.

Who knew that on the very first day of the market opening, he would collapse inside the jade gambling market? Old Wu was burdened with more than ten million yuan in debt, so he refused to go to the hospital and planned to rest before continuing to select raw stones.

"Can someone with this kind of mentality gamble on stones?"

After hearing the story, Zhuang Rui was completely speechless. Looking at Old Wu, who was resting with his eyes closed, he didn't know whether to pity him or give him a good scolding.

While jade gambling also relies heavily on luck, it differs somewhat from traditional gambling. It demands more experience and discerning eye, requiring long-term exploration and practical experience. It's not something anyone can enter the field of jade gambling.

People like Lao Wu, who know nothing about jade and have no experience, enter the jade gambling industry completely clueless, practically just giving money away to those rough jade dealers.

After resting in the shade for a while, Old Wu was the first to perk up. He refused to lie down again and, holding a flashlight, continued his jade gambling adventure, which made Zhuang Rui shake his head repeatedly.

However, he couldn't easily offer advice. Everyone in the jade gambling circle thought they had a keen eye for detail, and if they didn't speak to someone they knew well when examining rough stones, they were likely to offend them.

This was just a minor incident. After resting for a while, Zhuang Rui continued to look at the jadeite rough stones in the open bidding area. However, after looking at four or five thousand pieces, he couldn't find a single piece of the top-quality jadeite he had imagined, which made Zhuang Rui a little disappointed.

Looking at the time, it was almost noon. Zhuang Rui quickly called Old Tang. He had said early in the morning that he would be hosting the event today, and he dared not stand up this senior figure in the jade industry.

Having arranged to meet Mr. Tang at the entrance of the jade center, Zhuang Rui called out to Peng Fei and Li Zhen, and then prepared to end the morning's jade gambling. Although the gains were not great, Zhuang Rui had noted down more than twenty pieces of jade from the first 3,000 numbers, intending to bid on them in the afternoon.

"Quick, hurry, the person is dying..."

Before they even reached the entrance of the jade trading center, they saw a crowd gathered there, and the one who spoke up seemed to be Old Li from over an hour ago.

"Is that Old Wu?"

Zhuang Rui was stunned for a moment, then quickly pushed through the crowd and squeezed in. Sure enough, it was Old Wu lying on the ground. His face was no longer sallow, but deathly pale, without a trace of blood.

As the saying goes, human life is of paramount importance, so Zhuang Rui didn't have time to ask any more questions and quickly poured the spiritual energy in his eyes into Old Wu's body.

Saving a life is more meritorious than building a seven-story pagoda. Zhuang Rui risked his life. This was the first time he had gone all out since his spiritual energy level was upgraded on Pirate Island.

However, what made Zhuang Rui feel uneasy was that the spiritual energy that had entered Lao Wu's body had not disappeared and was still under his control, as if the person lying on the ground was not a living being.

This was the first time Zhuang Rui had encountered such a situation since his eyes gained spiritual energy, and he was at a loss for what to do.