

Immortal 501

Chapter 501: Flaming Meteor

Pei Mianman quickly reached out an arm to support him. "Ah Zu, don't let yourself be tricked! Not even those guys from the Devil Sect could injure her that badly! Zhuxie Chixin had to have made it in time. That's the only explanation for her grievous wounds. With the help of those from the capital, how could anything have happened to Chuyan?"

Zu An finally snapped out of his daze. In the dungeon, he had seen Chuyan use her ultimate, forbidden technique to fend off a ninth-ranked Shi Kun despite being at the fifth rank herself. There was no way she could be killed so easily, now that she was at the seventh rank. Even if she decided not to use that technique, it still wouldn't be easy for Mosquito Daoist to kill her.

He hadn't sensed her unleashing her ultimate, forbidden technique, which meant that Chuyan had never been forced into such a dire, life-threatening situation.

These thoughts help to calm him down. He glared at Mosquito Daoist and berated her. "Damned mosquito, I never expected that you would love lying so much! You gave daddy such a fright."

Mosquito Daoist was furious. "What did you say, brat?!"

As a powerful cultivator, she was respected and feared by many, and had run rampant across the world for many years. When was the last time she had been humiliated by a kid like this?

You have successfully trolled Mosquito Daoist for 999 Rage points!

She was just about to teach him a lesson when a strange red bird suddenly appeared in front of her.

It fluttered in front of her for a moment, then it opened its beak and released a strange cry.

Mosquito Daoist screamed. She clutched her ears, but this didn't help block the torrent of sound at all.

She was a master of sound-based attacks herself, and immediately realized that this wasn't a regular sound wave, but a spirit-based attack.

She quickly calmed her mind and used her ki to defend herself.

Seeing Mosquito Daoist in such acute pain, Pei Mianman prepared to leap forward, eager to take advantage of this, but Zu An grabbed her and started running instead. "What are you doing? We should be running right now!"

His Hundredwarble was a spirit element technique. It served as a powerful defense against the spirit-based attacks of others, but it wasn't as great at offense.

The difference in cultivation between Mosquito Daoist and himself was way too big after all.

Even though Mosquito Daoist had been caught off guard, Hundredwarble only managed to stall her for a little. It didn't do much actual damage.

As for using this as a chance to attack her, that was completely a fanciful delusion. Even though she was distracted spiritually, it wasn't enough to make her completely lose control of herself. If they attacked her, she would still be in a position to retaliate.

If the gap in their cultivations wasn't so huge, he might have given it a try. However, the difference was way too large, which made it completely pointless to take the risk. That was why he immediately pulled Pei Mianman away and ran further into the forest.

Mosquito Daoist was furious when she saw where the two of them had run to. "I will kill you!"

She wanted to chase after them, but was currently crippled by a splitting headache. The only thing she could do was to kneel down on the floor and clutch her head tightly.

Despite this, she wasn't too worried. This skill of his surely had a finite duration. Once the effects wore off, she would quickly catch up to them.

Those two were both injured, and their clothes—and even their bodies—were drenched in blood. Even if they completely recovered from their injuries, took a shower, and changed into new clothes, it would still not be enough to wash away all traces of blood.

From the nature documentaries that he used to enjoy in his past world, he knew that sharks could smell a single drop of blood from a few kilometers away, even if it had been diluted a thousand times. These fiend races had a powerful sense of smell, and it wasn't something that he could fathom given his current knowledge.

"Where are we running to?" Pei Mianman asked, greatly worried.

Zu An thought for a bit and said, "Let's meet up with that Zhuxie Chixin you mentioned. Mosquito Daoist is riddled with injuries that he gave her. In that case, it'll be safe once we reach his side."

"But that's only temporary safety! You'll die for sure once you reach the capital!" Pei Mianman gave him a doubtful look. "Are you sure you're not suggesting this just because you want to meet up with Chuyan?"

Zu An was momentarily speechless. They were already in such a sticky situation, yet this woman's imagination was still so rich! "Of course not! Didn't I already explain everything to you guys?"

"Okay then." Pei Mianman did not sound fully convinced. "But Mosquito Daoist is blocking our path back to the others. We might run straight into her if we go back now."

"That is why I'm going in this direction. We'll take a huge detour," Zu An replied.

In agreement, the two of them continued to move around the forest.

A while later, the air was suddenly filled with an urgent buzzing.

"Mosquito Daoist is almost here." Pei Mianman frowned anxiously. This was the sound she heard every time Mosquito Daoist was close. She was probably using her mosquitoes to track them.

"She's like a spirit who won't stop haunting me!" Zu An ground his teeth in annoyance. He really wished he had a bottle of pesticide or an electric fly swatter right now.

Of course, these were mere idle thoughts. Even if he had those things from his past world, there was no way they would help him get rid of this sentient mosquito monster.

Their surroundings suddenly grew brighter.

Zu An was stunned. "It's already dawn?"

But this doesn't make any sense! Did I really lose track of time while we were being chased?

"No, the sky isn't brightening! It's that thing!" Pei Mianman pointed towards the sky in shock.

Zu An raised his head. A shooting star seemed to have suddenly appeared! However, compared to those shooting stars that streak through the sky and disappear, this shooting star was growing brighter and larger by the second as it approached the ground.

Pei Mianman subconsciously grabbed Zu An's arm. Her voice began to shake. "An irregular phenomenon! This is an inauspicious sign! Are we really going to die here today?"

Zu An was quite amused. He didn't expect her usual bold and passionate self to be hiding such a timid side. He patted her hand to comfort her. "Don't worry, it's just a falling meteorite. It's a normal thing in astronomy."

He had seen many instances of such falling meteorites, thanks to the phone recordings and other media available in his past world. He still recalled the large Russian meteor, as well as the one in western China.

While they were chatting, the meteor, which was already pretty bright, suddenly erupted with a blinding white light, burning like the sun. It was supposed to be the middle of the night, yet it now seemed as bright as day. The light was strong enough to illuminate even distant objects and make them clearly visible.

This pseudo-daylight persisted for half a minute, then just as suddenly as it had appeared, the dazzling white light dimmed, and the burning meteor seemed to fall apart. It broke into several dozen waves of dark red flames, shooting off in different directions.

The sky became dark again, and the surroundings grew deathly quiet.

Zu An's eyes lit up. "Irregular phenomena always bring treasures with them. I'm going to take a look."

Pei Mianman was worried. "We're being hunted right now, and we don't even know if we'll be able to make it out alive. How can you still be in the mood to look for treasure?!"

Zu An chuckled. "This is where you're wrong. Even if we try to run back as quickly as we could, Mosquito Daoist will most likely catch up to us. We won't be able to meet up with Zhuxie Chixin in time. But that meteor caused a huge disturbance, and everyone within several dozen li is sure to have seen it. Zhuxie Chixin's group is no exception.

"There isn't a living soul who wouldn't be tempted by powerful treasure! Everyone who's seen it will be heading over there to check it out, and they will surely get there much faster than we do. It's safer than running around looking for them ourselves."

Pei Mianman gave him a startled look. She thought that greed had taken over his mind, but he'd actually reasoned things out in such great detail.

Zu An laughed bashfully. "Don't stare at me like that... You know, research shows that two people can't help but fall in love if they stare into each other's eyes for thirty seconds."

"Fall in love, my ass!" Pei Mianman scoffed. "Why didn't I see you act like this when Chuyan was with us earlier?"

Zu An's eyes widened. "Are you implying that I should act more intimately with you in front of Chuyan?"

"Hmph! In your dreams!" Pei Mianman snorted angrily. She ran off, her mind in quite a mess.

Zu An chuckled and followed after her.

The two of them headed in the direction where the largest meteorite chunk had fallen. In a few moments, they found themselves in front of a massive crater. All the earth around it was scorched black, and guttering flames still burned across the surrounding wasteland.

Chapter 502: Strange Stele

The soil inside the crater seemed a little strange. It was as if it had been crystallized by extremely high temperatures.

"Why do I feel a chill?" Pei Mianman subconsciously grabbed at Zu An's arm. She leaned against him heavily, as if doing so would make her feel a little safer.

"Indeed, it does seem a little cold." Zu An found this strange as well. A bloody meteor just landed here, and yet it's still cold? Shouldn't it be scorching hot?

The surrounding area still bore scars of an intense, burning heat, and even the air was choked with a burnt smell. Everything pointed at the fact that the area should be hot, but strangely enough, they felt cold instead!

"Be careful. The path to great treasure is usually paved with danger," Zu An reminded her, gently patting her hand.

Pei Mianman grunted in agreement and put up her guard as well. She was ready to react at any given moment.

The two of them carefully reached the lip of the crater and walked towards that meteor. A kaleidoscope of thoughts raced through Zu An's mind. I hope there's no radiation...

There were many cases in his past world where meteors or other such items contained radioactive properties. Those who uncovered these shining rocks thought that they stumbled upon some priceless treasure... but they were instead tormented by the excruciating effects of radiation, up to the point where they wished they were dead instead of alive.

However, now wasn't the time to think about these things. He headed towards it to have a look for himself.

The two of them found themselves in front of a giant black meteor and slowly circled around it. It didn't seem to be all that special. It was just a bit bigger than an ordinary meteor.

Where's the promised treasure? This was supposed to be some fated encounter, right?

