

Dragon Bones: A Novel Study Guide

Dragon Bones: A Novel by Lisa See

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Contents

Dragon Bones: A Novel Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Prologue, Chapter 1 - Chapter 3.....	4
Chapter 4 - Chapter 7.....	8
Chapter 8 - Chapter 12.....	12
Chapter 13 through Chapter 17.....	16
Chapter 18 - Chapter 22.....	20
Chapter 23 - Chapter 26.....	23
Chapter 27 - Author's Note.....	27
Characters.....	30
Objects/Places.....	37
Themes.....	40
Style.....	43
Quotes.....	45
Topics for Discussion.....	47



Plot Summary

Dragon Bones by Lisa See is a story of murder, artifact theft, Chinese history and love. Through a combined murder/theft investigation, David Stark and Liu Hulan rediscover their love for one another and discover that no one and nothing is as it seems.

When the body of a foreigner, Brian McCarthy, washes onto the shore of the Yangtze River, an investigation is ordered. Liu Hulan, a Red Princess, is assigned the case, but has issues dealing with things, as she has recently lost her only daughter to illness and blames herself. Simultaneously, her husband, David Stark, is assigned to a case of artifact theft at the same archaeological site from which Brian disappeared, that of Site 518. The couple, having marital problems, will have to work together to discover how the murder and the theft are related. When they reach the site, they meet a host of characters, including Catherine and Stuart Miller, a father/daughter team of wealth and power, Angela, the sister of the deceased archaeologist, Lily, a dishonest auction house worker who uses others to obtain precious artifacts, Dr. Ma, the leader of the site who appears to be hiding something, and Michael Quon, another wealthy man with a questionable purpose. Each of the members of the Site 518 team seem to be hiding something, and all seem to have motives of their own. When Lily is grotesquely killed and placed in her hotel room without a trace of evidence, Hulan and David realize their cases are linked, and are highly dangerous.

Over time, Hulan suspects a link between the two cases and a threatening religious cult she has been working with, the All Patriotic Society. Hulan and David soon learn that a missing relic, that of a ruyi, has been stolen and is believed to be the scepter of Yu the Great. When the lieutenant of the society shows up at an auction for the ruyi, David knows there is a link to Yu, the society, Hulan, and the murder, and knows he must save Hulan. Meanwhile, Hulan is becoming closer to Michael Quon. She soon realizes, however, that Michael is really Xiao Da, leader of the society. David arrives just in time to save his wife, but in the process, Michael escapes and the ruyi is lost. Through their journey, however, Hulan and David find they are able to forgive one another for the past, and Hulan is able to forgive herself for her daughter's death. Set against a backdrop of political corruption, Chinese culture and history, and the morality of the building of Three Gorges Dam, Dragon Bones is not only an intriguing mystery novel, but also a thought-provoking look at the pros and cons of China's greatest architectural achievement.



Prologue, Chapter 1 - Chapter 3

Prologue, Chapter 1 - Chapter 3 Summary

Dragon Bones is a story of politics, love, religion, archeology, power, and greed set in the middle of China, on the Yangtze River. As Liu Hulan and David Stark investigate murder and theft at Site 518, they find themselves pulled into the depths of a religious cult, the All Patriots Society. Over the course of their investigation, Hulan finds herself questioning her own past, as David questions the future.

In the prologue, readers follow the body of a deceased man through the waters of the Yangtze River. For miles, his body passes villages, factories, and cliffs, and the body becomes more disfigured. A young boy kicks it, thinking it is the body of a playing friend as they swim. He backs away in disgust but says nothing. The body continues to float through the Three Gorges, and the narrator discusses the history of the river, and the future inundation of the landscape as a result of the building of the Three Gorges dam. He reaches the dam, where the narrator discusses the great achievement the dam will be. A local farmer cleans the shoreline and finds the body, noting it is a white man, a foreigner.

Chapter one opens with Inspector Liu Hulan of the Ministry of Public Security at Tiananmen Square in China, pondering the gathering of an assembly of the All Patriotic Society, an illegal religious organization. Five years prior, Hulan made a deal with a group of high powered political figures who rule China. She was brought before them after a failure to save the lives of 150 women in an American toy factory operating in China. In her deal, she was allowed to marry foreigner attorney David Stark and to give birth to her half American child. In exchange, she was required to follow all Chinese laws, obey all orders, and follow party lines. She laments that life is different now, since her marriage is failing and her daughter is dead. As Hulan walks the square, she is noticeable by the press, as she is a Red Princess. Hulan was sent to the country during the Cultural Revolution, and brought back at age twelve to denounce her father, a high ranking follower of Mao Zedong. He was sent to labor camp, and Hulan was sent to the US, where she met David after law school.

Hulan notices a woman and her child as Tang Wenting, a lieutenant of the society, begins to speak of Xiao Da, their leader. The woman pulls out a large knife, and announces that she is here to punish the girl. Hulan draws her weapon, and Tang tries to calm the woman, but to no avail. Hulan shoots the woman in the shoulder, only to find the bullet shatters the bone, causing a cut in the carotid artery. The woman dies, and Tang begins to shout that Hulan is a mother killer and threatens retribution. Meanwhile, David Stark, Hulan's estranged husband, wakes alone in the house they used to share, and pays tribute to his deceased daughter's room. He flips on the television and watches in horror as news of his wife's situation comes through. David immediately goes to Hulan's compound to wait for her and thinks of how he and Hulan were happy in the past. When Chaowen was born, they disagreed on many aspects of raising the child



and David gave up much for the sake of his family. At three and a half years old, Chaowen developed a fever, and soon died from bacterial meningitis. Hulan became inconsolable and distant. She moved out, and David knows she punishes herself each day for Chaowen's death. When she arrives, the two talk briefly, and Hulan asks him to dinner.

In chapter two, Hulan visits her mother, who is in a wheelchair and plagued with dementia since the Cultural Revolution. After, Hulan thinks of the All Patriotic Society, and how their influence is spreading as they convince labor workers to steal, launder money, sabotage buildings, and make defective products to denounce the government. Hulan knows she should support religious freedom, having been educated in the US, but she strongly believes the society is wrong because of their manipulation of the public at the expense of the state. Hulan is asked to visit Vie Minister Zai, a father figure to Hulan but also a man in a high position of power over her. Zai tells Hulan that she is being assigned to a case on the Yangtze River of a deceased foreign man. His tone makes her realize those in power are listening and that she has no choice but to accept the case. Hulan travels to the realm of Pathologist Fong, and he presents her with a highly decomposed American body. When asked, Fong produces paperwork found in the man's pockets, but the symbols on them are faded. Hulan contacts the Embassy, and is told of a missing American archaeologist named Brian McCarthy. Hulan realizes this information was easily obtainable, and wonders again why Zai is using her. McCarthy worked as an archaeologist on a site near the Yangtze River. She then emails Dr. Ma, Brian's supervisor at the site, who emails in return, noting that they believed Brian had accidentally fallen into the river. When she returns to inform Zai of her findings, the two speak of the death of her child, and Zai reminds her she must get on with her life. He tells her to return to his office at three.

In chapter three, David thinks of his position in the only Chinese branch of his American law office as he is visited by Director Ho Youmei of the State Cultural Relics Bureau. After pleasantries, Ho speaks highly of David's known abilities to maintain discretion in sensitive matters of state. He notes that China is building the Three Gorges Dam, but that dam waters will cover over two thousand archaeological sites. At one of those sites, that of Site 518, artifacts have gone missing. Ho admits he is unsure of all the artifacts that have been stolen, and admits site 518 has seen five deaths, including a drowning of a foreigner. David is told he will work closely with Hulan at Site 518 and that he will meet with her, Ho, and Zai at three. At the meeting, Hulan is informed of the relic thefts, and both David and Hulan are told of illegal actions by auction houses as they buy and sell illegally obtained relics. David is to find and retrieve any of the relics he can find, while Hulan is to investigate the deaths of the five workers. After Hulan leaves, Zai explains to David that this case is an excuse to send him and Hulan to the country together to rekindle their marriage.

Prologue, Chapter 1 - Chapter 3 Analysis

In the prologue, the reader is introduced to several themes and aspects of the novel in a very short amount of time. The descriptions used to explain the Gorges are vivid and



detailed, letting the reader really understand the layout of the land and the power behind the river, which is a primary theme in the novel. Additionally, as the body floats, the reader is given insight into the poverty of the people living on the river, which helps to set the stage for understanding the working class in China. Finally, as the body is discovered, the phrasing, that of "white devil", introduces the feelings of the Chinese on foreign parties within the state. This history of the river, including the concepts of Yu the Great, and the inevitable inundation of the land is a vital part of the story, and this short prologue serves to at least give the reader a context from which to base the rest of the novel.

Chapter one introduces yet more of the themes and concepts used throughout the rest of the novel, as well as two of the most important characters, those of Liu Hulan and David Stark. It is clear from this chapter alone that Liu Hulan is a rare and powerful figure in China as a woman of wealth in a power position with the most feared political group, the Ministry of Public Security. From her deals with the heads of state to her father to her upbringing and her current position, Hulan has led a life few in China even dream of. However, it is also clear Hulan is a deeply hurt woman. Her past failures with the factory workers, her marriage, and the death of her daughter all serve to force Hulan to hide behind her passion as an inspector. She has chosen to dive into the All Patriotic Society as a refuge to her pain. The All Patriotic Society is introduced here as well, and they play a large part in the novel. Xiao Da is introduced as the ghost figurehead of the society, and Tang, the lieutenant, introduces the idea of Xiao bringing the people together with a symbol of power. Further, the threatening nature of Tang indicates the true violent nature of the society, as well as foreshadows the danger Hulan is in following her actions.

Hulan's accidental killing of the mother in this chapter, in front of television cameras, is a subtle clue that Hulan is being set up. She mentions several times in the chapter that it is odd for television crews to be present, since part of Hulan's deal with the government was that she would be kept out of the public eye. Because of her high profile, she is wary of publicity, and the allowance of the media at an illegal religious event in the first place is questionable. This foreshadows Hulan being set up by Zai in the following chapters.

Chapter one also introduces David Stark, the estranged husband of Hulan. It is clear from the beginning that David loves his wife dearly, and realizes she is suffering from guilt. He, too, questions his role in his daughter's death, and has additional pain as his wife pulls away from him in an effort to protect herself from her pain. David gave up his own dreams for those of his wife and child, and while he forgives Hulan, he does recognize his own sacrifices are often overlooked by her. This chapter's explanation of the death of Chaowen shows why Hulan believes she is, in part, to blame for the illness, as her daughter may have lived with earlier medical treatment. In addition, this chapter explains David's own guilt as he struggles to come to grips with his inability to provide the perfect life for his wife and child. David's attempts to console Hulan are consistently rejected and although it is apparent she does care for him, it is also clear their marriage is troubled.



Chapter two reveals even more information about the All Patriots Society, which helps to show their rise to power, and their danger. Clearly, Chinese policy takes a dark view of those who wish to overthrow the State, and the society threatens their power over the people. Hulan believes the society is equally bad, but because they prey on the weak and make promises the hurting believe in. This belief is what leads Hulan through her journey to tie the society to the murders in the story, and this is an important factor. Also in this chapter, Zai is introduced as a man Hulan both respects and loves as a father. His words and actions in this chapter, however, also show how much Zai and his staff are manipulated by the state. Zai is controlled by the state, and therefore Hulan is, as well. On the other hand, his words about Hulan and her actions with the child show she care for her, as well as show Hulan's weaknesses, as well.

The case assigned to Hulan in this chapter foreshadows her involvement in Site 518 later in the novel. It is clear from the beginning that the body Hulan is researching is that of the body in the prologue of the novel. The papers found on Brian's body foreshadow information later in the novel about Brian's work in Chinese language and symbols. However, the ease in which she obtains the identity of the man furthers the idea that she is being set up for something. Her appointment with Zai at three foreshadows her and David's combined assignment of the case.