Suddenly, they heard a burst of sinister laughter. "I didn't expect the two of you to come all the way here. Did you find anything nice? Be good and hand it over, and I might just spare your lives."

Mosquito Daoist was standing at the edge of the crater, staring coldly at the two of them.

Zu An felt a huge headache. "I'm pretty sure I owed you some ridiculous debt in my past life, and you've somehow chased me all the way into this one!"

He was trying to buy some time. If his suspicions were correct, then Zhuxie Chixin and the others would be arriving soon.

Mosquito Daoist tried her best to rearrange her tattered daoist robes. Unfortunately, no matter how she tried, she still could not manage to cover most of her exposed skin. "Hmph! I'm not in the mood to chat with you right now, brat. Hand over what you've found, or else I'll start working on the woman next to you. Don't come crying to me then."

She already had a plan in mind. She wouldn't immediately kill Pei Mianman, but use her as a hostage to get the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra out of Zu An instead.

Zu An shrugged and pulled Pei Mianman behind him. "We just got here as well, and only managed to look around for a bit. This big meteor is the only thing here. There's nothing else."

Given her past experiences with him, Mosquito Daoist wasn't at all inclined to believe him. She leaped towards the two of them.

Zu An and Pei Mianman quickly raised their weapons in defense. Unfortunately, they didn't have Qiu Honglei's Empress Lantern, and Mosquito Daoist was also already slowly adapting to the two of them, especially Zu An's strange movement technique and Pei Mianman's black flames. Now that she was more prepared, the two of them were no match for her.

Pei Mianman was the more injured of the two, and her reactions were slow. She was thrown backwards by the force of Mosquito Daoist's attack.

If it wasn't because Mosquito Daoist still had a use for her in mind, she would have already died.

Seeing her seriously injured, Zu An tried to leap to her aid, but this only gave Mosquito Daoist an opening. She seized the opportunity and sent a palm flying towards his chest and smashing right into it.

Mosquito Daoist wasn't as lenient with him as she was with Pei Mianman. She had watched him crawl back up over and over again while drenched in blood, and knew that he definitely had some special powers of recovery, which she subconsciously attributed to the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra. That was why she no longer held back like in the previous fights.

Zu An felt as if a fire truck had rammed straight into him. His body flew backwards in a graceful arc and crashed into the meteorite behind him.

The tremendous impact sent him smashing right through the surface of the meteor, creating a human-shaped hole.

Even Mosquito Daoist was given a fright. She wanted to fully immobilize Zu An, not take his life immediately. How was it possible that her attack had been so strong?!

Only Zu An alone knew that, although the meteorite behind him looked as though it was fashioned out of some incredibly tough black steel, it was actually nowhere near that sturdy. On the contrary, it was actually quite brittle.

Mosquito was just about to jump in and secure the two of them when a loud and continuous cracking filled the air, as though something was breaking apart.

She immediately stopped and looked at the massive meteorite behind Zu An. Given her cultivation, she could tell that that was where the sounds were coming from.

It looked like Zu An hadn't been lying after all. The two of them hadn't had time to uncover the meteor's secrets yet.

An irregular phenomenon of nature always brought with it a powerful treasure, but this treasure was often guarded by tremendous danger. She wasn't in the greatest condition right now, so she had to be more careful.

"Ah Zu!" Pei Mianman staggered over to where Zu An had crashed into the meteorite, pulling him out. Just these simple movements alone were enough to exhaust whatever remaining energy she had. It was clear just how serious her injuries were.

Zu An found himself free of the meteorite, his clothes completely tattered, like those of a beggar.

However, he didn't have time to tend to himself right now. He turned around to look at the meteorite behind him. Cracks had appeared all around that human-shaped hole. Initially, there were only one or two cracks, but more and more quickly followed. Eventually, the entire outer layer of the meteor was covered in cracks.

Without warning, this massive meteor suddenly split open and broke into countless small pieces.

A pitch-black stele^[1] poked out from the rubble. There were two strange symbols carved on the surface. They looked like characters or drawings, but were somehow neither. Pei Mianman was quite knowledgeable herself, but she had never seen characters like these in the writings or language of any race.

Zu An stared at the two characters as if he were in a trance. A figure rushed past the two of them. Mosquito Daoist reached for the stele, her eyes brimming with excitement, "Hahaha! This treasure is mine!"

A meteorite descended from outer space, containing a stele within it. Anyone with a brain could figure out that it was extraordinary! This was sure to be some exceptional treasure! She couldn't resist the temptation, and decided to seize it for herself first.

Zu An and Pei Mianman were both in a terrible state, and were completely powerless to stop her. They could only watch as she wrapped her hands around the stele.

However, the moment Mosquito Daoist grabbed the stele, a layer of light flickered across it, sending a powerful force rippling outwards. With an agonizing shriek, Mosquito Daoist's body was blown backwards.

Even though she managed to neutralize most of the impact thanks to her extensive combat experience, she still suffered a considerable number of internal injuries.

Zu An immediately cheered. "Serves you right!"

Mosquito Daoist refused to acknowledge defeat. She rushed towards the stele again. This time, she used less force than before, and slowly reached her hand towards the stele. However, there was the same flicker of light, and she was flung away by what appeared to be a barrier around the stele.

This time, however, since she hadn't used too much strength, she was only pushed away lightly, without suffering any serious damage.

Mosquito Daoist slowly walked around the stele, trying out different methods that she could come up with, but none of them worked.

Not only was she left frustrated, she knew that others would soon be drawn here as well. She didn't have much time left.

Off to the side, Zu An grabbed Pei Mianman's hand and signaled to her with his eyes. The two of them used what remained of their strength to run away from the stele. With luck, Mosquito Daoist would be distracted by the stele and would not give chase.

However, with a flicker of movement, Mosquito Daoist appeared in front of the two of them, blocking their path. She reached out her hand and grabbed Pei Mianman by her neck. "You two, go and touch that stele!"

It was possible that she, as a member of the fiend race, could not pass through whatever barrier was around it, but the two humans might be able to succeed. After all, such restrictions were similar to those that elders of the human race employed to safeguard their own secrets, and prevent other races from inheriting their skills.

Zu An snorted disdainfully. "Those who ask for help should always ask nicely."

Mosquito Daoist could only stare at him, speechless.

Is this guy somehow blind to the fact that he is currently a prisoner? She would've already killed him instantly if not for the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra.

You have successfully trolled Mosquito Daoist for 222 Rage points!

"If you keep spouting nonsense, I'll start cutting up your woman's face!" she threatened, stroking her sharp fingernails along Pei Mianman's fair cheeks.

Chapter 503: Yinxu

Pei Mianman's expression grew frosty. "I'll bite my own tongue and end my life if you dare cut up my face! Let's see what you'll use to get the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra out of Zu An then."

She could guess what Mosquito Daoist was thinking, and purposely said this to remind Zu An as well.

Mosquito Daoist froze. "Oh? Girl, you look pretty delicate and fragile, but you have a pretty stiff backbone. It seems like you care a little bit about this face of yours. In that case, you'd better cooperate obediently!"

"Enough, enough." Zu An was worried that she might actually hurt Pei Mianman. "Let's just go over there. Let her go first."

"You first." Mosquito Daoist wanted to be careful. She didn't want to see anything else happen.

Zu An shrugged his shoulders and walked straight towards that stele without any further argument. Mosquito Daoist was quite surprised at how agreeable he was being.

He reached the stele and examined it carefully. It was entirely black in color and felt extremely ancient. He couldn't figure out if the two symbols carved on its surface were words or decorative designs.

He stared at those somewhat familiar diagrams, and a pensive look appeared on his face.

"What are you dilly dallying for?" Mosquito Daoist said impatiently when she saw him standing in front of the stele like a statue. A massive meteorite had crashed in this area, and others might be arriving at any time to investigate. She was obviously in a hurry.

Zu An grunted in reply, then gently touched the stele. As expected, he encountered the same problem as Mosquito Daoist.

A transparent barrier formed in front of his hand, preventing him from touching the stele.

"Use more force!" Mosquito Daoist ordered, frowning. Were her suspicions wrong? Could it be that this wasn't left behind by a powerful human?

Zu An could only brace himself and throw himself at the stele. However, he had seen what Mosquito Daoist had suffered earlier, so he didn't use his full strength.

Sure enough, the instant he rammed into the barrier, it instantly became incredibly hard. He cried out in pain.

Mosquito Daoist was watching all of this closely. She noticed that the force of the rebound was clearly not as great as when she herself had charged at it earlier. The main function of this object was probably to absorb the energy of an impact and then reflect it back.

"I can't break through either." Zu An rubbed his shoulder as he crawled back to his feet. He had a hopeless expression on his face.

Mosquito Daoist proposed another idea. "Scatter some of your blood on it." She had roamed the world for many years, and she knew that many restrictions used blood as a catalyst.

She wasn't worried that this stele would recognize Zu An as its owner. After all, she had this big-chested woman as hostage, and she was confident that she could easily overwhelm Zu An as well, given the gap in their cultivations.

Even though it was unusual to be able to transfer a blood-bound treasure from one owner to another, it would be a different story once the original owner died.

She would get rid of him once she obtained the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra anyway. It took barely an instant to formulate her plans.

Zu An didn't refuse her request. He was already riddled with wounds, so it was easy enough to draw blood from any of them.

He flicked a drop of blood at the stele. The blood disappeared after making contact with the transparent barrier, but there was no reaction.

"Was it insufficient?" Mosquito Daoist muttered. "Use more!"

"I don't have much left, thanks to you!" Zu An berated her angrily. However, he still ran his palm across his body, coating it in blood, then reached forward to touch the barrier.

The barrier seemed to be able to cleanse itself somehow. His hand left a red stain on the barrier, but the red color quickly disappeared, and the patch regained its original transparency.

"Did it absorb it or not...?" Mosquito Daoist was confused. She pushed Pei Mianman forward. "You, go and give it a try."

Pei Mianman was anxious to be away from her. When she reached Zu An's side, she said through voice transmission, "Ah Zu, what do we do now?"

Zu An's expression was a little odd. "Don't panic. I think our luck is about to change."

"About to change?" Pei Mianman was confused. She couldn't see how things would get any better. Were they really putting all of their hopes on other people getting here in time?

"What are you two muttering about there? Hurry up and give it a try!" Mosquito Daoist shouted. She didn't dare stand too close because she was afraid that there would be some other formidable defensive mechanism. However, she remained close enough that she could still react in time if something happened.

Pei Mianman had no choice but to do what Zu An had done earlier. At first, the barrier remained intact, and showed no sign of reaction. However, as she wiped off the blood from her wounds and tried one last time, that stele suddenly trembled. The two diagrams on the stele flared with a burst of golden light. The symbols seemed to have come alive, flickering with light.

When this happened, Mosquito Daoist rushed forward to take a look. Unfortunately, aside from the golden light flowing out of the two diagrams, nothing else seemed to have changed. The barrier was still there, and they still couldn't touch the stele.

"It looks like the key lies with those two symbol diagrams," Mosquito Daoist said. "Do either of you recognize it?"

Zu An and Pei Mianman both shook their heads. “I’ve never seen it before.”

Mosquito Daoist was asking for the sake of asking. Even she, who had mountains of experience, had never seen these symbols before. There was no way that these kids would have either.

She fell into deep thought. “Does this seal need the blood of a woman to activate, or does it need a man and a woman to activate it together...?”

While she was still pondering this issue, Zu An suddenly grabbed Pei Mianman. He looked at the two strange patterns on the stele and said, “Yin... Xu!”

The strange symbols weren’t some random chicken scratches—they were ancient Chinese characters from his past world! These were oracle bone inscriptions!

A written language already existed during one of China's most ancient dynasties, the Shang Dynasty. These characters were usually carved on tortoiseshell and bones, and then used for sacrificial purposes. That was why they were called oracle bone inscriptions.

Even though modern china already deciphered most of these oracle bone inscriptions, these scribblings were incomprehensible to ordinary people. None of them would recognize these characters.

Zu An only recognized these characters because he had watched a documentary about archaeology previously, regarding this oracle script. The title of that documentary was ‘Yinxu, ruins of Yinshang’.

The Shang Dynasty had relocated their capital city many times. The most famous capital city was Yin City. That was why the Shang Dynasty was also called the Yinshang. This capital city was later excavated, but after a thousand years of erosion, this previously-prosperous city had been reduced to mere buried ruins.

That was why those remains were called Yinxu[1].

Zu A didn’t know why he would see these two characters in this strange world, moreover through the oracle script of the Shang Dynasty. Yinxu should have been a term later generations used when referring to the Shang Dynasty—there should be no way those actually from the Shang Dynasty would use this term.

However, this wasn’t the time to think about all this. When he heard Mosquito Daoist say that the key lay in those two characters, and seeing how the seal had clearly been triggered earlier, he had to give it a try.

The stele shook suddenly at the sound of his voice. The strokes of the two characters began to move, and then they began to swirl around the edges of the stele. The stele morphed into a portal the height of an average human. The borders shone with gold, while the inside was black.

Zu An was no stranger to these portals. He had seen similar wormholes in the science fiction works of his past world. The entrance to the Ursae dungeon was also a similar portal, although this portal was much smaller in scale.

Without hesitation, he held on tightly to Pei Mianman’s hand and jumped straight in.

“You little bastard!” Mosquito Daoist had been deep in thought, so the sudden developments left her rather stunned. The stele had been protected by the barrier just a moment ago, and the gate of light had formed almost instantly, so she was powerless to stop them in time.

She subconsciously reached out towards the two of them when she saw them jump through, trying to grab at least one of them, and managed to grab Zu An’s trouser leg. But Zu An was already prepared. His longsword sliced through his pant leg, cutting that section off.

Mosquito Daoist was left holding a pointless piece of cloth. From the time Zu An and Pei Mianman entered it, the portal had already shrunk to the size of a bowl, preventing any other humanoids from entering.

She couldn’t believe what she was seeing. She had seen secret dungeons before, but she had never seen a secret dungeon that only remained open for such a short time.

There was no way that she would stand idly by as this treasure slipped right through her fingers, not after so much sacrifice. She would never accept this! She transformed into a Blackblood Mosquito and followed them inside the instant before the portal closed.

Chapter 504: The Most Shameless Man of All

The inn within the small town was full of the Imperial Guard, and King Liang and Liu Yao were surprisingly on the list. They had already made contact with the reinforcements sent from the capital.

King Liang and Liu Yao were normally confident and arrogant, because they were usually the most powerful individuals present, and were also relatives of the emperor and empress.

Now, however, the two of them were uncomfortably restless. They snuck looks at the man off to the side from time to time, as if trying to determine his present mood.

No one could blame them for being so cautious. Even though the rank of the man in front of them was beneath theirs, his strength was absolutely unquestioned. His rank was being deliberately suppressed only because he was the emperor’s confidante, and the emperor wanted him to serve as the leader of his secret service.

Many nobles and officials in the capital had been crushed by him over the years, which was why the two of them did not dare to be negligent.

They had been given the huge task of capturing Zu An, and yet they had ended up losing him, and the lives of ten of the Embroidered Envoy as well.

If they had managed to capture Lu Sanyuan, then they might have at least been able to make up for some of that. However, Lu Sanyuan’s cultivation was way too high, and even with the two of them working in tandem, there was no way for them to deal with him. They had been toyed with for a while before he had swaggered off.

There was only one possible outcome for this, which was for them to be stripped of their ranks and criticized harshly. The two of them were relatives of the emperor and empress, so they wouldn’t suffer

as poor a fate as other ordinary officials, but they wouldn't stand a chance if Zhuxie Chixin spoke poorly of them when they returned to the capital.

A storm was brewing on Zhuxie Chixin's face. He had noticed the way the two of them were behaving, but paid them no attention.

One after the other, the Embroidered Envoy began to return from their assigned scouting missions.

"Reporting to the Chief Commander! We did not locate Mosquito Daoist's whereabouts."

"Reporting to the Chief Commander! We did not locate Zu An's whereabouts."

"There was no sign of the young miss of the Pei clan either."

...

Zhuxie Chixin's eyelids twitched as the reports came in. He looked at the beautiful and reserved woman beside him. "Miss Chu, I fear that we require an explanation from you."

"I do not understand what I should be explaining," Chu Chuyan replied indifferently.

King Liang and Liu Yao were taken aback. This young lady was clearly showing such bravado because of her ignorance. She did not know how terrifying Zhuxie Chixin was. In the capital, even children knew to fear him.

Despite that, their hearts were full of admiration as well. They had heard of the reputation of the Chu clan's first miss before, but they would only catch glimpses of her from far away. They weren't of the same generation, after all, so even if Chu Chuyan was in the capital, there wouldn't be any suitable opportunity for them to interact with her.

Now, they managed to see what she was like up close. As expected, her reputation was well-deserved. She really did have the aura of an immortal deity, floating above the cares of the mortal world.

Given their social status, the two of them had already seen their fair share of young and beautiful women. However, sharp and refined women like her really were a rarity, and what made her even more outstanding was her uniquely cold arrogance and her noble temperament.

Right now, she was facing the leader of this special assignment, whose cultivation was far above hers, and who held the lives of countless people in the palm of his hand. However, she didn't try to assert herself, nor did she bend down in subservience. She merely maintained her simple, elegant composure.

Such a proud and arrogant demeanor stirred in men a powerful desire to conquer her. However, such a woman was definitely not worthy of any ordinary man.

She's like a flower lovingly placed upon a pile of cow dung!

The two of them both happened upon the same thought by chance, because both of them recalled how obscenely and shamelessly Zu An had acted along the way.

In their opinion, the person worthy of Chu Chuyan would be an elegant and handsome young master, who was gentle in speech and character. This man would have to possess an exceptional background, and be a genius as a cultivator, nurtured from his youth. This Zu An, however, was just some hoodlum

from the streets, no matter which angle they looked at him from. They had no idea which part of him attracted Chu Chuyan.

They subconsciously glanced over at the nearby Zheng Dan. The Sang clan's daughter-in-law treated him rather well too, and hadn't said much even when Zu An bullied her. They even seemed to be rather attached to each other.

Then, there was that lady saint of the Devil Sect, and the Pei clan's young miss as well. Both of them seemed to be close to Zu An.

Their imaginations went into overdrive. Were the aesthetic tastes of women and men that different?

Zhuxie Chixin cut off their fanciful thoughts with a cold snort. "I recall that Chu First Miss promised me that you wouldn't help Zu An escape. You swore on the name of the Chu clan. Why are you placing the Chu clan in danger because of a man?"