Chapter three focuses on giving background information about David's expertise as a lawyer. It is clear from Ho's conversation that David is highly respected, and even Hulan admits he is a brilliant man. David knows how to be discrete, which is something the Chinese government needs to maintain power. As a result, it is no surprise he is hired to handle the thefts of artifacts at Site 518. Ho's information to David introduce the idea of the unsystematic cataloging of materials at the site, and also introduces the idea that the deaths at Site 518, of which there are many, are related to the stolen artifacts, and that both may relate to the building of the controversial Three Gorges Dam. During the meeting with Zai, Ho, Hulan, and David, it is clear the two of them are being pushed to work together. Zai's comments at the end of the chapter suggest this pushing is being done for their sake, but when combined with information from previous chapters, it is suggested that there is more to the union than Zai suggests.



Chapter 4 - Chapter 7

Chapter 4 - Chapter 7 Summary

Chapter four opens with Hulan and David discussing Zai's plans for their romantic getaway. After packing, the two travel to Chongqing and board a ferry. Once aboard, Hulan finds herself again thinking of her husband fondly as they dine together and walk the ship, hand in hand. Back in the room, however, the two take separate bunks, and Hulan thinks of Chaowen, her daughter, and whether she could have done more to save her life. At dawn, they pass the first of the Three Gorges, Qutang Gorge, and Hulan again grasps David's hand. When the couple reaches Bashan, they meet Dr. Ma Zhongyan, the leader of the Site 518 excavation. As he drives them to the site, he explains that their lodging, the Panda Guest house, is the old home of a wealthy family. Hulan, however, notices All Patriotic Society posters. Once at the site, Ma explains that the site is digging for relics of the Ba civilization, as the area will be flooded when the dam is complete. Ma introduces them to Stuart Miller, owner of Stuart Enterprises, who has a large contract with the Chinese government for the building of the dam, and his daughter, Catherine, a young and beautiful woman. Stuart admits he sponsors part of the digs because he likes to own Chinese relics, and if the auction houses sell stolen relics with forged papers, he will buy them. David and Hulan both think Ma and the others are hiding something.

In chapter five, Hulan and David listen as several at their lunch table discuss the Nine Tripods of Yu the Great, which were used to create a visual map of his empire. They are introduced to a variety of experts, including Dr. Paul Strong, an aging linguist, Dr. Michael Quon, a multi-talented expert in many fields, five Chinese representatives from various museums, known as the vultures, and Lily Sinclair, a worker for the Cosgrove's auction house. Lily and Stuart tease one another about their intentions at the site. Catherine explains, as she discusses the Nine Tripods again, that Yu the Great is a figure of legend. She notes his control over the floods is recorded in the Shu Ching, China's historical text. The group discusses symbols of power, and Michael notes that modern and ancient rulers had symbols of power, including Mao and Xiao Da. When Hulan reveals she is investigating a murder, however, the conversation rapidly shifts to the safety of the site.

Chapter six finds David, Hulan, and Ma where Brian is believed to have fallen into the river. Hulan notes the bareness of the landscape and the dangerousness of the cliffs and paths that line the raging river. Ma takes them to a small beach to where Brian's belongings were found. Ma explains that three of the local deaths were due to a bridge collapse and that the bridge was likely built faulty as a result of corruption with the builders. When pressed, Ma admits that the local police captain is the brother in law of the contractor for the bridge. Another man fell from a bunk ladder and died. A final man, Wu, drown in a local whirlpool. Ma admits he does not know all the relics that are missing, because all were not cataloged properly. He continues by noting the most important missing piece is a ruyi, or scepter, made of a unique fungus. When asked



about the families of the deceased, Ma notes most were moved to distant provinces, but the Wu family still lives near the caves.

Back at the guest house in chapter seven, Hulan surprises David as she kisses him in their shared room, and the two make love. As they talk afterward, Hulan questions how to prove Brian was murdered. David and Hulan attend dinner at the guest house dining area, where they meet Angela McCarthy, Brian's sister. She tells the couple Brian was intelligent and driven, but had a lack of common sense. He had a tendency to sleep with a lot of women, including those he worked with, such as Lily and Catherine. Lily explains, when asked to join them, that she didn't want to reveal her relations with Brian in front of the others, but David suspects Lily was also sleeping with Stuart. Lily explains that Brian did freelance work for her, including research. Lily begins telling the group of the guest house, where the wealthy Wang family once lived. During the Revolution, Master Wang disappeared from the middle of the courtyard and remarried. His widow, Madame Wang, still works with Cosgrove's on selling the family heirlooms, which is why Lily is on site. The three walk together to their rooms, and at her door, Lily asks to ride with David and Hulan to the site the following day.

Chapter 4 - Chapter 7 Analysis

Chapter four introduces the idea that Hulan and David still have feelings for one another. Hulan, although she at first is reluctant, begins to warm to her husband again, and the two seem to enjoy one another's company, although they still sleep separately. However, these feelings are also mingled with a high sense of guilt, as each time she faces her husband she is forced to think of Chaowen, and whether she did enough to save her.

This chapter also introduces the concept of the loss of historic relics as a result of the Three Gorges Dam. As the guide informs the guests on the ferry of Qutang Gorge, readers are treated to information about the hanging coffins of the Ba people. This section is brief, but it does help the reader to understand the great loss China will experience when the waters from the dam inundate the landscape. This theme is continued by Dr. Ma Zhongyan, introduced in this chapter, as he too discusses the relics that will be lost following the dam.

Ma is a highly uneasy man who seems to be hiding something. He is cordial and kind, but seems resentful of David and Hulan's presence. Again in this chapter, the All Patriotic Society is mentioned, and it is clear that their activities are tolerated in this area, showing they are strong, and possibly involved in governmental corruption here. This foreshadows the knowledge later in the novel of the direct involvement of officers in the society. Ma's introduction to the Ba people, and the Four Mysteries of the cultural development of China, show the true value of China's history, and of the relics involved. In addition, Catherine Miller and Stuart's conversations about the art smuggling of auction houses and Stuart's own questionable activities show the value of the items to collectors, as well.



Chapter five helps to introduce many of the mythical aspects of the novel, as well as to introduce many of the characters. During lunch conversations, the Nine Tripods of Yu the Great are discussed. It is clear that Lily really believes that the Nine Tripods could exist in the Yangtze, and it is equally clear that Catherine helps to feed Lily's belief. This foreshadows knowledge later in the novel that Catherine is the one who planted the idea in Lily, though Brian. The history of Yu the Great, and the beliefs of his acts to control the waters, play into the concept of the work on the dam, and the control of the government over nature, as dictated by the Mandate of Heaven. Combined with the information from the Shu Ching, these stories lend to the idea that any relic found of Yu the Great would be a very powerful symbol indeed. Michael's comparison of Mao and Xiao in terms of power over the people is to be noted, as later, it is such power that Michael admits he seeks.

The attacks of the group on Lily foreshadow several events in the novel. It is suggested that Lily's work for Cosgrove's sometimes involves illegal selling of artifacts, which is later proved to be true. Additionally, the references to who Lily will drown next refer to the death of Wu, the man who drowned, and a story told in future chapters about the cause of his death. It is clear that no one particularly cares for Lily, and that everyone has a goal of their own at the site. Stuart and Catherine both appear snobbish, and as though they are above the law, making Hulan suspicious of them. The vultures, clearly out for themselves, do not appear to care much for Ma, but do little to stick up for themselves. While Ma may run the site, it is obvious that everyone has an agenda.

Chapter six helps to explain the death of Brian, or at least Ma's interpretation of it, and again helps introduce the landscape around the site. Hulan's original note that the landscape is barren foreshadows the finding of the giant fungus underground later in the novel, as does the smell Hulan and David notice when they enter the caves. Additionally, Hulan's brief hearing of the cry of a baby combined with the passing of the Wu home, and child, foreshadows the knowledge of the cave structure, and the secret entrance to the caves from the Wu home. The information about the collapsed bridge and the knowledge that the local captain's brother-in-law was the contractor suggests corruption that Hulan and David have already mentioned previously in the novel. The death of so many people at such a small site is of concern for both David and Hulan, and both suspect a link between the theft of relics and the murders. Their suspicion of Lily is understandable, considering her unpopularity in the group and the group's opinions of her.

The conversation between Ma and Hulan and David in the caves about the artifacts introduces another object used throughout the novel, that of the ruyi of Yu. Ma's description of the object makes it clear that it is priceless. The mention of the jade disks, too, foreshadows the reappearance of those disks at the hands of Brian's killer, Xiao, later in the novel.

Chapter seven further develops the relationship between David and Hulan as their intimacy is taken to a new level. David admits he is cautious, but happy, and Hulan, too, seems relaxed. As they talk, however, it is clear that they both are aware that something seems amiss with the experts at the site, and that all of them seem suspicious in one



way or another. When Angela is introduced, they learn more of Lily's involvement, and it becomes more clear that Lily is definitely a person of interest, having had a sexual relationship with Brian, and having had him work for her directly. Lily's stories of the guest house, while entertaining, seem a bit exaggerated, lending to the idea that Lily's stories are bathed in half truths. Additionally, her story of Wang's disappearance in the courtyard and his continued smuggling of heirlooms suggests a hidden passage, foreshadowing events later in the novel as deaths occur without a clear escape for the perpetrator.



Chapter 8 - Chapter 12

Chapter 8 - Chapter 12 Summary

Chapter eight opens with Hulan and David discussing the case at breakfast, as both agree that Ma is hiding something. When they arrive at the Jeep, Lily has not yet arrived. David tries her room, but to no avail. Hulan and David return to the room, and as she opens the door, David immediately smells death. When Hulan turns on the light, they see Lily, dead, lying naked on top of her sheets, which are completely clean. She has been swabbed down with her own blood, and her feet have been cut off, but there is no blood elsewhere, indicating she was killed somewhere else. Her hair has been combed through with blood, her nose has been cut off, and there is something under the blood on her forehead. The local security arrives, and Hulan quickly takes control from Captain Hom. Hulan sends for a pathologist, and has Hom and his men secure the building. Once in the dining room, Hulan addresses everyone in both English and Chinese, informing them of the murder. For the Chinese, she stresses the responsibility of everyone to help foreigners as a sign of superiority. Hulan tells David to go to the site, while she and Hom interview the foreigners.

In chapter nine, Hulan first instructs the local officers on how to interview the hotel staff. Hulan herself interviews Angela first, who is useless as she is extremely upset. Next, Hulan interviews Stuart, who begins cocky, but once Hulan puts him in his place, he is cooperative. Hulan asks repeated about her affiliation with the All Patriotic Society, but Stuart doubts she or anyone at the site is a member. During her interview with Michael Quon, he admits he likes Lily, but not her profession. He is relaxed and forthcoming, but admits he is at the site solely because he wanted to see it before it was under water. He says he and Brian went caving together last year, but that Brian was missing when Michael arrived this year. David, on his way to Site 518, thinks of Hulan, and notices their newfound closeness has already gone. He finds Ma, and informs her of Lily's murder, but he seems distant. David seeks the vultures, and talks with them about the thefts. All believe the foreigners are to blame, and all seem to blame Ma in some way. The vultures agree the ruyi that was stolen is likely at Cosgrove's, through Lily Sinclair. One of the vultures, Li Guo, reminds David that smuggling artifacts is simple, and that no one has clear jurisdiction. Back in the interview room, Hulan questions Catherine, only to find she lies. First, she claims not to have seen Lily. When pressed, Catherine admits she and Lily walked through town together, but said little, other than to discuss what Stuart would be purchasing at the Cosgrove's auction. She also notes Lily and Stuart were likely having sexual relations, and that Lily is the likely thief of the artifacts from the site. Back at the site, David gets drunk while discussing Michael Quon, and the other members of the team with the vultures. They note Brian had developed an interest in dragon bones, or ancient oracle bones used for divination, because on an interest in Da Yu, and his role in the beginning of civilization.