Chu Chuyan kept her composure. "I indeed made this promise, and I didn't help Zu An escape."

"Then why was it that Zu An was gone by the time I arrived?" Zhuxie Chixin gave her a frosty look. Her exceptional appearance hadn't the slightest effect on him. As the leader of the Embroidered Envoy, the emperor's greatest and most trusted aide, he had long since trained himself to be unaffected by the charms of women.

Chu Chuyan replied, "At the time, Mosquito Daoist was going to kill both Pei Mianman and Ah Zu, and the members of the Devil Sect were intent on capturing them as well. I did not have the ability to protect them both, so I ordered them to leave the battlefield first in order to survive. I did not intend to let Zu An escape."

"Why did those members of the Devil Sect agree to cooperate with you? On top of that, you even let them go when I arrived. Is the Chu clan colluding with the Devil Sect?" Zhuxie Chixin leaned forward. His gaze was intensely oppressive, and his voice had grown much more severe.

King Liang and Liu Yao subconsciously straightened their bodies, cowed by his overbearing stance.

Sang Hong, Sang Qien, and Zheng Dan exchanged glances. This was definitely a huge crime. The emperor had been looking for a way to deal with the Chu clan all along, and this crime would really be the final nail in the coffin for the Chu clan.

Chu Chuyan clearly realized this as well. She frowned. "Lord Zhuxie, please do not speak such frightening words. Our Chu clan has nothing to do with the Devil Sect. We only worked together because Mosquito Daoist was too strong. Neither side was a match for her."

After a pause, she continued, "Lord Zhuxie is well aware of Mosquito Daoist's prowess. Respectfully, not even you could restrain her, so I stood even less of a chance. As for what happened then, the Devil Sect used the opportunity to get away. I was seriously injured myself, so there wasn't much I could do to stop them."

Zhuxie Chixin almost choked on his breath. This woman had completely turned the tables on him! It was true that Mosquito Daoist had slipped through his fingers in the end. If this matter was examined closely, he would be the one to bear all the responsibility.

His expression grew even darker. Mosquito Daoist was infamous, and she really was quite formidable herself. The many years she had spent on the run from her pursuers had only helped her to perfect her arts in escape. She had still managed to get away despite his side having such a huge advantage in terms of numbers.

As for those Devil Sect fiends, they had also taken the opportunity to slip away.

That lady saint of the Devil Sect had run in the direction of Chu Chuyan, who should have at least done something about it, but she had deliberately let her go.

Unfortunately her explanation for that was also reasonable and fair, and he had no proof to back his claim up.

His face was almost as black as a piece of coal. A subordinate interrupted them. "Reporting! There has been a discovery in the rear courtyard."

This sudden report was sudden and unexpected, and he quickly got up to take a look. The others also followed, curious to find out what had happened.

They reached the rear courtyard, where they discovered a simple, crude tombstone. The graves were exhumed, and then the dozen-or-so corpses were removed.

Zhuxie Chixin frowned. "Who are these people? Are they from the Devil Sect?"

A trembling voice spoke in reply. "No, they are warriors from our Sang clan."

Zhuxie Chixin looked at Sang Qien. "Why would your men die here? From their appearance, they seemed to have dressed themselves up as tavern workers. What were you all planning?"

"I received intelligence that someone wanted to harm my father, so I summoned some men to protect them..." Sang Qien gave a rough recount of what had happened. For the sake of avoiding complications, she didn't talk about how they took the initiative to save Zu An, instead framing the meeting between the Devil Sect and their men as a coincidence.

"Those Devil Sect members really are vicious and merciless." Zhuxie Chixin suddenly sensed something amiss. "Who buried these people, then? Those Devil Sect members wouldn't be so kind-hearted as to bury them and erect a tombstone, right?"

Even though these people weren't resting in coffins, they had still been carefully buried. Every one of them had their clothes sorted out, and they were even given a woven mat to serve as a coffin.

"It was probably Zu An," Chu Chuyan said. She looked at the words on the tombstone and blushed. "The handwriting is so ugly, yet the words are so distinctive. Who else could it be but him?"

Someone else found the other half of the tombstone, which had accidentally broken off while the graves were being exhumed. Sure enough, the large words 'Set up by Zu An' were written on it.

"Zu An..." Sang Qien fell into a daze as she read the words he had written: "Grave of loyal men". Her eyes grew slightly misty. She suddenly seemed to understand why her sister-in-law had fallen for this man.

...

“Achoo!” Meanwhile, somewhere far away, Zu An sneezed. “Which girl is thinking about me now?” he muttered to himself.

Next to him, Pei Mianman snorted. “You really are the most shameless man I have ever met.”

Chapter 505, Part I: Hell On Earth

A sudden cry rang out from outside the inn. “Come over here! What is that?”

A group of people subconsciously raised their heads and looked in the direction that person was pointing. A blinding radiance streaked across the sky.

Liu Yao looked at that shining meteorite as it flew through the night sky, and muttered to himself, “It’s an irregular phenomenon... It surely harbors a great treasure!”

The eyes of those around him burned with desire when they heard what he said.

Only Zhuxie Chixin maintained an impassive expression. He stared at that streak of radiance that had suddenly turned the dark night into day, then said, “Let’s move. We’re heading over there to take a look.”

Chu Chuyan was slightly hesitant. She was still worried about Zu An and Pei Mianman’s safety, concerned that they might not be able to escape Mosquito Daoist’s pursuit. She wanted to use this opportunity to find them.

Sang Qien walked over to her side and said, “Big sister Chu, even though I haven’t been with Zu An for a long time, from what I know about him, he’ll probably run towards that falling meteorite. I’m sure its sudden appearance has drawn enough attention, and other people will converge on it swiftly. There will surely be others there to help keep Mosquito Daoist in check.”

After all, there was clearly no need for Zu An to reveal the fact that he possessed Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, yet he had done so deliberately to drag in other powers to keep the emperor in check. This man could be considered absolutely reckless, yet at the same time, he was still an incredibly meticulous thinker. She believed that he would choose to run towards the meteor, as that would make it easier for him to escape.

Chu Chuyan gave her a surprised look. “I’ve heard that Miss Sang was sharp, and it now seems like the rumors were all true. If we do end up rescuing Ah Zu, I shall owe you a debt of gratitude.”

“I should be the one who is grateful to him for burying these men.” Sang Qien gave those deathsworn soldiers a look. She had already requested that Zhuxie Chixin order the men to be buried again. Once they returned to the capital, they would dispatch some people to bring these men back home.

Chu Chuyan’s expression softened as well. “Even though there are too many things I can criticize Zu An for, deep down, he is still a kind person.”

Sang Qien grunted in agreement. “I could sense that as well.”

Sang Hong sighed. He actually admired Zu An greatly. If he'd known about this beforehand, he would have brought his daughter to Brightmoon City instead, and taken him in as his son-in-law. His son wouldn't have had to die such a miserable death then...

Zhuxie Chixin and the others were not in a sympathetic mood. He left behind some men to guard the inn and watch the criminals, then personally led the Embroidered Envoy in the direction the meteorite had crashed.

King Liang and Liu Yao couldn't hide their curiosity, and followed along as well. So did Chu Chuyan, who was worried about Zu An.

However, by the time they reached the crash site, all they saw was a crater, with some debris scattered about, probably from the meteorite. Zhuxie Chixin's face was as dark as a thundercloud.

"Lord Zhuxie, do you see Zu An?" Chu Chuyan asked. He had the highest cultivation among them all, and had arrived first, so he might have noticed something.

Zhuxie Chixin stared at the remnants of the meteor. "We were too late. I saw them jump through a portal. Mosquito Daoist followed them in as well. The portal disappeared too quickly, and I wasn't able to stop them in time."

He presumed that the portal was the entrance to a secret dungeon. However, he had never seen a portal entrance close that quickly. Who knew if Zu An would even be able to return alive? After all, only after a secret dungeon had matured and been mostly explored did it become relatively safer. Most secret dungeons were extremely dangerous when they first opened.

He felt a huge headache coming on when he thought about how he was going to explain things to the emperor once he got back.

"Mosquito Daoist went in as well?" Chu Chuyan's expression changed slightly, a tremor of fear growing in her heart.

"That's not something to be worried about. Secret dungeons are usually rather complicated, so they might have been sent to different locations upon entering," said Zhuxie Chixin.

...

The instant Zu An and Pei Mianman entered the portal, they felt a sudden weightlessness. This wasn't an unfamiliar feeling—they had felt something similar when they entered the dungeon behind the academy.

When they regained their senses, they discovered that they were in a world shrouded in mist. Gray-colored fog hung heavy in the air all around them.

"I think I saw Mosquito Daoist enter as well," Pei Mianman said, glancing behind her in worry. However, there was no one there.

Zu An said, "She did follow us in, but she was probably sent to a different location."

He too felt a growing headache. That woman just never gave up! She never even let this small opportunity slip past her.

Pei Mianman also understood what had happened. This was true of many other secret dungeons as well. Those who entered were often sent to different locations within the dungeon. To arrive in the same location as a group, those entering needed to hold hands.

Only now did she notice that their hands were still clasped together tightly. Her face colored slightly as she felt the heat coming from his hand. "How much longer are you going to hold my hand for?"