In chapter ten, Hulan explains to David that she thinks the death of Lily was a punishment to her for her role in the death of the mother at the All Patriotic Society.



David tries to understand her rationale for a link, and then tries to convince her there is no logical link. Hulan also wonders why Ma and Ho neglected to tell David the ruyi was being auctioned by Cosgrove's. David decides he will fly to Hong Kong to stop the auction the following day. The couple arrive at the home of Wu's family and they are greeted by the man's blind father. In the room is also Wu's widow and his child. The inside of the home has no windows to the outside, and a barrier blocks the entrance. Wu is convinced his son was killed by the foreigners. He reports that Wu worked with one of them, and the day he died, Wu mentioned he wanted to take something from the ground that would unite the people. Wu's father repeats that the land is living earth. When asked, both report they never spoke to Brian. As they leave, the father tells Hulan to go to the next All Patriotic Society meeting, and learn their ways.

In chapter eleven, David and Hulan argue about the role of the All Patriots Society in the happenings at Site 518. The closeness the two felt before has gone. They speak with Pathologist Fong about Lily's body. He reveals that the body was washed in blood both before the body as moved to the room, and again after. He admits there were at least three killers. In addition, Fong reports Lily was branded with the Chinese symbol for river on the forehead and that Brian has the same mark.

in chapter twelve, the night staff of the hotel reports they saw nothing. At the All Patriotic Society meeting, Tang Wenting is present, and as Hulan listens, Xiao Da speaks from deep within the caves. He pushes the masses to fight against the dam and the government, and begins to speak against Stuart Miller. Suddenly, Hulan is singled out by Tang, and accused of bringing a corrupt foreigner, David, into their presence. David and Hulan are thrown from the room. Hulan is now convinced that Zai sent her to find Xiao Da, but David disagrees. Hulan finally admits she blames herself for the death of Lily and the woman in the square. David realizes her anger and frustration is really about Chaowen. When David tries to comfort her, however, Hulan turns on him, blaming him for Chaowen's death. Angrily, he reminds her the death was her fault. The two return to the hotel and David realizes that Hulan may never heal.

Chapter 8 - Chapter 12 Analysis

The events in chapter eight begin to show the true dangers of Site 518, and begin to unravel the mystery of the links between the deaths and the relics. It is clear to David and Hulan that Ma is not what he appears, foreshadowing their discovery that he is a spy later in the novel. At this point, however, his actions, as well as his frequent disappearances, make him seem a suspect. The discovery of Lily's body, pristine in its condition and yet gruesome in detail, shows the true viciousness of the killers, and clearly tells Hulan that Brian's murder was not accidental. The way in which her body was mutilated as well as the painstakingly detailed covering of blood on the body show Hulan the killers were not hurried. David's response to the body is normal, as are Su's and the other officer's, but Hulan shows she is a strong veteran of such cases as the decay and stench do not bother her. Her attitude toward the local police, too, while seemingly rude, does allow her complete control over the situation, and shows the true power of Chinese government, even in local matters. Hulan's comments to the Chinese



workers shows her role as a symbol of power. Her use of nationalism to evoke cooperation again shows the persuasiveness of the Chinese government. Hulan takes her position seriously, and although David is hurt at the end of the chapter when she excludes him from her interviews, it is clear Hulan believes his presence would be harmful.

Chapter nine helps to show more of the personalities of the workers at Site 518. Angela, who seemed upset but tolerable at the death of Brian, is beside herself with grief. While she is of little help, Hulan still believes Angela is hiding something, as her actions often betray her words. Stuart Miller appears at first to be a cocky rich man, who cares little for Chinese authority. When he is reminded that he is in China and that his powerful friends are not nearby, however, Stuart shows he is a true businessman, and begins to cooperate. His assurances that he and his daughter have no information, however, leave Hulan to think he knows more than he is letting on, and his manner as a rich man annoys Hulan. Michael Quon's interview is less revealing, although Michael does admit he and Brian went caving together. It is clear in this chapter that Hulan finds herself attracted to Michael, although at this point she is unwilling to admit her attraction. Finally, her interview with Catherine is revealing, in that she catches her in a lie. On prodding, however, it is clear Catherine is a strong woman who is trying to impress her wealthy father. Her relationship with Lily was clearly punctured with jealousy, making her also a suspect in the eyes of the reader. Additionally, the knowledge that Lily was smuggling artifacts, and that she and Stuart were sleeping together, lends credit to the idea that perhaps Stuart killed Lily. It is clear, following these interviews, that everyone has secrets here, and that everyone is hiding something. It is also clear from this chapter that Hulan will not let go of the idea that the All Patriotic Society is involved in the events of Site 518 in one aspect or another. David appears to be right, as Hulan seems to use the society as a scapegoat for nearly everything that occurs in her life.

David's conversation with Ma, too, suggests something is amiss. Told of one more death, Ma seems little concerned, which is a red flag to David. This is furthered by the vultures' comments about Ma, and their clear dislike of him. However, they also suggest Ma is more than he appears, foreshadowing again the knowledge later that Ma is a spy for the government. Li Guo's seemingly uncharacteristic outburst in this chapter signifies his true role as a spy for Public Security. Finally, their conversations of Brian's interest in dragon bones and Da Yu, combined with the sheet of symbols found on his body and his interest in Dr. Strong, suggest Brian was working on something to do with Chinese linguistics as a link to Da Yu and modern culture.

Chapter ten shows just how obsessed Hulan is with the society, and just how much she blames herself for the things that occur in life. In a way, this self-incrimination shows Hulan's selfishness, as she is unable to believe the situation has nothing to do with her directly. David's attempts to rationalize things shows him to be a more logical thinker. Again in this chapter, too, Hulan and David note that Zai consistently had information he did not share with them, indicating there is more to the story than meets the eye.

The home of the Wu family in this chapter is a clear sign that something is special about either the family, or their home. The complete lack of windows, when combined with a



barred door, signify the family is trying to protect something, although it is unclear as to what that is. Wu's death, when combined with this knowledge, becomes another questionable accident. Additionally, the father's clear dislike of foreigners, the widow's clear fright of Hulan and David, as well as their involvement in the All Patriotic Society, do suggest a link between this family, the murders, the relics, and the society, although that link is still vague. Wu's comments about taking something from the ground foreshadow the knowledge of Yu's ruyi, and the father's comments of the living earth signify his knowledge about the growths in the underground caves later in the novel.

Chapter eleven gives more details about the death of Lily and the similarities between this death and Brian's. It is discovered that both bodies were branded and both were missing their noses. It is now clear both are connected, considering the rare circumstances. The knowledge that there are multiple killers and that they took the time to drain the blood and bring that blood to the room to bathe her in it shows not only amazing coordination, but a level of cruelty that is difficult to comprehend. Additionally, the link to the All Patriotic Society that Hulan is convinced exists is pushing a wedge between David and Hulan, showing the fragility of their true relationship. While they both love one another, it is questionable, based on the walls Hulan puts up, that their relationship can survive, despite their recent closeness.

In chapter twelve, Zai's warnings about Hulan and her propensity for putting herself in danger comes true. Her actions at the meeting of the All Patriotic Society show she has little concern for her own well being. She is completely obsessed with the cult, to the point of irrationality. Tang Wenting, while dangerous and clearly angry with Hulan, does not act violently, and David realizes Hulan's obsession is clouding her judgment. When it comes out that Hulan is hiding her grief behind her obsession, David's attempts to console her are met with vicious accusations. Readers finally see David break, as Hulan's hurtful words cause him to admit his own frustration with Hulan at their death of their daughter. It is clear that Chaowen's death has caused possible irreparable damage to Hulan, and that she may never forgive herself, or David, and that David, too, harbors unspoken feelings about the death. In addition, the comments at the meeting show Xiao Da to be against the dam, and a force for the people to oppose the dam as a fight against a government who is corrupt. Further, the comments made against Stuart Miller, although indirectly, hint that he may be the next victim.



Chapter 13 through Chapter 17

Chapter 13 through Chapter 17 Summary

The following morning, in chapter thirteen, Hulan knows she has hurt David. As she says goodbye to him as he leaves for Hong Kong, she means to say much, but in fact, says little and hurts him further. Hulan makes a decision to finish the case, and work on letting go of her past. She locates Stuart Miller at the dam, and from his comments it is clear Stuart is impressed with the dam. In his trailer on site, Hulan notices several relics. Hulan informs Stuart of the society's threats against him, and he points out that he is safe at the dam. She questions him about his involvement with Brian and Lily, and he notes that Brian was Lily's courier. Expanding, he reports that Lily smuggled artifacts Brian brought to her out of China, but that the pieces were not from Site 518. He admits he purchased illegal items from Lily, and Hulan asks about their relationship.

As David and Fong fly over the landscape in chapter fourteen, they see many families waiting for rescue from the high flood waters. In Hong Kong, David meets with Angus Fitzwilliams, the operator of Cosgrove's. When informed of her death, Fitzwilliams shows emotion, but quickly asks about Lily's things. When pressed, Fitzwilliams admits they purchased goods from Lily that were questionable, and that some are even being auctioned that night. Pressed further, he admits that Lily threatened to tell his wife of his non-existent affair with her if he were to fire her. David informs Fitzwilliams that the items to be sold are likely stolen relics from Site 518, but he asks for proof. David is given a catalog of items for that evening's auctions, and sent away.

In chapter fifteen, Stuart admits he and Lily were lovers, but notes it was a matter of business. When asked about problems at the dam, Stuart admits there have been issues, but blames them on Chinese government interference, unskilled labor, and coincidence. Hulan pressures Stuart, asking about Wu, the All Patriotic Society, and other unconnected issues, but Stuart denies any knowledge of the day workers or their religious activities. Stuart angrily notes that there are many who would like the dam stopped, including American groups such as Greenpeace, and that the Chinese government has placed the entirety of the responsibility for the dam on foreign shoulders, so if it fails, they are to blame. Stuart admits he loves the project, because of its size, but that he also seeks to preserve the artifacts, hence his funding of the digs. When accused of not caring about the displaced people, Stuart points out that the new villages built for relocation have running water and electricity and opportunity. He discusses the massive deaths in prior years from flooding, and reminds Hulan that a few should be sacrificed for the many. He claims he wants to make a difference.

In chapter sixteen, Hulan pours over her notes to find inconstant stories, and she discovers that Angela was actually in the country prior to the notification of her brother's disappearance. She also looks through the files of the other site representatives, the vultures, the workers and the night staff, but to no avail. Hulan begins to search the grounds, looking for clues, and finds herself at the back wall of the compound, where an



old woman guards the gate. She explains that she has watched the gate for many years, as she is a member of the Wang family. She explains to Hulan that the door to the gate is loud, and locked at all times. Only she has a key. Hulan is convinced, and knows no one could have come through the back. She is left with the question of how the killers moved the body.

In chapter seventeen, Hulan seeks Ma, but finds he has left for Hong Kong. Undeterred, she locates Hom to ask for the missing case files of the day worker's deaths. As they talk, Hom explains that Site 518 is highly important, due to the ancient artifacts found. Ma had come to him the night Brian disappeared, and the two hunted for him, but when his belongings were found by the river, they assumed an accidental drowning. When Hulan notes that Hom neglected to mention in his report that Stuart had offered to help in the search, he admits Ma told him to leave that out. Hulan suddenly realizes Ma works for the Ministry of State Security. Hom admits he did not create files for the killed day workers, in an effort to spare their families. He rationalizes that if no reports are made, no one is suspicious and looking for retribution. He admits his brother-in-law skimmed on the bridge that collapsed, but denies he is corrupt, and claims he wants only to avoid civil unrest. When Hom admits he allows the All Patriotic Society to meet in an effort to capitalize on their peaceful ways, Hulan reminds him he can still follow the rules and save himself. He advises Hulan he will soon die, but that in the meantime, he hopes to see his people moved to safety. After the meeting, Hulan admits to herself that Hom is a brave man. She is stopped by Michael Quon, who invites her to walk with him. The two explore Qutang Gorge, and Michael points out the beauty of the landscape. Michael speaks freely of Chinese legend and Yu. Michael invites her to dinner, and Hulan eventually accepts. When pressed for the story of Yu, Michael gives a short version, but when Hulan notes that legends come from the minds of simple villagers, Michael points out that the villagers may know more than even Hulan.

Chapter 13 through Chapter 17 Analysis

Chapter thirteen shows the true depth of Hulan's inability to communicate her feelings. She avoids many things she wishes to say to David, and instead continues her matter-of-fact way, knowing she is hurting him severely. Her determination to attempt to let go shows she wants to change, but her continued inability to express her feelings is a problem. Her meetings with Stuart Miller again show he loves Chinese relics and that he is wealthy, but also show he is impressed with the sheer magnitude of the dam project. Stuart's lack of concern for his safety again shows his belief that he is untouchable. This is again shown true with his admittance that he has purchased merchandise smuggled by Brian to Lily, and for which Lily faked the paperwork. However, Hulan, armed with the knowledge that Stuart and Lily were sleeping together, asks the question at the end of the chapter that is designed to throw Stuart off. Hulan's question is loaded, in that she already knows the answer, but is looking to trap Stuart in a lie.

In chapter fourteen, more information is revealed about the corruption in the Hong Kong auction house of Cosgrove's. Fitzwilliams' character represents the business interest of China, in that while he is saddened by Lily's death, he is far more concerned about what



will happen to any artifacts she had in her possession. His absolute resolve that his auction house is not in the wrong by selling items with questionable papers seems to show the depth of his corruption, but after the revelation that Lily threatened to ruin his marriage, this knowledge becomes proof that Lily was, in fact, a manipulative person. Fitzwilliams, however, has an opportunity to stop the sale, and he refuses, again showing that to him, money is more important than honor.

In addition, the narration of the rising waters and the deaths as a result of floods shows again the fine line between beauty and death that the Yangtze River represents. The author, in this chapter, presents first the majesty of the dam through Stuart. Next, she describes the horrible consequences of the existing floodwaters that the dam can help to save. At the same time, prior in the novel, the author discusses how the dam will cover valuable archaeological sites within China, and how the lands being inundated will force millions to relocate and lose their homes. In showing both sides, the author forces the reader to understand both the pros and the cons of the dam, and to make their own conclusions about the legitimacy of the dam, based on factual information.

Chapter fifteen reveals even more about Stuart, and his feelings about the dam. When shoved, it becomes clear Stuart resents the Chinese government for forcing him and his team to take full responsibility for the dam, even though they are the ones holding up supplies and paying unskilled workers minimum pay. In addition, he knows there is extreme corruption, and is annoyed that he will be blamed for problems. His love for history is part of his reasoning for wanting to help preserve the artifacts. Through Stuart's comments about how the dam will force new cities, and how those cities will be more modern, the author shows again a positive side of the Three Gorges dam. Lisa See again compares the pros and cons of the river through the characters in the story, allowing the reader to make his or her own conclusions.

Chapter sixteen simply adds to the mystery in the novel by showing that even Hulan cannot figure out how the killers gained access to the guest house. In addition, this chapter reveals another component of Chinese culture, that of familial employment. The old woman who guards the gate works for the guest house because she is a member of the family. Her grandson, children, and his children will also work for the guest house. She and Hulan's conversations about the Revolution again show that Hulan lived through a time when lives were taken in a moment, and as a result, she and others like her are more hardened than others. Her upbringing and background is the cause for Hulan's faults, and as a result, the reader is more inclined to feel sympathy for Hulan.

Chapter seventeen flushes out the character of Captain Hom, as well as gives more information about Ma the legends of Yu. Captain Hom appeared, originally, to be corrupt, but this chapter shows he is merely a messenger of the state, at the will of State Security, and a man who is trying to protect his people. He feels for those being displaced, and understands their anger and frustration. His attempts to protect them are mistaken as corruption, but Hom is completely willing to lose face if his actions are for the good of the people. His revelation that Ma is a spy, as foreshadowed throughout the novel, brings together several key pieces of information, and confirms that Zai has set Hulan and David up for some purpose. Hulan's mixed feelings about Hom show her



again as both a strong woman and a cruel one. While she admires Hom and his bravery, she also condemns him for his actions, noting that they will be the end of him. Hulan constantly chooses the path that makes her own life easier, and chooses herself over others.

Her encounter with Michael has several purposes in the novel. First, again it is clear Hulan has a liking for Michael, and it is clear Michael knows much of Chinese history. His comments about the beauty of the land and the legends of Yu show he has knowledge as well as interest in the topic, hinting at his identity as Xiao Da. Additionally, his clear displeasure of her biased opinion about the peasants, revealed later to be his followers, also hint at his true identity.



Chapter 18 - Chapter 22

Chapter 18 - Chapter 22 Summary

In chapter eighteen, David attends the auction at Cosgrove's. David recognizes many of the Chinese at the auction. As he walks amid the artifacts, he finds the ruyis, and is shocked to find they are highly valuable. David is surprised to find Stuart Miller, but the two quickly strike up a friendly conversation, with Stuart acting as a guide for David, explaining how the auction works. He points out that collectors, dealers, and museums all have different reasons, and methods, for buying goods. Stuart invites David to join him for the auction and banquet, and David politely accepts. On the way into the auction room, David sees Ma and Fitzwilliams arguing, and approaches. He discovers that Ma, too, is trying to stop Fitzwilliams from selling the stolen artifacts. Ma finally confesses his true position, and asks David to help ensure the ruyi and other artifacts from Site 518 remain in China. He points out many have the same markings. He points out that by retrieving the ruyi, David could be saving his wife.

In chapter nineteen, Hulan visits again with Angela, this time threatening her with jail if she does not tell the truth. Angela reveals Brian had told her he had found something that would change her life but could not explain further, as he didn't know who else was reading his emails to her. As a result, Angela came to China and arrived to find her brother missing. Angela notes she thought Brian may have found a famous mushroom, as she is a mycologist. Hulan searches the room, and notices no signs of Brian's personal life. When asked about a notebook Hom claimed to have found, Angela states she has not seen it. Hulan admits that Brian may have been killed for whatever it was he had found. Hulan asks Angela to tell the others she has given the notebook to Hulan, and she relents, confused.

In chapter twenty, David sits with Stuart during the auction, but thinks of why Ma wants the ruyi so desperately. Stuart explains as the auction continues the bidding practices of many of the high rollers in the room. When the ruyi comes to bid, Stuart, Ma, and a man in the front row named Bill Tang furiously bid on the piece. Tang, Stuart notes, is a computer programmer from Silicon Valley. A woman on the phones chimes in with bids, and eventually the piece sells for twenty-eight million Hong Kong dollars. Tang is furious, believing Fitzwilliams failed to acknowledge his bid at the end. When Tang attacks Stuart, believing he won the bid, David realizes the man is Tang Wenting, the lieutenant from the All Patriotic Society. David also learns that the phone bid was really Stuart, acting through a third party. David follows Bill Tang as he leaves the auction.

In chapter twenty-one, Hulan attends dinner with Michael, and he continues to charm her. He recounts his childhood in the States, and he admits that, as a rich man, he has dabbled in toys, women, and other hobbies, but that he enjoys Chinese artifacts more than anything. He notes his inability to fit in in either culture, as he is a blend of both. He has a fascination with Da Yu, and he is focused on his link to Yu as a mathematician. He also commends Yu for this work in creating agriculture, wine, the calendar, and much of



modern civilization. As Hulan reveals more of her past, she realizes that she is opening up more to Michael than she has to her husband. Michael reminds her she too is different, and that he believes her choice of career was done to protect her from regret.

In chapter twenty-two, David continues to follow Bill Tang, but is ambushed on a dark pier. Tang beats David severely and throws him in the river. David is pulled to safety right before he drowns, he realizes after he regains consciousness fully, by Ma. It is clear as he quickly travels to his hotel that many ribs are broken, his face is swollen, cut and bruised, and there is a large bump rising where he was kicked. Looking for Band Aids after a shower, David finds the papers he took from Lily's room during Hulan's investigation. David realizes as he reads that the journal is Brian's.

Chapter 18 - Chapter 22 Analysis

Chapter eighteen helps readers to understand the true level of corruption in the auction house market, and the real value of the artifacts of Site 518. From Fitzwilliams to Ma, it is clear no one is as they seem, as Fitzwilliams refuses to see the truth, and Ma reveals to David who he really is, and his true purpose. In addition, Stuart Miller begins to show himself in this chapter not only as a player and a rich man, but also as a genuinely nice person. He plays to win, but he is willing to help David understand the auction business, and seems delighted in his company. The fact that many of the pieces have the same markings, when combined with the knowledge that Brian was stealing pieces from somewhere other than the site, suggest there is another society and culture near site 518 that is unrelated to the Ba culture. Ma's insistence on the retrieval of the ruyi suggests its value, and when tied with previous information in the novel, this hints that the ruyi is highly desirable, and may be the reason for the murders.

Angela's revelations in chapter nineteen serve to both clear her name, and to foreshadow the vital nature of Brian's journal later in the book. It is clear now that Brian knew he was being chased, and knew that his life was in jeopardy, although it is unclear as to what he feared. The mention by Angela of a possible mushroom foreshadows the finding of the Bashan Fungus later in the novel. Angela's insistence that there is no journal, combined with Hulan's concern for Angela's safety, show that the journal is believed to have valuable information.

Chapter twenty reveals the real value of the ruyi, and the major players involved in the game. However, it is the revelation that Bill Tang is the same man as Tang Wenting that is the most shocking. Tang's attack on Stuart shows him to be volatile, as David already knows him to be. Unlike his usual self, David follows Tang into the night, knowing this is a rash, and illogical decision. This shows his true love for Hulan, in that he now knows there is a connection between the tragedies of Site 518 and the All Patriotic Society, and he knows she is in danger. Although the link between Michael and Xiao Da is not established, David does know Bill works for Michael, which hints at danger for anyone left at the site. Finally, this chapter shows the level Stuart will go to in order not only to win an item, but to secretly hide that he has done so. Knowing Stuart, one can only



assume that his actions to obtain the ruyi without anyone being able to prove possession means he plans to keep the item and not leave it in China.

Hulan's dinner with Michael in chapter twenty-one further shows her growing affection for him. His revelations of his love of logic, along with his admiration of Yu again foreshadow the revelation that Michael is Xiao. Additionally, Hulan's own admission that she enjoys Michael, and that she has revealed much to him shows just how deeply he is drawing her in. It is clear, based on her thoughts about what she sees when she is with Michael, show her profound guilt about her daughter yet again. Michael, too, can see that on her face, and his comments about her grief and regret foreshadow his use of this knowledge later in the novel as he tries to break Hulan.

The attack of David in chapter twenty-two shows the depths to which Tang will go to obtain the ruyi and to rid China of any obstacles to the All Patriots Society. The symbols David sees on the buildings in this chapter foreshadow his recognition of the same symbols later in relation to Michael Quon and his company. In addition, Ma's saving of David shows him to be knowledgeable about Tang, as well as a decent man, even though he is a spy. David's use of Chaowen's Band Aids symbolizes his own acceptance of her death and his willingness to see her memory as a saving grace rather than a curse. The finding of Brian's journal, now known by the reader to contain vital information, foreshadows the discovery of its content in later chapters.