Zu An chuckled awkwardly and quickly let go of her hand. "I had no choice earlier! I wasn't trying to take advantage of you."

"I know." Pei Mianman's looked at him with her beautiful peach-blossom eyes, which were deep and enchanting. "Otherwise, I would've burned you to ash with my black flames a long time ago."

Zu An jumped in fright. "Please don't...Whoever comes into contact with your black flames is incinerated completely, and even their bones are reduced to nothing!"

"You silly thing, why would I use my black flames on you?" Pei Mianman giggled.

Zu An looked around them, peering out at the greenish-gray mist surrounding them. This mist seemed different from regular mist, that would dissipate even in a gentle breeze. It was exceptionally thick, and he wasn't confident that even Solitary Wind's tornados could scatter it. "Be careful, this place is rather strange, and we don't know where Mosquito Daoist is either. Things could turn sour if we end up running into her."

This mist reduced their visibility to just a few meters ahead of them, which wasn't far at all. If Mosquito Daoist was hiding nearby, they wouldn't have any advanced warning.

"Okay..." Pei Mianman wasn't actually that scared, yet she somehow felt a sense of safety when she was around this man, although his cultivation was clearly lower than hers.

"How are your injuries?" Zu An said as he took out a pill. She had been injured by Mosquito Daoist again earlier on, and he could see how weak she was.

"I'm fine. I'm already in a much better condition." Pei Mianman shook her head, refusing his offer. "The medicine from earlier is still doing its work. I'm already slowly recovering."

Zu An had to give Ji Dengtu credit for his medicine. He made a mental note to get some more from Ji Xiaoxi the next time he saw her.

"By the way, how were you able to recognize the characters on that stele?" Pei Mianman asked curiously. The scene from earlier on was still fresh in her memory.

"Because I know a lot of things, duh!" Zu An said smugly.

Pei Mianman snorted. "I've studied the records left behind by all the different races ever since I was young. Why have I never seen these words, then?"

Zu An knew that she was a top student, and he probably wouldn't be able to fool her if he said that they were some random characters that were only used in his hometown. Instead, he said, "I don't know either. I've seen those characters in my dreams before, so I recognized them when I saw them on the stele."

Pei Mianman was shocked. "There are records dating far back into ancient times about certain individuals' talents being directly bestowed on them by the heavens. I've always thought that it was just a myth. I never expected that such a thing would be true."

Zu An exhaled in relief. He had chosen this excuse precisely because of these examples from the past. He hadn't expected it to actually work.

Now that he had loosened up, a host of questions began to bubble up in his mind. Would he actually see the ruins of Yinshang, and come across any oracle bone inscriptions?

He recalled meeting the first emperor, Qin Shihuang, in the dungeon behind the academy, and other figures from ancient times. He sank deep into thought, trying to puzzle out what was going on.

"Ah!!" Pei Mianman suddenly cried out in alarm, and subconsciously grabbed his arm.

"What happened?" Zu An asked anxiously. He looked all around him, expecting to see that Mosquito Daoist had somehow caught up to them, but their immediate surroundings seemed completely calm, and he didn't detect any possible dangers.

"Blood..." Pei Mianman pointed at the ground beneath them. "The color of the soil here is dark red, as if it had been soaked in blood."

There was greenish-gray mist surrounding them. They could only see a few meters ahead of them, and they had been in a constant state of stress all this while. The sight of the blood-red ground beneath them was enough to immediately send chills running down anyone's spine.

Just how much blood was needed to completely turn the soil dark red?

505, Part II: Hell On Earth

Zu An was quick to reassure her. "It might not be blood. It might just be red because of the presence of oxidized iron."

"Oxidized iron?" Pei Mianman froze, a blank expression on her face.

"You can think of it as rusted iron." Even though Zu An was trying his best to comfort her, he didn't have much confidence in his own explanation. Was this really the result of oxidation?

Pei Mianman said, "Regardless of what it is, we still need to remain alert. This sort of secret dungeon is probably full of dangers."

This was actually common knowledge in the cultivation world. It was easy to see if a secret dungeon was dangerous or not just from its environment. If it had gentle breezes, bright beautiful sunlight, green hills and clear waters, it was probably a relatively peaceful dungeon. Even if the core of the dungeon was slightly more dangerous, it would be perfectly manageable as long as one did not venture there.

The environment of this particular dungeon was anything but that.

The two of them proceeded carefully, because it was all too easy to get lost within the dense greenish-gray mist. There was no way to distinguish north from south, east from west. The two of them could only proceed forward cautiously, one step at a time.

The ground beneath them gave away suddenly. This section was not solid enough to support their weight.

“Be careful!” Zu An and Pei Mianman coincidentally cried out in warning at the same time as they leaped backwards.

Unfortunately, Pei Mianman was seriously injured, so she was unable to jump to safety. Zu An grabbed her right away, but the action sent him tumbling down into the hole as well.

In a panic, he quickly stuck out a hand and tried to grab onto a nearby wall. He didn’t know how deep this hole was, or if it was a trap, so he didn’t dare let them fall.

Unfortunately, things didn’t turn out the way he had expected. There was something not right with the walls of the pit. They were hard and slippery. At Zu An’s current level of cultivation, he could split a stone with no difficulty at all. His fingers should have dug into the wall firmly and held on, especially considering the strength he had used.

Somehow, though, his fingers were only able to make shallow indents on the wall, and were unable to penetrate any deeper. His fingers were already in great pain, despite having not made much of a mark on the wall.

With Zu An unable to grab onto any handhold, the two of them tumbled down into the darkness.

Zu An subconsciously wrapped himself around Pei Mianman, using his body to shield her. She was seriously injured right now, and he was concerned that this fall would be enough to kill her.

As for himself, he had the Primordial Origin Sutra, so his powers of recovery far exceeded any normal human.

Just like that, the two of them rolled downwards. He tucked Pei Mianman’s head firmly against his chest and did his best to cover her with as much of his body as possible.

Fortunately, they weren’t tumbling into a bottomless abyss. After a moment, the two of them finally hit the bottom.

Zu An groaned as he felt something sharp stabbing into his back. However, he couldn’t be bothered with this right now. He quickly lifted the face of the beauty in his arms. “Big Manman, are you all right?”

Pei Mianman’s flawless eyes no longer possessed their usual devastatingly powerful charm. Instead, she stared at him somewhat blankly. “I’m... fine. Aren’t you worried that Chuyan might be heartbroken if you throw away your life here?”

She clearly remembered what had happened just now. He hadn’t run away on his own, but fell into this hole with her in order to save her.

But none of them knew what was down here, and he had put his own life in danger just to save hers.

Moreover, he had used his own body to shield her from the rocks and other dangers as they tumbled down the slope. Her clothes were only slightly wrinkled, perhaps torn in some spots, and she had suffered only minor cuts and scrapes.

On the contrary, Zu An's clothes had been completely ripped to shreds, and his face was covered in cuts and bruises.

Zu An laughed out loud. "What kind of nonsense are you spewing? How could I abandon you like that? Aren't you my friend?"

"But we're only friends..." A trace of disappointment flashed across her face, vanishing as soon as it appeared. She immediately found her usual charm again. "I guess that's fine. I am Chuyan's good friend, after all. Chuyan would never let you hear the end of it if you didn't save me."

She then raised a fist and hit Zu An.

"Ah!!" Zu An inhaled sharply. He felt a piercing pain in his back, and then he spat out a mouthful of blood.

"What's wrong? I didn't even use any strength!" Seeing him in such pain almost brought Pei Mianman to tears.

"It's nothing. I think something stabbed me in the back when we landed earlier. Help me take a look." Zu An twisted his head, but he couldn't see his own back.

Pei Mianman immediately began to weep. A long, sharp object had pierced deep into his back. From the looks of it, it had already punctured his lungs. No wonder blood had gushed out from his mouth!

Hearing her description, Zu An unexpectedly relaxed. "It's not too bad. Help me pull it out."

"But if I pull it out now, you'll lose a lot of blood!" Pei Mianman exclaimed.

Zu An rubbed her head and reassured her. "Don't worry. My cultivation might be average, but my body is pretty tough. Nothing's going to happen."

Pei Mianman finally remembered the amazing regenerative properties of his body. She bit her lip and said, "Be careful."

"Yes ma'am!" Zu An straightened his body. Even though it was painful, he forced himself to act calmly, so as not to worry her.

He was actually quite amazed at himself. He was horrified when he first learned that Guan Yu had poison scraped off his bones^[1], but he had been dealt countless grievous wounds in this world already. Forget about scraping his bones—his bones had already broken and fused back together many, many times.

Of course, this was all thanks to the world of cultivation. The bodies of cultivators were not as brittle as ordinary humans. Nevertheless, other cultivators would have already died if they had suffered the injuries he did. In the end, he had to thank the Heiress Ball of Delights he had back then, and now, the Primordial Origin Sutra.

Pei Mianman was a cultivation genius, and she was able to keep her hands steady no matter what weapons they wielded. However, as she held onto the object sticking into Zu An, her hands trembled furiously.

“It’s all right, just pull it out.” Zu An patted her gently. His warm smile finally calmed her down.

Pei Mianman also knew that she couldn’t keep putting it off. She took a deep breath, and then she slowly pulled out that sharp rock. Her movements were slow, afraid that blood might just gush out if she pulled it out too quickly.

Zu An groaned, and his forehead was immediately covered in fine beads of sweat. This hurts way too bloody much! Then again, it had pierced his lungs, after all.

From what he knew, the most painful way to die in his previous world was to have one’s lungs severely punctured. The victim would leave the world in great pain, gasping for air all the way.

Once again, he felt grateful for the Primordial Origin Sutra’s incredible powers of regeneration. Without it, even if he didn’t die here, he would still end up dying from an infection.

Pei Mianman finally removed the sharp rock. Then, she tapped his pressure points and helped him seal up the wound. Even so, there was a massive hole in Zu An’s back, and his body was riddled with other wounds as well. Tears began to stream uncontrollably down her face again.

She knew that she would have been killed by this sharp object if Zu An hadn’t protected her. She was the only reason he had been wounded so badly.

Because of what happened to her mother, Pei Mianman never believed in the concepts of love and affection. Although she always put on a flirtatious attitude, and seemed the polar opposite of Chu Chuyan, her heart had always been as cold and unfeeling as a rod of pure iron. She viewed everything in the world with indifference.

Even though her relationship with Zu An was pretty good, and she might have felt a little bit for him, that was as far as it went.

Now, though, he had saved her life over and over and again, and the walls around her heart—which she had built up ever since she was a young girl—had begun to collapse bit by bit. Even her long-frozen heart had begun to melt.

“Sis, can you please save the crying for later? Help me apply some medication, please.” Zu An was speechless. Wasn’t this girl usually pretty quick-witted? Why was she acting like a little girl today?

Pei Mianman snapped out of her daze. She took the medicine bottle from his hands and helped him apply the medicine, then tore off a part of her clothing to bandage his wound.

Her eyes suddenly narrowed as she noticed several other bandages on his body. These bandages even had little flowers embroidered on them, and they seemed to give off a faint fragrance. Another woman had definitely helped him with his wounds.

This was only a momentary distraction for her. She quickly wrapped up his fresh injuries and helped him wipe away the sweat on his brow.

“Big Manman, your hands are really soft.” Zu An felt much better as the coolness seeped into his back. With Divine Physician Ji’s medicine and the Primordial Origin Sutra working in tandem, survival wasn’t an issue at all.

This time, Pei Mianman didn’t laugh. Instead, she gave him a serious look. “Ah Zu, can you promise me something?”

“What is it?” Zu An froze.

Pei Mianman bit her lips. She hesitated several times, clearly searching for the right way to say this. In the end, she looked him in the eyes and said, “Can you promise me that you won’t risk your life to pick up girls in the future?!”

Zu An stared, speechless.

Pei Mianman continued, “You risked your own life to save me several times, and you did the same for Zheng Dan earlier. You blocked a spear for her. And then there’s that Qiu Honglei as well... If you don’t cherish your own body, how can you face... face Chuyan?”

Zu An was embarrassed. “Actually, I wasn’t thinking about any of that. I just couldn’t bear to watch you guys die without doing anything...”

Pei Mianman’s gaze softened. “I know you mean well, but your luck will run out eventually if you keep doing that! What if you really do lose your life?”

Zu An said quietly, “My body is different from those of ordinary humans...”

Pei Mianman cut him off. “I know you can recover quickly, but even that has a limit! Can you promise me that you won’t do something stupid like this in the future?”

Zu An’s heart softened when he looked into her misty eyes. He quickly said, “All right, all right, I promise you. Even if I am saving others, I will make sure that I survive... But if you encounter danger again, there’s no way I won’t try to save you.”

“Look at this guy...” Pei Mianman sighed. This dummy didn’t understand me at all! How many girls can resist a man who is willing to risk his own life to protect her? Who knows how much emotional bank this guy will rack up in the future!

Zu An picked up the sharp object that had stabbed right into his body. “Let’s see what in the world made me suffer so much.”

His eyes suddenly narrowed in the middle of his sentence. This wasn’t a rock, but a human rib bone!

Pei Mianman’s attention had been totally on him earlier on. Now, she also recognized what this thing was. “This... this...”

Zu An quickly stood up and examined his surroundings. Both their faces immediately drained of all color.

Zu An said with a bitter smile, “It seems like what you said was correct. This entire place was dyed red with blood.”

Perhaps because they had fallen quite a fair distance, the mist around them wasn't as thick as before. This pit was roughly the size of a few soccer fields. There were sets of bones strewn everywhere. Every single skeleton was twisted, clearly revealing the agony they had experienced before their death. It really was hell on earth.

Chapter 506: Everything is Strange

"Ah!" Pei Mianman cried out in alarm. However, she immediately realized that she shouldn't be drawing any attention to herself right now, especially in such a strange and unfamiliar environment.

She subconsciously grabbed Zu An's arm and leaned against him, as though he was her only source of warmth.

Her body was trembling slightly. Zu An sighed. Even though this woman usually appeared bold and unflappable, in the end, she was still a young lady inside. It was completely normal for her to feel fear when confronted by such a situation.

Forget about her for a moment, even a man like him would be scared out of his wits. If he was the only one here, his heart would be pounding like crazy.

However, he had a young woman next to him, and a pretty one at that. For some reason, he suddenly wasn't so scared anymore.

No wonder the companies of his previous world always made men and women work together on tasks. Women could stimulate the hormones of the men and make them more courageous, thus greatly increasing the efficiency of their work; the men would have similar effects on women.

He cleared his throat and tried to comfort her. "Don't be scared, they're just bones. Whoever they belonged to died a long time ago."

Pei Mianman blushed. She was slightly embarrassed by her current behavior. "Hmph, I won't be scared even if they were alive. By the way, could this be an ancient battlefield?"

Zu An squatted down by a nearby skeleton. He examined it for a while, then shook his head. "I don't believe it is. I didn't see any weapons along the way."

"Then could it be the field that the victors of the battle used for executions? This would explain why no weapons were left behind!" Pei Mianman said. "There are rumors of an ancient Devilgod who massacred four hundred thousand troops, even though they had already surrendered. That really was terrifying."

Zu An was stunned. Was she talking about Bai Qi? He didn't expect this world to have a legend like this![1]

He had always suspected that this world was linked to his previous world in countless ways. However, the academy's books on geography—if they were accurate—showed that this world should be much, much bigger than Earth, which was why this couldn't be Earth.

He shook his head to dispel these thoughts, then replied, "I don't think it's that either. They don't look as though they meekly allowed themselves to be executed, nor are they kneeling on the ground. They don't seem like surrendered soldiers who were awaiting execution."

He had noticed this by carefully examining several skeletons earlier on.

"Then were they buried alive? I noticed that you weren't able to grab onto the walls earlier." Pei Mianman walked over to a wall and poked at it with her fingers. The surface was tough and had a slippery surface, as if it were coated in oil. "This seems to be something that prevents people from climbing back up."

"Buried alive?" Zu An had a strange look on his face. "Isn't there something you're forgetting? There's no dirt here."

Pei Mianman's face immediately turned red. Only now did she realize that she said something foolish. If they had been buried alive, these corpses would still be underground. The reason they had fallen into this pit was because it was hollow, with only a thin layer of soil covering it.

"Then what do you think is going on?" She said with a huff of annoyance, to cover up her own embarrassment.

"I don't know how they died, but I've noticed something really strange. All of their heads are pointed in a certain direction." Zu An said, his face a serious mask.

Stunned by his revelation, Pei Mianman rushed over to examine the skeletons around them. She had felt something amiss as well, but had been unable to put her finger on what exactly it was. Now, with Zu An's sudden remark, she finally knew the strange feeling in her gut was coming from. Even though the skeletons were all in different postures, they possessed one common trait, which was that all of their heads were lowered, as if they were all looking at something beneath them.

Zu An inspected these skeletons a little more before saying, "They weren't executed by hanging. The neck bones of those who are hanged would snap backwards, and their heads should not be pointed downwards like this. There are other signs as well. These skeletons don't bear any significant damage, which proves that they weren't killed by weapons. Their bones didn't turn black either, so it doesn't look like they were poisoned."

Pei Mianman's face turned pale. "Stop scaring me! It sounds more and more strange now..."

Zu An sighed. "This place was strange to begin with. It's not a big deal, we don't need to know the cause of death. Let's find a way out of this place first."

He walked over to the wall of the pit and looked around. His voice, when he next spoke, was tinged with puzzlement. "Hm? I remember us tumbling down a long slope when we first fell. Why do these walls now look perfectly vertical?"

"This place is way too weird." Pei Mianman also remembered that they had tumbled down a slope with Zu An wrapped around her. Now, the walls all seemed to be perpendicular to the ground, with no sign of a slope at all.

Zu An also had a bad sense of foreboding. He cleared his head, then looked above him. "This pit doesn't seem to be that deep..." He muttered to himself.

The pit was around twenty meters deep. This might be extremely deep for an ordinary person, but it wasn't too difficult for a cultivator.

"Wait here. I'm going to see if I can jump out." Zu An said to Pei Mianman. Scaling such a height wasn't usually difficult for him, but that was only if he had some footholds along the way. The walls were too slippery for that, so he had to make it in a single leap.

It wasn't too big of a deal if he tripped and fell, but Pei Mianman was injured. It would be a disaster if he fell while carrying her.