Chapter 23 - Chapter 26

Chapter 23 - Chapter 26 Summary

As David continues to read Brian's journal in chapter twenty-three, he learns several key pieces of information. First, he learns of the Five Punishments of Yu, which include branding, cutting off of the feet, death, and cutting off of the nose and castration, and he realizes both Lily and Brian suffered some form of the punishments. David also learns of Brian's involvement with the All Patriotic Society. Brian also realized there could be a link between Yu the Great and the artifacts at the sites. The journal discusses the use of the "swelling mold", or a substance to stop the floods. Further in, Brian discusses finding a link between Yu and the Chinese mindset, and talking one on one with Xiao Da. Catherine, it turns out, invented the story of the Nine Tripod's possible link to the site to drive Lily. Brian meets Wu and his widow, and begins to tease her as he passes their home in search of more relics, which he then turns over to Lily for payment. Brian becomes obsessed with a discussion of the ruyi of Yu, which was said to be made of a natural element, like a mushroom. In the end, Brian believes he has found a link between the symbols used in Chinese language and the actual geographic layout of the land at Site 518. When he returns to China, he writes of Lily's use of Wu to attempt to locate the tripod in the whirlpool, and his subsequent drowning. When he visits the family to see if he can help, he reports that he has learned the truth. He notes that Xiao Da must never know, and that he must send photos to Angela. Two days prior to his disappearance, he writes that he is frightened, and makes a note to Angela to really look at his photos to find the truth. David now realizes the ruyi is the target, and that Stuart Miller is now in danger.

In chapter twenty-four, David runs painfully to the home of Stuart, only to find Ma on the floor of the living room, dead. Upstairs, David finds Stuart held at gunpoint by Tang, who has beaten him severely. David hits Tang with a jade piece, knocking him unconscious. David phones the police to report the murder, and Stuart explains that, following the auction, he placed the ruyi in the vault. David convinces Stuart to give him the ruyi in exchange for David's telling the Chinese government that Stuart bought the ruyi at the auction to return it to China. Stuart explains to David that the ruyi is the Holy Grail of China, as it proves Da Yu's existence. When Stuart begins wondering about Tang, he notes that David has met Tang's employer in the states, Michael Quon. David realizes Quon is Xiao Da. Stuart hurriedly sends him to the airport to attempt to get back to Bashan to save Hulan. At the hotel to get his things, David receives information from Fong that Lily had traces of fungus in her mouth and on her body, and that the symbols on the paper found on Brian's body matched those in the journal. David realizes now the paper is a map, leading him to the cave in which Brian found the relics of Yu.

In chapter twenty-five, Hulan is in her room when Michael arrives, asking her to breakfast. She refuses and worries about David, as she has called and learned he has checked out of the hotel in Hong Kong. She learns from Captain Hom that he plans to attend an All Patriotic Society meeting that evening, as he has been asked by one of his



officers, Su. He reports that he believes it is a chance to reconcile the relations between his office and the people. Hulan travels to the cave of the vultures, to talk with them about Ma, and Catherine explains that many artifacts at a site have similar markings, but that those Brian found were not the same. At lunch, the group discusses the politics of the dam, and Michael notes that the government's great tribute will also destroy Chinese history. After lunch, Michael teases Angela about mushrooms she has located, and Hulan notices suspicion in Angela's posture. Michael and Hulan walk together to the caves, where Hulan can hear the baby of the widow, and she realizes the caves must be interconnected. Michael takes her further into the cave, and deliberately drops the flashlight. He slowly moves to her, running his hands along her body, and tells her not to be afraid as he locates the light. Outside, he admits he just wanted to be alone with her in the darkness, and apologizes.

In chapter twenty-six, David is aware that Michael uses power and control to manipulate the people as Xiao Da. He suspects that Zai knew Xiao Da's identity. Back in Bashan, electricity is out as Hulan and Michael have dinner together once again. She cannot help but think of when Michael held her in the cave, and she had surrendered to him. In Wuhan, Michael pays a helicopter pilot a large sum of money to fly him to Bashan, despite the storm. Hulan, now in her room, goes through each person in the investigation, and reanalyzes their role. Suddenly, Hulan understands that there is a hidden passage in the courtyard. She rushes to Angela's room, and tells her to run to the station to tell Hom not to attend the meeting, as she knows now his life is in danger.

In the courtyard, Hulan squeezes between two rocks in the scholar's rock pile at the center of the courtyard, and finds herself at the top of a hidden well. Once at the bottom, she realizes she is in a series of caves, and can hear voices above her as she makes her way through and out of town. Eventually, the caves lead her to the cave of the All Patriotic Society. Moving forward, she arrives in a room where Captain Hom lies tied to a table, naked. His nose is gone, as are his hands and genitals, and his arms are spread out, allowing the blood to drain into buckets. His brother-in-law lies next to him, already dead. Hulan sees Michael, and realizes he is Xiao Da. The two argue about Yu, and his comparisons to Michael as a savior to the people. Officer Su assists Michael in washing the body of the brother-in-law in his own blood, while meanwhile, David convinces the chopper pilot to land near the caves, and pays a visit to the Wu's. He presents Brian's map to the young widow. On the map, the symbol for good is written at the spot of the hut, and the cave symbol is within the hut. David pulls the cloth away from the baby, and realizes it is a white child, and not pure Chinese. The woman leads him to a hidden opening in the hut, and David climbs through. She attempts to pass the child to David, noting "the people will know", but he points out they will know anyway, and climbs into the darkness.

Chapter 23 - Chapter 26 Analysis

The reading of Brian's journal ties together several aspects of the novel. The tie in between the Five Punishments of Yu and the murders strongly suggests a link between someone who follows Yu and the murderer. Again, this foreshadows Michael Quon, the



largest follower, as the murderer. Brian's involvement in the society is not surprising, but it further ties together his work with his murder, and the knowledge that he and Michael were friends, and that he had one-on-one contact with Xiao Da again suggests Michael as the link. The passages about the swelling mold, when combined with Brian's photos to Angela, her position as a mycologist, and Wu's father's comment about the living soil suggest that what she said was true, that Brian had found a mushroom that Angela would be interested in. Again, when this is tied in with the ruyi of Yu being made of a mushroom, one can deduce that Brian has found the scepter of Yu. The knowledge that Catherine's joke led to the death of Wu is disturbing, but also explains the group's razzing of Lily on the subject, and her guilty responses. Further, Brian's visit to the Wu family on his death, combined with the knowledge that Wu's wife and Brian had several meetings combined with the knowledge that Wu's wife lied to Hulan when she said she never spoke with Brian, shows a conspiracy between the two. This foreshadows the knowledge that Brian and Wu's wife had an affair. Additionally, his mentioning that he "learned the truth" when visiting the Wu's foreshadows the knowledge that the family has acted as guardians for centuries. Finally, this chapter begins the discussion of Brian's finding that the land of Site 518 actually played a role in the development of several characters of the Chinese language. This chapter, while somewhat short in comparison, holds a wealth of information that ties back to small pieces of detail in nearly every chapter, making it vitally important to the overall puzzle.

The incidents in chapter twenty-four serve to confirm what the reader already suspects, that Michael Quon is, in fact, Xiao Da. The death of Ma after his saving of David is not surprising, nor is the attack on Stuart by Tang. However, Stuart's comments that the ruyi is the Holy Grail of the Chinese help to explain the reason that the ruyi is so sought after. Stuart again proves himself to be a much more pure character than his actions sometimes indicate, as he not only helps David to escape, but also helps him to save his wife. In addition, his deal with David, in which he loses nearly three million dollars, shows him to be a man of true character and worth. At the end of this chapter, Fong's information about the fungus found on Lily again suggests that there the mushrooms are a key to the puzzle of site 518, and are somehow tied to the murders. The symbols on Brian's paper again confirm that Brian knew of the existence of a cave where relics of Yu, including the ruyi, were held.

Chapter twenty-five again serves to pull together loose ends. Hom shows again his true personality as he plans to try to bridge the connection between the people and the law. The revelation that Su is a member of the society foreshadows his involvement in Hom's death later. At the site, Catherine's revelation that Brian's artifacts did not have the markings of the Ba further show they are of a different origin, lending to the idea they are relics of Yu. Michael's comments at lunch about the river foreshadow his identity as Xiao Da, as the society's message is the loss of Chinese history as a price of modern technology. Further, his comments to Angela, and her responses, signify again that both Angela and Michael know of the fungus found in the caves by the end of the novel. The interconnectedness of the caves hints to Hulan that there are several passages, which helps her discover the truth of the caves later in the novel. Finally, Michael's advance on Hulan in the caves, and her response, shows she is extremely attracted to Michael and that he does hold some power over her.



Chapter twenty-six helps to explain how Lily's body was moved into her room without a trace, and how Wang disappeared during the Revolution. The hidden passage in the courtyard leads to the same caves that holds the All Patriotic Society's meetings, as well as the caves in which Brian found his artifacts. Captain Hom's clear torture is horrible, but it does serve to give Hulan power as she is angered. However, the knowledge earlier in the chapter that Hulan has clear feelings for Michael, when combined with the knowledge that he really is Xiao, shows just how close Hulan came to her own demise in the cave with Michael earlier. Their conversation about Michael shows he clearly sees himself as a representative of Yu, in that he claims to want nature to run free and wants the people to have power. Hulan, however, sees he is greedy, and wants only power for himself. The use of the fungus in the cave to smear blood on the bodies explains Fong's findings of Lily's body, and again hints at a hidden piece of the puzzle, when combined with Angela's mycology, Brian's photographs, Michael's comments of the caves as living, and the Wu family's assertion that the land is living.

The realization that Wu's son is half white hints at the idea that the child is really Brian's. The fact that there is a passage from the house of Wu to the caves foreshadows the knowledge that Wu and his family were keepers of the caves, and that Brian's notes really do link the land to several characters in the Chinese written language. Finally, David's endless pursuit of his wife shows again his love for her.



Chapter 27 - Author's Note

Chapter 27 - Author's Note Summary

In chapter twenty-seven, Hulan feels she has the upper hand, as she has a weapon. Michael admits he thinks the society can spread their membership to sixty million in just a few years, and as she argues, Michael takes her gun. The two argue about the dam, its significance, and what Michael's true motive is. Michael argues he is trying to save the past, and allow nature to take its course, whereas Hulan believes he is simply hungry for power and money. Michael asks how many times her husband has put her in danger, and tries to turn her from David, asking her to join him, instead. When Michael brings up her daughter, Hulan is humiliated. In her anger, however, she finds she is able to forgive herself, and realizes she did all she could for her daughter. Michael admits he traveled the route of Yu, and along the way, gathered more followers. Brian learned who Michael was, and followed his beliefs, until he located the cave of relics. He stopped speaking to Michael, who realized what Brian had found as a result of what Lily, his handler, was selling through Cosgrove's. Michael realized by the photographs on Brian's website that he had possibly located the site of Yu, as he noticed the mushrooms, and as he saw the ruyi come up for auction. He confronted Brian at the river, and the two fought, but Brian slipped and fell. Su, Michael's follower, decided to make the accident a symbol to the other workers to avoid the caves by using the Five Punishments, unaware that Hulan would hide the facts of the case. Lily had figured out where the cave was, as well, but had come to it when Su was on guard.

When Michael asks for the journal, David walks in, noting that he has it along with the ruyi, and that he will trade it for his wife's life. Hulan realizes that she will happily give her life to save David's, because she loves him. Hulan grabs the jade ax they were using to chop apart Hom, and hits Su in the stomach. David then throws his lantern, and the ruyi, at Michael. As he drops to the ground, David and Hulan escape to the caves in the dark. They can hear Michael behind them, however. David stops and waits until Michael rounds a corner, then knocks him and his flashlight to the ground. Michael calls to Hulan in the darkness that he has the ruyi, and asks her to come to him. Hulan moves away from David, and he hears a tussle, then a scream as Michael falls through hole in the cave into the raging river below. Hulan comes to him in the darkness.

In the Epilogue, the flooding of China reminds everyone of the need to control the river as thousands perish. Meanwhile, David and Hulan piece together the entire story of Site 518. Michael and the ruyi have seemingly washed away in the river. Hulan and David find themselves healed by the experience, and able to rekindle their love and their lives. Wu Hadong's wife commits suicide, along with her child, and David realizes she tried to give him the baby to save, as it was the son of Brian. She and Brian had become lovers, and Brian had used Lily to hire Wu as a way to have more time with his wife. However, Wu did not dive into the whirlpool to find the tripod, but instead, also committed suicide following his knowledge that the baby was not his. Wu's wife had told Brian the Wu family was the keeper of the relics of Yu, and Brian realized his selling of the artifacts



denied China a clear link to Yu the Great. When Michael began to threaten him, Brian understood his future, and sought to protect his lover and their child. The photograph on Brian's website, once analyzed, showed the seemingly barren landscape was actually a symbol to Angela that there was a massive fungus growing under the surface. In the caves, researchers find a seven mile wide mushroom, the largest in the world. Linguists to the area argue over Brian's findings that some Chinese symbols were actually based on the physical landscape of Site 518. Hulan meets with Zai, and confronts him, knowing he sent her to Bashan to draw out Xiao and the ruyi. He admits the truth, but notes he loves her, and does what is best for the state and country. On examination, Michael's Vyruscan product is found in the security system of the Three Gorge Dam, and it is realized that Michael was planning to override the system to allow the river to open up and to solidify his position as Xiao Da. Stuart Miller becomes a local hero for his return of Chinese artifacts, and when knowledge of the truth behind the All Patriots Society emerge, Captain Hom is hailed as a martyr. Hulan finds herself reflecting on her life, and lets go of her past regrets. She and David discuss their future, and the possibility of trying again to have a child.

The Author's Note thanks several people involved in the writing of the novel, including those who helped with Chinese legend and folklore, as well as those who assisted in questions of art forgery and archeology. At the end of the note, the author stresses that while Site 518 is fictitious, there are many archaeological sites of importance that will be lost with the Three Gorges Dam. The floods and deaths in the novel are based on true floods in China prior to the dam, and the statistics about the loss of homes following the inundation is also based on reality.

Chapter 27 - Author's Note Analysis

Chapter twenty-seven gives Hulan a chance to finally show who she really is. Michael reveals he wants to continue to spread the society, and eventually reach a higher number than Communism, showing he is looking to take over the masses as opposed to save them. Their arguments about the dam again show both cons and pros about its building. When Michael brings up David and Chaowen, however, Hulan begins to gain her inner strength. She finds she really believes she did all she could for Chaowen, and that her husband loves her and protects her, as he has always done. Michael's comments were foreshadowed with his mentions of her inner guilt as they dined earlier, but in this capacity, where Michael is blatantly questioning her choices and her opinions of her child, Hulan finds her inner anger. Their conversation leads to Brian's death, and the knowledge that it was an accident that was simply taken advantage of is surprising. It is shown that, as foreshadowed, it was Brian's photographs that led Michael back to the caves. David's decision to trade the ruyi for his wife is expected, but Hulan's choice, for once, to choose someone else over herself shows her growth in the novel. For the first time, Hulan understands love, and understands what it means to give yourself for someone else, as David has always done for her. Their escape, combined with Hulan's attack on Michael and his subsequent fall, end their nightmare and allow them to begin their journey in healing.



The Epilogue ties the last remaining pieces into place. Again, the mention of the wild river and its consequences shows the author's attempts to present both sides of the argument of the building of the dam. The suicide of Wu, as well as his wife and child, explains her actions when David entered the caves from within her home. She was trying to give the child to David, knowing that the people would know the child was Brian's. When that failed, she killed them both. Brian's finding of the largest mushroom known to man was foreshadowed throughout the novel. The barren landscape, a result of the fungus, the mention of the fungus in the caves, the finding of mushrooms by Angela, the smells in the caves, the comments by Wu and Michael all led to this growth. In addition, the maps of Brian, discussed throughout the novel in terms of his discovery of living characters of Chinese language, led to his mapping that helped David find Hulan. Zai's admittance that he set up David and Hulan, as was hinted at throughout the novel, is not a surprise, but does lead Hulan to question his loyalty. For the first time, it is clear Hulan is beginning to question Chinese policies, and think instead of her own life, and her life with David. Because of her journey, Hulan is able to let go of her past, and look brightly into her future with David.

The author's note gives several references for further reading, but also serves as a final note about the dam its self. Lisa See admits her fictionalization of the facts, but also notes that some true information is contained within the book, and her pointed conversation on the topic shows the importance of the dam to her. She allows the reader to decide an opinion, however, as again the author presents the information without bias.



Characters

Liu Hulan

Liu Hulan is a Red Princess and an investigator for the Ministry of Public Security. After making a deal with a group of highly political figures, Hulan is allowed to marry David Stark, an American, and have her daughter, Chaowen. Hulan is an excellent investigator, with a specialty for difficult murder cases. Because of her deal with her government, Hulan is forced to abide by all regulations of China and follow all policies without question. Her investigations lead her to begin examining the All Patriotic Society, a cultural-religious group that threatens the power of Chinese government as it gains more followers. When her child dies and her marriage begins to falter, Hulan questions her own abilities as a wife and mother, and her skills diminish. She is sent to investigate the death of a foreigner, Brian McCarthy, who was involved with the archaeological dig at Site 518 in Bashan. Her husband, too, is sent to investigate the theft of archaeological pieces at the same site. Through the story, Hulan finds a link between the All Patriotic Society, the death of McCarthy, and Site 518, and discovers that she is stronger than she had begun to think. She regains her confidence after confronting her guilt about the death of her daughter, and finds she is able to forgive herself, and regain a life with her husband.

Hulan represents a rare sect of Chinese society, that of the respected female authority figure. In the story, Hulan is in her position because of her adherence to Chinese regulations and her deals with the Chinese government, showing that to be in a position of power in China, one must obey. While Hulan was educated in the States, it is clear she understands Chinese politics and is able to use them to her advantage. She believes, too, in much of the Chinese system, and finds it difficult to understand why her husband, American-born David, does not. At the same time, Hulan does not find herself fitting in with Chinese, either, as she is a Red Princess, or a high society woman in a supposedly classless Communist system. Hulan is unique, in that she is a representation of West and East theory and teachings, but she is lacking in Chinese historical knowledge. This fact makes her a mark in the novel, as she is unable to fully grasp the true nature of Xiao Da's effect on the people, in terms of the relation to Yu the Great and his ruyi. In the end, however, it is Hulan's ability to accept her own failings, and to examine a situation from all sides, that leads to her discovery of the link between the murders and the All Patriotic Society.

David Stark

David Stark is an American lawyer who is married to Liu Hulan. David is known in China for his ability to handle delicate matters for the government, as well as for political and business figures in a way that preserves the dignity of the government. David loves Hulan dearly, but when their child dies, he feels she pushes him away due to her own guilt. David is hired by the State Cultural Relics Bureau to investigate the theft of relics



from Site 518. He is told by Hulan's employer that the trip is designed to bring them closer together again, but when he arrives, he finds there are clear links between his case and that of Hulan's. David tries to help Hulan, but is continuously pushed away as Hulan deals more and more with her own guilt about her failing marriage and the death of their daughter. David is torn between his love for Hulan and his own emotions. David's cool headed logic and his constant drive to save his wife result in his ability to discover the identity of Xiao Da, as well as to find and save his wife.

David's character in the novel is another unique one, in that he represents admired foreign interest in China. David would normally be under scrutiny, but because of his wife, he is instead used as an asset to the country. David is cautious, and understands the positions of the Chinese government, although he still believes firmly in the policies of the United States. It is David's abilities that allow him to thrive in China and his marriage to Hulan that gives him the privileges of a citizen.

Xiao Da / Michael Quon

Michael Quon is a Chinese American who claims to be in the country finding his Chinese roots. During her first interview with him, Hulan learns Michael dislikes Lily's profession, since he wants Chinese artifacts to stay in Chinese hands, and thus, Michael clearly identifies with his Chinese roots. Michael, over time, proves to be smooth, daring, dashing, and very well mannered. He begins to charm even Hulan, as he speaks of his wealth and his profession. He is a believer in Yu the Great, and wishes to connect more with Yu and his historical journey. He grew up in the US, with a mixed heritage, and learned much of his Chinese from a language instructor. After an Ivy League college, Michael built a company, Vyruscan, and made a fortune. He then invested, bought toys, played with women, and found himself bored quickly. Realizing he didn't fit in in the US, Michael went to China to discover his heritage after reading Chinese poetry, which led him to the beauty of the Ba people, and Da Yu. Following the Shu Ching, Michael made his way to the Yangtze River, to the Nine Provinces. Hulan learns, however, that Michael really is the founder of the All Patriotic Society, Xiao Da. He founded the movement as a way to be closer to Da Yu, and as a way to gather relics of Da Yu and Chinese culture illegally. His movements as a Chinese American mathematician masked his movements as Xiao Da. After Michael realized Brian was stealing Da Yu relics from unknown caves, he confronted him and accidentally killed him. Michael then used the Five Punishments on the body as a way to show the archaeologists not to continue to sell with Da Yu relics. Lily was killed in the same way. Michael believes he can overthrow the powers that are building the dam to let the river run freely. In the end, Michael is killed by Hulan and David, after he kills police officer.

Tang Wenting / Bill Tang

Tang Wenting is the right hand of Xiao Da. Seen first at an All Patriotic Society meeting in the beginning of the novel, it is clear early on that Tang is a fanatic follower of Xiao Da. He uses a situation at the meeting where Hulan saves a little girl's life as a weapon



against her, and against the Chinese government. Throughout the novel, Tang repeatedly appears where Hulan is, making her believe there to a link between the All Patriotic Society and the deaths of foreign archaeologists. When David meets him as Bill Tang, a genius computer programmer from the States at an auction for an ancient ruyi, it becomes clear that the leader of the All Patriotic Society seeks to obtain the ruyi, and that the ruyi is believed to be the scepter of Da Yu. Tang attempts to kill David, as well as Stuart Miller, in an effort to obtain the ruyi. In the end, Tang is captured.

Chaowen Stark

Chaowen Stark is the deceased daughter of Hulan and David Stark. Born healthy, Chaowen was a blessing to her parents. When she was three and a half, Chaowen developed a fever, which turned quickly to bacterial meningitis. Chaowen perished, and Hulan believed herself to be to blame. Over the course of the novel, David and Hulan battle one another to come to terms, finally, with the loss of their daughter, and in the end, the two are able to forgive themselves and one another, and move forward. While an unseen character, Chaowen's character is a motivating factor for many in the novel, and as such, is a primary force.

Vice Minister Zai

Vice Minister Zai is a father figure to Hulan. Having taken her under his wing after the denunciation of her father, and his death, Zai is both an employer and a caretaker of Hulan. However, Hulan learns by the end of the book that Zai's primary focus will always be one of the protection of China, even at the risk of Hulan and David's lives. He knew Xiao Da was part of the problems at Site 518, and knew that by sending Hulan, Xiao Da would show himself. Hulan understands his position, but at the end, does not know if she can continue a relationship with him, knowing he has wittingly sacrificed her and her family for the state.