"Okay, but be careful!" Pei Mianman stood obediently aside, like a young married woman.

Zu An nodded. Taking a deep breath, he bent his knees and jumped. His body shot out like a missile.

"I should be able to make it," Zu An said with a smile. He saw that he was about to reach the top. He still had quite a bit of momentum left over, so it wouldn't be too difficult to carry Pei Mianman with him.

"Be careful!" Pei Mianman cried out in alarm.

There was a loud crash. His head exploded with pain, and then his ears began to ring. It was as if he had accidentally run straight into a pair of glass doors.

If it wasn't for his sturdy body, his head would've been smashed open right there and then.

He screamed in pain as he fell from midair. Pei Mianman quickly rushed forward to catch him, but she was seriously injured and didn't have the strength to do so. Both of them ended up on the ground in a heap.

Zu An quickly raised his head, and saw a shimmer of blue light.

Sure enough, a transparent seal had appeared across the top of the pit. The runes on its surface were extremely strange, not at all resembling the style of the runes he was used to after arriving in this world. Despite this, they still seemed rather familiar. What were they exactly?

His mind moved quickly, and he suddenly cried out in alarm. "I remember! Those are Taotie Runes!"

In the museums and documentaries of his past world, many bronze artifacts dug up from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties had these types of designs. Some called them Taotie Runes, while others called them Beast Runes. They meant more or less the same thing.

"Can you move your hands first?" A voice called out from beneath him, dripping with annoyance.

Zu An lowered his head, and saw that he was currently squashing Pei Mianman. Because he had fallen from above, he had naturally stretched his hands out to support himself, and they just happened to be pressed against her chest.

So soft!

This was his first thought.

So big!

This was Zu An's second thought. However, he quickly snapped out of his daze and pulled his hands away. "Um, would you believe me if I said that it wasn't on purpose?"

"I know that already." Pei Mianman's face was slightly red. She got back to her feet with his help.

It was Zu An's turn to be stunned. She didn't get mad? After all, when someone pretended to accidentally bump into her back at the academy, she had chased after him with her black flames until a teacher interfered and saved that unfortunate kid.

"Why is there a seal above us?" Pei Mianman completely ignored what had just happened. She stared above her and said, "We definitely fell from up there."

As they spoke, the flickering blue streaks of light on the seal slowly disappeared, and in a few moments, it was as if the seal did not exist at all. However, they both knew that it was still there, and once activated, it would reappear.

"It looks like we can only look for a way out down here." Zu An could tell that the seal above them was similar to the barrier around the stele that had brought them here. It wasn't something they could destroy, given their current strength.

Pei Mianman grunted in agreement. She was just about to reply when a sudden quaver entered her voice. "The eye sockets of those skeletons... they're shining..."

Chapter 507: A Difficult Dilemma

"Shining?" Stunned by her remark, he quickly turned to follow her gaze. Sure enough, blue light was suddenly burning in the dark sockets of the skull. It was as if this skeleton had opened its eyes!

Zu An subconsciously took a step back as well. He swallowed with difficulty and said, "Does this world of yours have ghosts?"

Pei Mianman was also in a state of panic. It was already scary enough that this massive pit was filled with skeletons, and the strange light shining within that skull made her even more terrified. She didn't even notice that he said 'this world of yours'.

"Ghosts? Are you talking about spirits of the deceased? There are several ancient records of them. In the past, several cultivators sought out unconventional paths, and began to delve into necromancy. Some managed to control corpses and other such things."

Zu An recalled the zombie troops that he'd seen in the dungeon behind the academy, and Zhang Han as well. These could all be considered undead creatures. He wondered what kind of being his big sis empress was...

But now wasn't the time to think about these things. He looked at the skeleton, its eyes still flickering with blue light. "I don't think these are undead creatures. I've met them before, and the feeling I get from them is different."

Back in the old tomb in the Ursae Dungeon, even though those undead creatures had inferior intelligence, he could sense a form of ki fluctuation from their bodies. However, he did not feel anything of that nature from these skeletons, and the light inside of those eye sockets were very different as well.

"Then what kind of thing is this skeleton?" Pei Mianman was still a little scared. She didn't know if it was because she was weak from her injuries, or if it was because she had Zu An next to her, but she felt much more timid than before.

"It might just be some phosphorescence. Such phenomena tend to happen in cemeteries and other such places. Phosphorus is quite flammable, and it produces blue flames when ignited. Many people don't know about this and treat them as flames that represent the souls of the departed," Zu An explained, imparting some scientific knowledge to her.

"Phosphorus? Is it something similar to that oxidized iron that you were talking about earlier?" Pei Mianman asked curiously. She considered herself quite well read, but she had never read anything about these before.

"Something like that. They're both a type of chemical." Zu An's face heated up. He had said earlier that the dirt was red in color because of oxidized iron, yet it turned out that it was actually blood. He really hoped that he wouldn't embarrass himself again.

As if she had read his mind, Pei Mianman's fingers began to tremble as she pointed in another direction. "Why are more and more eyes lighting up?"

Zu An quickly looked around. He noticed that the other skulls were beginning to emit blue light as well, one after the other.

There were thousands of skeletons in this mass grave, and blue lights were beginning to light up a large area. The pit, which had been dark earlier on, was now filled with an eerie glow. It was an utterly terrifying sight.

Suddenly, there was a strange rustling, but they didn't see a single person around them. Things began to feel weirder and weirder.

"Are you... sure that it's just phosphorous?" Pei Mianman leaned even closer to him. She sounded extremely frightened.

Zu An gulped. This was definitely not phosphorus. If it was, why did they all coincidentally happen to burn only within the eye sockets of those skeletons?

Damn it! Why am I still trying to explain all these things with science? There are many things in this world that can't even be explained through science to begin with!

The soft, tender touch on Zu An's arm was about to drive him crazy, but made him braver as well. He said in a low voice, "I'll go and take a look!" Standing around and thinking about it would only make him more afraid.

"Be careful!" Pei Mianman reminded him.

She followed behind him so that she could look after him by being at his side, and also because staying with him made her feel slightly safer.

Zu An took out his Tai'e Sword. He carefully stopped next to the closest skull, vigilant against any sudden attacks.

The skull on the skeleton hung limply, without showing any sign of change.

Zu An didn't believe that it was luring him in. After all, undead creatures usually lacked intelligence, and wouldn't be capable of such tricks.

He squatted down by one of the skeletons. "Excuse me, I'm really sorry for disturbing you. I just want to find out what happened here. This might help you rest in peace as well."

After saying this, he reached out his hand and slowly removed its skull. He wanted to see what was going on.

However, as soon as he lifted it up, the two cold lights flared brightly, then shot out towards his face.

He immediately identified what those two lights were. They weren't will-o-the-wisps, nor were they ghosts. They were two strange-looking snakes.

These two snakes weren't large, only a foot in length. Their bodies were extremely thin as well, but their heads were quite large.

It had a bump on its head, and there was what seemed to be a vertical eye on that bump—which Zu An supposed could be considered its face. It was precisely this eye that was glowing with blue light.

Normal snakes had eyes on the sides of their head, and they were always small and round. However, not only was the snake's eye oriented vertically, each snake only had one eye, which made them look extremely bizarre.

Its entire body was painted with black and red patterns, and almost every single one of its characteristics suggested that it was poisonous.

Zu An had already prepared himself to deal with any sudden ambushes when he removed the skull. As the snakes lunged at him, his Tai'e Sword flashed, and the two snakes were hacked into four chunks.

However, his eyes immediately narrowed, because the snakes did not seem to lose any forward momentum at all, even after being sliced apart.

He then remembered that snakes could still move after losing their heads. There were many cases of people dying after being bitten by beheaded snakes in his previous world.

"Damn it all!" The two snakes were lightning-quick to begin with, and the two of them were extremely close to him, so there was nothing else that Zu An could do.

He could only pray that his powerful regenerative abilities could ward off the venom that was sure to be in these snakes. However, the snakes were extremely weird, and their poison was sure to be potent.

A burst of black flame flashed past, and the two snakes were instantly burned to a crisp.

It was none other than Pei Mianman, stepping in to help him. Zu An felt cold sweat dripping down his back. He gave her a grateful look. "Big Manman, I would be dead right now if you hadn't been here with me."

Pei Mianman smiled. "You've already saved me many times as well."

However, her smile quickly froze. "I think it's best if we leave this place as soon as possible."

Zu An turned around. All around them, the blue lights in the skulls had begun to move. The strange snakes wriggled out from those skulls, with many of those skulls harboring two snakes. They blanketed the ground, soon covering everything in sight.

There were thousands of corpses here, and it was easy enough to imagine just how many snakes there were here.

"Let's get out of here!" Zu An turned and ran, pulling Pei Mianman along with him. The snakes swarmed at them from all directions.

Usually, cultivators like them should be much faster than snakes, but these snakes were something else altogether. They were incredibly fast, and didn't seem to be falling behind at all.

Zu An ran across the massive pit, doing his best to avoid these snakes. He didn't want to be surrounded by them. Only when he had to did he use his Tai'e Sword to open up a path.

This time, he had learned from experience, and paid attention to the direction in which the snakes were facing. There was no way he would let himself be ambushed again.

This pit was massive. Zu An estimated that it was the size of seven or eight soccer fields. However, they were cultivators, so they were much faster than ordinary people. Even though this pit was large, it wouldn't take them much time to fully explore it.