Brian McCarthy

Brian McCarthy is an American archaeological student on a fellowship to China as part of the attempt to preserve archaeological sites before the inundation from the Three Gorges Dam. Brian soon discovers a wealth of treasure in a cave, and begins bringing them to Lily Sinclair, a member of a team of auctioneers for Cosgrove's. Additionally, Brian discovers proof of a large fungus, which he sends to his sister, as she is a mycologist. In addition, Brian becomes involved with Michael Quon, or Xiao Da, and the All Patriotic Society. Brian has many lovers in China, including Lily and another member of the site team, Catherine Miller. However, it is his relations with the wife of a local, Wu, that causes the greatest problems. Brian and Wu's wife have an affair, and Brian impregnates her. Wu's wife tells Brian that her husband's family has been keeping guard over the treasure's of Yu the Great for centuries, and Brian suddenly realizes the treasures he has been taking are those of Yu. Brian realizes that the life of his lover and



child are in jeopardy, and refuses to tell Michael where the relics are kept. As a result of their fight, Brian is killed. Michael and his followers then mutilate the body in line with the Five Punishments of Yu as a symbol to the other archaeologists to stay away from the relics, but it is this that involves Liu Hulan, and leads to Michael's own demise. However, following his death, it is discovered that in his quest, Brian may have found the Rosetta stone of the Chinese language, in that he discovered landscape markings that seem to have been the basis for the creation of some of the first Chinese characters representing concepts such as river and door.

Ma Zhongyan

Ma Zhongyan is the leader of the Site 518 excavation. Educated in the United States and well versed in American culture as well as Chinese culture, it is clear Ma is a member of higher society. Ma seems to enjoy receiving what he believes are bribes from the museum curators who seek the treasures being found at the site, and he constantly seems teasing to the staff, but unhelpful and resentful to Hulan and David. Over time, it is revealed that Ma does not work for the Cultural Relics Bureau, but instead works for the Ministry of State Security, China's version of the CIA. Ma was sent to secure China's position in terms of the artifacts found at the site. When he discovered Brian had found the ruyi, his position became more important, as that artifact must, according to government, remain within China, and with the proper authorities. Ma is eventually killed by Bill Tang at the home of Stuart Miller in an effort by Tang to steal the ruyi.

Stuart Miller

Stuart Miller is the owner of a large corporation, Miller Enterprises, which includes Miller Engineering. Miller's company is awarded several contracts in China as a result of his consistent good work with the government. He is providing much of the crews, expertise and machinery for the building of the Three Gorges Dam. Miller is good looking, extremely wealthy, and believes his money and power lend him rights in China that others do not have. Under the surface, however, Hulan learns that Stuart is under much pressure because of his involvement with the dam, as his parts are being sabotaged and his involvement is being protested by many environmental groups. In addition, Stuart collects Chinese relics, and it soon becomes apparent that Stuart helps to move illegally obtained and sold Chinese relics out of the country by buying them through legitimate auction houses, even though their paperwork is forged. Stuart purchases the ruyi of Yu at a Cosgrove's auction, and is nearly killed by Bill Tang as a result. He is saved by David, and assists him in helping to save the life of Hulan. Stuart Miller represents foreign interest in China, as both an asset and one who uses his position to obtain relics.



Catherine Miller

Catherine Miller is the daughter of Stuart Miller. As a young and beautiful woman, Catherine finds herself forever seeking the approval of a father who she can never really please. Catherine tired quickly of Lily's constant stories, and began one of her own, focusing on the possibility that one of the Nine tripods could exist at Site 518. Lily soon became obsessed with the idea. Catherine and Brian were lovers, but Brian felt a need to distance himself, as she was the daughter of his benefactor. It was during an outing seeking this distance that Brian located the cave and the daughter of Wu. Unknowingly, Catherine played an important role in the deaths of Brian and Wu, in that had they not been lovers, Brian would not have found the cave or began a relationship with Wu's wife. As a result, Wu would not have committed suicide when he realized his child was Brian's.

Lily Sinclair

Lily Sinclair is a representative of Cosgrove's, an auction house. Lily is passionate and bright, but uses her knowledge about art and business to mask Chinese artifacts and sell them illegally through the auction house. She pays Brian, an archeology student, to assist her in locating and removing artifacts without anyone's knowledge. After Brian brings Lily several artifacts of an origin outside Site 518, she begins to know he has stumbled on something huge. When pushed, however, Brian distances himself. Lily, believing one the the Nine Tripods exists in a whirlpool nearby, seeks Brian's help in retrieving it. When he refuses, everyone believes Lily talked Wu into diving into the pool, where he drowns, although in truth, he committed suicide as a result of discovering his wife's child is not his. Lily then begins to seek the cave she knows Brian found before his death, but is captured by Michael Quon and his followers. She is killed and maimed in accordance with the Nine Punishments as a sign to the other archaeologists to stay away from the caves.

The Vultures

The vultures are a group of older museum curators who seek to obtain the relics uncovered for their own museums. They are not corrupt, as many claim, but simply doing their jobs, and helping one another to make sure there is equal distribution of the artifacts. While generally smaller characters in the story, the Vultures do tell David and Hulan much of the background of Yu, as well as hint at the true identity of Ma. One of the vultures, Li Guo, actually works for the government. Hulan discovers it was he who informed Zai of the ruyi, and he who was a constant informant for the movements of Ma.

Da Yu / Yu the Great

Da Yu, or Yu the Great was the founder of the Xia dynasty in China, or the first to form a hereditary dynasty. He was hired by King Shun to control the floods after his father, Kun,



failed at the task. Yu was given a gui as a symbol of his task, and in legend, Yu then created mountains and gorges to guide the river to the sea, thereby stopping the great floods. In addition, Yu was credited with teaching the people of agriculture and animals, and with helping to replace the nomadic society with the feudal system. Proof of Yu the Great is what those in the book seek, and in the end, it is believed that the ruyi of Yu is discovered in a cave protected by Wu and his family. It is, sadly, lost to the sea in the end of the book.

Wu Huadong

Wu Huadong was a day worker who drowned in a whirlpool. Originally, rumors surfaced that Lily Sinclair paid Wu a large amount of money to have Wu jump into the whirlpool in an attempt to locate one of the Nine Tripods of Yu. However, in the end it is discovered that Wu really jumped into the whirlpool to commit suicide after discovering his wife's child was not his, but was instead that of Brian McCarthy's. Wu's family have been keepers of the caves of Yu the Great for centuries.

Angela McCarthy

Angela McCarthy is the sister of the slain archaeological student, Brian. Angela came to China after her brother sent her a photograph of small mushrooms that indicated a huge fungus growing under the surface. Angela, as a mycologist, was highly interested in such a find, so she came immediately to the area, only to find her brother had disappeared, and later, she learns he had been killed. Angela lies several times to Hulan and to David in an effort to keep her brother's finding a secret, but her lies are not malevolent. She is not a bad character, but one who clearly loved her brother and wanted to help him and preserve his memory.

Captain Hom

Captain Hom is the local police chief in Bashan. His brother-in-law skirted law to build a local bridge that collapsed, killing many individuals. Hom turned a blind eye, as he does for several people in Bashan, in an effort to minimize the level of chaos in the area as they try to evacuate nearly half a million people. Hom is not a bad person, but instead is trying to maintain peace in an area filled with justified anger and frustration. In the end, Hom goes to an All Patriotic Society meeting in an attempt to breach the gap between his position and the people. He is killed brutally by his own officer, Su, who is a member of the Society, and by Xiao Da.

Su Zhangqing

Su Zhangqing is a worker of Xiao Da, and a police officer under Captain Hom. Hulan originally believes Su to be a good police officer, and a highly useful tool for her. However, she soon learns that Su is, in part, responsible for the deaths and mutilations



of Brian, Lily, Hom, and his brother-in-law. Su is attacked by Hulan as she tries to escape, and in the end, lives and is vital to the police as he tells all he knows of Michael Quon.



Objects/Places

Shu Ching

"Shu Ching: Book of History" is one of the oldest books known to man, having been written between 2357 BC and 631 BC. The collection of speeches, cannons, and other writings is vital to Eastern thought and culture, and while shrouded in myth, it also contains much of China's historical record.

All Patriotic Society

The All Patriotic Society is a cultural religious movement in the book, led by Chinese American Michael Quon as a cover for his illegal activities as an artifact smuggler and collector. The All Patriotic Society claims to believe in nature over progress, and a dedication to live reverently.

Cultural Revolution

The Cultural Revolution was a violent movement in China that resulted in social and political chaos in the 1960s. Led by Mao Zedong, the revolution began as the youth of the country rose up in a class struggle against the bourgeoisie elements of the nation. The revolution ended with Mao's death.

Dang'an

In China, a dang'an is a profile of actions and attitudes of the people, both foreign and domestic, within the country. Acting as a security record, the dang'an works as a running account of one's movements, made to keep constant control of the population.

Ba Civilization

The Ba civilization is believed to be one of the first civilizations to exist in the world. As fishers and hunters, the Ba people were also warriors.

Nine Tripods

The Nine Tripods, looking like bowls on three legs, are nine bronze vessels Yu the Great created to help make a visual map of his empire.



Zun

A zun is a ritual wine container.

Gui

A gui is a type of tablet given as an imperial gift at the beginning or end of a mission or task.

Ruyi

A ruyi is another imperial gift, but one that is much like a scepter, with long handle and head.

Dragon Bones

Dragon Bones are ancient oracle bones in China used for divination.

Five Punishments

The five punishments are the punishments mentioned in the Shu Ching, and include branding of the forehead, cutting off of the nose and feet, castration, and death. Michael Quon uses the Five Punishments on Lily Sinclair and Brian McCarthy in the book.

Nine Provinces

The Nine Provinces are believed to be the nine territories set out by Yu the Great, marked by the Nine Tripods.

Site 518

Site 518 is the fictional archaeological site in China where many ancient Chinese artifacts are discovered.

Bashan

Bashan is the fictional village in China in the novel that symbolizes the real villages inundated by the building of the Three Gorges Dam.

Three Gorges Dam

The Three Gorges Dam is the largest electricity generating plant of any kind in the world. Built spanning the Yangtze River in China, the dam was mostly completed by 2008, with some elements not set for completion until 2011. The dam was designed to be a historic success for China, and is seen by China as a proof of superiority. However, the dam flooded hundreds of vital archaeological and cultural sites, caused irreversible ecological damage. One of the book's central themes is the possible damages caused by the dam.



Themes

Three Gorges Dam

The theme of the morality of the Three Gorges Dam is a consistent one throughout the novel. Although seemingly a background concept, the dam is a constant tie between all characters and aspects of the novel. The author, through the characters, gives facts and information about the dam, without appearing to give judgment. This allows the reader to make decisions based on which side he or she chooses to take.

One on hand, Lisa See presents the positive aspects of the dam. As is mentioned by Stuart in the novel, the dam will be the largest producer of electricity and will greatly reduce greenhouse gasses produced by China. As Hulan notes, the dam will also stop the massive flooding and mudslides that happen on the river each year, killing thousands. In the novel, this is shown as flood waters rise, and as many are killed along the river during the storms. Again, while these occurrences are in the background, they are important to this theme.

In addition, Stuart reminds Hulan that it is because of the dam that new cities, complete with running water and electricity, are being built. This gives many of the peasants opportunities they would not have had. Further, cleaner cities because of running water will reduce the deaths by illnesses that also happen every year as a result of the flooding.

Finally, the government of China promotes the bridge as a symbol of strength and unity of the people. With the building of the largest architectural site on Earth, China hopes to show their abilities and their power through the building of the dam. It is to serve as a testament of China's superiority.

On the other hand, there are several downsides to the building of the dam. First, hundreds of ancient archaeological sites will be lost as a result of the dam. Vast amounts of land will be inundated with the construction of the dam, and these sites will be lost forever. Since many of these sites hold artifacts from ancient Chinese history, the proof of China's continued societies will be lost, as will facts about their past.

In addition, millions of Chinese peasants will lose their land as a result of the dam. Again, the inundation will cause the flooding of vast property, and those living on the lands are being moved to higher ground. In some cases, the land has been in the family for hundreds of years. Further, many believe the promises of a better life in the new cities are lies, as there is not enough farmland in the cities for these people to have land. Without land, many would not survive.

Finally, the possibility of damage as a result of the dam is highly likely. Whether through domestic or foreign terrorism, or through biological changes, it is possible the dam can cause more problems. As the largest site, the dam also becomes a target for terrorism.



In addition, the changes to the biosphere and to the river as a result of the dam are untested, and could result in severe environmental issues. Further, and structural problems in the dam could equal a collapse, and such a collapse could kill millions.

Power of Guilt

The power of guilt over people is a large theme throughout the novel. Hulan's character is perhaps the best display of this theme in the novel. First, Hulan feels tremendous guilt over her involvement in the death of her daughter. She fears she should have done more, including moving back to the States and taking her to a hospital sooner. She is unable to accept that she is not to blame for the death, and as a result, Hulan distances herself from everything she loves, including her husband. Her guilt forces her to hide in her job, and as a result, she begins to lose those she loves. Hulan also feels guilt as a result of her father's death. In addition, Hulan feels guilt as a result of her position. Having been involved with the deaths of 150 women at a factory, Hulan blames herself and her inadequacies for their deaths. This is worsened when Hulan kills a young mother at an All Patriotic Society meeting. Still worse, when Lily is killed with Hulan present, she begins to feel that every death is her fault. In the end, all of this guilt combines to severely cripple Hulan's ability to love. However, by the end of the novel, Hulan is able to come to terms with her guilt, and although she can never forget her actions, she learns that she can forgive herself and move on, thereby allowing herself to again love and be loved.

Guilt also plays a role in David's life. He too blames himself in part for the death of his child. More importantly, however, David blames himself for not being able to provide Hulan with a life of happiness. He continuously tries to make up for his mistakes, but his own guilt leaves him helpless and unable to move forward with his life.

Guilt also plays a role in Brian McCarthy's final actions. Brian realizes at the end of his life that he has stolen true Yu artifacts from the Wu family. He additionally believes he has caused the death of Wu, as he committed suicide on knowing Brian had fathered his wife's child. The guilt from these actions weighs on him as he tries to rectify his mistakes, which leads to his death.

Captain Hom's life is also affected by guilt. When his brother-in-law's company built a faulty bridge in order to pocket money and the bridge broke, Hom intentionally looked the other way. In part to save his brother-in-law, and in part to protect the families of the victims, this decision still weighed heavily on Hom. When given what he saw was a chance to rectify his mistake, Hom took it and attended a society meeting. It was this decision, based on guilt, that led to his demise.

Power of Greed

Another theme throughout the novel is that of greed. Almost every character in the novel is affected by greed. Brian McCarthy originally sought work from Lily in order to earn money to impress Catherine Miller. This initial greed began the entire spiral downward



for all characters, and in the end, indirectly led to Brian's death. Stuart Miller consistently sought ways to gather more artifacts and treasures. His greed led to his near death from Tang as he sought to take back the ruyi. Lily Sinclair was also greedy, as her search for relics led her to use nearly everyone she knew. Using Brian as a courier and Stuart as a fence, Lily's greed for the hidden artifacts Brian had found led her straight into the hands of Michael. In addition, she sought to use the day workers to locate her artifacts, as well.

Michael Quon was greedy as well, in a variety of ways. He admits he sought toys and thrills, but his largest greed was for power. Michael used his personality as Xiao Da to gather the masses around him, which continually gave him power over others. With his increases in power came an increase in greed, and his search for the ruyi of Yu leads him to murder. Michael, too, is greedy in his need to control Hulan. As a power figure, Hulan is a challenge for Michael, and one that he aims to conquer. Even at the end, Michael seeks to obtain the unobtainable, that of Hulan's loyalty. It is this greed that leads to his likely death. Had Michael simply escaped with the ruyi, he would have been free. However, his last effort to win Hulan leads to his death.



Style

Point of View

The point of view in the novel is third person. This point of view is necessary, in that the story is not only told from the viewpoint of Liu Hulan, but also from that of her husband, David Stark. Since the two are often in different areas, it is vital to understand what both are seeing and thinking in order to piece together the mystery of Site 518. The point of view proves reliable, as both David and Hulan's discoveries lead to the same conclusions. In addition, this point of view is important since one of the main points of the novel is the interplay between David and Hulan in terms of their marriage, and without a third person view, this would be difficult to convey from both sides. Additionally, the third person point of view allows the focus of the story to be in a particular place at a given time, which lets the reader fully grasp the situation. Since Hulan is following Michael Quon, and David is following Tang and Stuart, the storyline would be impossible to grasp if the reader was not able to gain insight from both parties. By using a third person view, the author allows the story to be told using multiple characters and multiple plot lines which eventually all come together at the end of the novel.

Setting

The novel primarily takes place in a fictitious village in China named Bashan, and at an archaeological dig site nearby, named Site 518. Bashan is a small village, with intermittent phone service and occasional power outages. Because of Site 518, the area has improved in terms of technology, but it is not in comparison with the main cities. Bashan is near the Yangtze River, and in the path of the planned waters that will inundate the land following the completion of the Three Gorges Dam. The story begins in Tiananmen Square, where Hulan is involved in a skirmish with the All Patriotic Society. She and David are then sent to the Panda Guest house in Bashan to follow a murder and thefts of artifacts at Site 518. Near Site 518 is the home of Wu, and the caves of the artifacts of Yu the Great, where some of the story also takes place.

Other settings mentioned in the novel include the United States, where David, Stuart, Catherine, Lily, Brian, and many others were born, and where Hulan and others were educated. Additionally, Hulan mentions being sent to a farm in the country during the Cultural Revolution. Finally, other archaeological sites include the Yellow River and the Erlitou site.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is generally simple, although at times formal in nature due to the assumed translation of Chinese characters used throughout the novel. Many of the characters, due to their position as archaeologists, speak very technically, using many



Chinese words and phrases. Although some are explained briefly in the novel, a deeper understanding of Chinese culture and of archeology is necessary to truly comprehend the technical aspects of the novel. In addition, many of the characters are Chinese, and their tones and language tend to be different than those of foreign nationalities. This helps to discern the origins of the characters speaking, and also helps to characterize the different cultural customs of the characters. The Chinese characters are much more formal, polite, and stiff than those of the American characters, and this holds true for their language, as well. The technical language of the novel helps to add depth to the story, as well as to the characters themselves.

Having an understanding of Chinese myth, legend, and history is also necessary to really understand the subtle complexities of the story. The book discusses Yu the Great and his relation to the Ba people and the Three Gorges on a very surface level, but a deeper understanding of this legend can help the reader piece together the aspects of the story presented, and understand how each fits into the overall picture of Yu as a presence at Site 518. The author does introduce the legend, and the Shu Ching as a collection of documents, and does provide at least a base understanding of the myth.

Structure

The novel is broken into several different sections. The first short section simply introduces the Shu Ching as a book, and explains its significance to China. In the Prologue, a deceased, white foreigner is followed as his body floats down the Yangtze River. The main body of the work is broken into twenty-seven chapters of unequal length, and into five sections, to mimic the Five Domains of Yu, discussed in the Shu Ching. The first, The Imperial Domain, opens the novel to discuss how Hulan and David come to be at Site 518 together. The Enfeoffed, Pacified, Sworn, and Wild Domains follow, and each stops at a logical breaking point in the story. With each section break, a small passage explains the domain, and a drawing is present that shows the domain in context to the other domains. Following the main body of the novel, the epilogue explains the ending of the story and ties together all loose ends. In the Author's Note at the end of the novel, Lisa See describes in more detail her references about the artifacts and information used in the novel, as well as explains which portions of the novel are based on facts about Three Gorges Dam, and which are fabrications. In total, the novel is 348 pages in length.



Quotes

"Despite its journey, the dead thing was most definitely human, with its arms and legs still attached. But this creature with its red hair was no ordinary man. He was a yang guizi, a white devil, a foreigner."

Prologue, xv

"China has no great epics like Gilgamesh, the Mahabharata, or the Iliad. Yu's story is the closest, although it isn't about creation or the spirit world. It's about the relationship between man and the physical universe."

Chap. 5, p. 71

"Patriotism was a natural outgrowth of China's new found prosperity and its emergence after decades of isolation. Nothing was more 'patriotic' in China these days than the dam, and nothing was more universally appealing to the downtrodden than the idea of a savior."

Chap. 12, p. 151

"When a true leader gives repose to the people...his kindness is felt and the black-haired race cherish him in their hearts."

Chap. 12, p. 154

"You think this is some male thing - some giant phallic symbol or whatever you women think when you don't understand something. You're way off base Inspector."

Chap. 15, p. 194

"Hasn't it occurred to you that those simply village people, as you call them, may know more than you?"

Chap. 17, p. 218

"Asian art is a very small world, made up of collectors, dealers, and executive directors from museums. They all have their own reasons for buying, their own strategies, their own customers."

Chap. 18, p. 224

"She was born a Red Princess in a society that was supposed to be classless. She'd kept her individuality in a society where individuality was often singled out for punishment. She was different in her neighborhood, different at work, different from the people she'd known in the countryside, different - as Michael said- from most people in China."

Chap. 21, p. 256

"This isn't about the dam, or the people who'll be moved from these shores...this is about the power of a single man. Do you really believe you have the Mandate of Heaven?"

Chap. 27, p. 316



"The state can resist, but the old beliefs run through the body of China like dragon veins - hidden, sometimes suppressed, but always affecting those who live on the surface."
Chap. 27, p. 317

"Her heart so long shielded had been battered and cracked by Michael Quon's pernicious attacks. Now it shattered open, releasing wave upon wave of feeling. She would give Quon her life to save David because she loved him."
Chap. 27, p. 329

"But the concerns of one individual were of minor interest to Zai when the philosophical conflicts between Zhu Rongji and Li Peng - and the Ministry of State Security and the Ministry of Public Security - were being played out in Beijing, where what mattered were issues such as how the dam would proceed and would a Confucian or Taoist methodology be followed, where consideration had to be given to how China would approach the United States about Michael Quon, his involvement in the All Patriotic Society, and what he had attempted to do with Vyruscan at the Three Gorges Dam. "
Epilogue, p. 340



Topics for Discussion

Do you agree with Hulan's relentless pursuit of the All Patriotic Society? Why or why not? Do you agree with her point that religious cultism can be detrimental to state government? Why? Is this a problem in the United States? Can you think of an example? In your example, would stopping the cult have prevented any issues? What does this say about Hulan's argument for the need to disband the Society?

Why do you think Michael Quon became Xiao Da? What does he give as a reason? Do you believe him? Why or why not? What does Hulan claim is his reasoning for becoming the leader of the All Patriotic Society? Do you agree?

Throughout the novel, and in real life, according to the author statement at the end of the novel, the building of the dam threatens many historical archaeological sites, as well as the homes of millions of people. Do you think the Chinese government has a right to bury history and leave millions homeless in an attempt to build the dam? Why? Why do you believe the Chinese are building the dam? Does the end result in this case justify the means? Why or why not?

In the book, Brian McCarthy is killed, in part, during a heated argument with Michael Quon. Who are all contributors to the death? Why? How is Stuart Miller partially responsible? Catherine Miller? Lily Sinclair? Wu? Michael? Ma? Be sure to explain your answers using information from the book.

Explain the story of how Yu the Great was born, and the story of his work during the floods. Where was Yu born? Why was he placed in charge of the floods? How did he control them? What sacrifices did he make to complete his task? What achievements are attributed to him? Do you think Yu is a real character, or a myth? Why?

Explain the significance of the finding of the ruyi of Yu the great. What is the ruyi? Why is it important? Who sought to obtain it, and why? What was the result? What does this say about the power of the symbol?

What do you think of the practice of stealing artifacts from a dig site and selling them through auction houses? Knowing this is a common practice, do you think Lily Sinclair was wrong for her participation in the act? Was Brian and Stuart? Di Ma's knowledge of the situation make him partially responsible, as well? Describe each character's involvement in the process, and their level of criminal responsibility for the resulting smuggle of artifacts and the deaths of others at Site 518.