Unfortunately, these strange snakes were everywhere, and did not give up their pursuit of them. As they ran past more of the bleached bones, more and more snakes joined those that were already pursuing them.

There was no way Zu An could just stop. If he stopped running, the sea of snakes would catch up to them. When he hacked through those few snakes that got too close, he noticed that their blood was like acid, burning through the ground. Their blood was definitely highly toxic and corrosive. If he let these snakes overrun them completely, their fate would surely be too horrible to imagine.

However, continuing to run around would only alarm more and more of these snakes. It was hardly a solution to their problem.

The only hope was to find an exit from this pit. Only then would there be a chance for survival.

However, after running around the perimeter of the pit, they were left in despair. Aside from those skeletons and the strange snakes, there was nothing else. There was no way out.

Chapter 508, Part I: On the Verge of Despair

"Ah Zu, is there anything we can do?" Pei Mianman was no longer her confident and bold self. Her face was deathly pale.

As a cultivator, she wasn't really afraid of death.

However there were many ways to die! If she was killed by someone else, then that was that. However, being slowly chewed to death, little by little, by an endless sea of snakes was just too horrifying to even imagine.

She finally understood why those skeletons didn't have any wounds. They had probably been poisoned by these strange snakes! These snakes were so small, so their teeth didn't leave behind any visible marks on the bones. After these people had died from the venom in the snake bites, the snakes would feast on the flesh of the corpses...

These snakes would enter her body, and then come out of her eye sockets... Pei Mianman shivered in fear.

Zu An's mind was moving at lightspeed. It would be a losing battle if they stood their ground against this endless multitude of snakes. He had to think of something else.

But they already examined this entire pit, and there was no exit to be found.

Unfortunately, this made a lot of sense. This pit was clearly designed to kill. The walls were slippery and impossible to climb, and there was even a seal above them, preventing any attempt to escape in that direction. Why would the one who made this trap allow any of its prey to leave?

Zu An couldn't help but feel despair creeping into his mind. Why did they have to fall into this pit?

Hm? Wait. There was no seal when we fell in! There's no way this seal could allow entry but not exit, right? I don't think it's that advanced.

He quickly scanned the surroundings. The walls around them were all perfectly vertical, but he was sure that they had tumbled in along a slope. Even though that slope was steep, it was definitely not perfectly vertical.

"Ah Zu?" Pei Mianman saw Zu An staring. She dealt with the incoming snakes with her black flames as she yelled at him.

Zu An snapped out of his daze. He said to Pei Mianman, "We need to hurry back."

"Back? Back where?" Pei Mianman was lost.

Zu An replied, "We are returning to where we fell in. There should be an exit there."

Pei Mianman immediately replied, "We already checked that area! There were only vertical walls there. There were no exits."

They had moved on to look elsewhere precisely because they hadn't found any exits there. They had already covered a distance of several soccer fields. There would only be more of these strange snakes to deal with if they went back.

Zu An quickly explained, "What you see isn't necessarily real most of the time. Who knows, there might be some hidden mechanism, or an illusion that made us think they were walls."

Pei Mianman still wasn't convinced. "But we already checked everything. There were no mechanisms!"

She wasn't a dolt. On the contrary, she was incredibly smart. She wouldn't have been considered one of the best cultivators in her age group otherwise. She had taken special care to check that area before they left, just to make sure that there were no such hidden mechanisms.

Zu An replied, "We only checked the sections closest to the ground earlier. What if the switch is higher up on the walls?"

He led Pei Mianman back to the spot, brandishing his sword at the incoming snakes as he continued his analysis. "Actually, now that I think about it, it's easy to see the contradiction. Since there is a seal above, why is there a need to make the walls so slippery?"

"Huh?" Pei Mianman had instinctively assumed that the seal was meant to deal with powerful experts, while the slippery walls were to deal with ordinary people. However, since there was already a seal in place, making the walls slippery was indeed pointless.

Zu An quickly continued, "We saw earlier that those skeletons weren't bound, which meant that they could have tried to escape at any time as well. If the seal above only activated after they entered, those who fell in could use that small opening to escape, which would be troublesome. That suggests that the seal was already in place before those poor souls fell in.

"This presents another problem. If the seal was already in place, how were they put in? They were clearly brought in by a different channel. They were probably unconscious when they were chucked in, which was why they didn't know that this alternate channel existed."

Pei Mianman still had her doubts. "In that case, all of the victims could have been thrown in first, and then sealed in afterwards. There's no fear of them escaping then.!"

"There are three things that suggest otherwise!" Zu An said. "Firstly, there are too many bones down here. If they were all brought in at the same time, that would be a lot of work. From what I saw along the way, there were differences in the skeletons as well. They weren't uniformly scattered around the pit, but rather in groups, and the groups were spaced out as well. These groups definitely didn't know each other beforehand. We stepped on some bones along the way as well. Some of them were still hard, but some of them were much softer, which would mean that they were much older.

"Secondly, if I was the one in charge of engineering such a large pit trap, I definitely wouldn't want to make it a single-use trap. I'd want it to be reusable. This increases the probability that there is an alternate channel, which was what I spoke about earlier.

"Thirdly, and most importantly, we were awake when we fell in, and we tumbled along an incline. This is the basis for my initial speculation."

Pei Mianman's eyes shone brilliantly as she listened to all of this. She had already begun to despair earlier on, but his analysis had given her a newfound hope. Even though she had yet to see this secret passage herself, she was already convinced. "Ah Zu, you're too awesome!"

Being praised by a beautiful woman who looked at him with adoring eyes made Zu An's heart stir. "Of course I am. Don't end up falling in love with me now."

“Hmph! You’re shameless!” Pei Mianman rolled her eyes, but she really was quite amazed. This fella was able to remain optimistic no matter the situation, and his optimism was infectious, imparting to those around him a feeling of safety.

However, the two of them didn’t have the luxury of chatting right now. More and more of those snakes had shown up as they made their way back, and they found it hard to even find proper footing.

At first, the situation was still manageable, thanks to Pei Mianman’s black flames. The snakes seemed afraid of fire, and didn’t dare get too close.

However, Pei Mianman’s injuries were still substantial, and she couldn’t sustain the black flames indefinitely. Eventually, she had to take a break to recover.

Zu An was left to wail away with his sword to clear away the snakes in their path. Fortunately, his Bixie Swordplay didn’t use up his ki. His direct fighting style was also suitable for such a situation, where enemies were everywhere.

Unfortunately, his Sunflower Phantasm was now completely useless. The technique was good for evading enemies, but there were snakes all around them, and simply evading attacks wouldn’t do him much good.

Snakes swarmed them from all directions. Left with no choice, Zu An tried to leap from skeleton to skeleton, using the bones almost like stepping stones. However, these skeletons had snakes of their own, which often slithered out when disturbed. If not for his quick reactions or Pei Mianman’s black flames, he would’ve already lost his life.

Faced with this seemingly impossible problem, Zu An discovered another method, which was to leap to the wall. Even though the walls were slippery and hard to use as footing, he could hang onto them with his Tai’e Sword and the Poisonous Prick, moving along the wall by alternately stabbing one or the other into the wall.

No matter how tough the walls were, they didn’t stand a chance against the Tai’e Sword or the Poisonous Prick, which both cut through iron like dirt.

Zu An sighed in relief. He patted Pei Mianman, who was clinging to him, and said, “We finally have a chance to catch our breath.”

He decided to climb back up to where they had fallen in, using his two blades like climbing claws.

Pei Mianman grunted in agreement. Her face was a little red. Her arms were hooked around his neck, and her body was pressed up right against his. They could feel each other’s body heat through their clothes. She was normally rather bold, but she felt incredibly embarrassed right now.

Zu An wasn’t faring much better either. His entire body was burning up as he smelled the fragrance of the woman clinging to him and felt the softness of her chest against his. This massive pit that was full of danger now no longer seemed as hateful...

He suddenly felt the beauty embracing him slowly slide downwards, and was immediately given a fright. He freed up one hand in order to grab her thigh and support her. “Manman, don’t let go! If you fall, it’ll be over!”

The snakes were all gathered right beneath them with their heads raised, staring at them with their vertical eyes and hissing. It was an extremely frightening sight.

Pei Mianman bit her lip, clearly embarrassed as well. "I don't have any strength left. I can't hold on tightly any longer..."

508, Part II: On the Verge of Despair

Where are you putting your hand?!

Despite her reaction, Pei Mianman knew that he was doing this to save her, so she didn't say anything.

"Wrap your legs around my waist. That'll make it easier for you to cling onto me." Zu An said this as he lifted her leg, trying to wrap it around him.

"No way!" Pei Mianman immediately refused. Even a pure and innocent young woman would know that such a thing wasn't proper at all! How could she allow this?

Zu An began to sweat. "Miss, I'm really not trying to take advantage of you! My hands are occupied with trying to climb this wall. If I carry you with one arm, we won't be able to go anywhere!"

Pei Mianman raised her head. She could see the veins on his sword arm bulging, clearly supporting a substantial amount of weight. She wasn't a completely unreasonable person. Even though it was embarrassing, she still ultimately agreed to it, given their current situation. "Fine. But you can't tell Chuyan about this. No, wait—you can't tell anyone!"

Zu An's face darkened. "Why would I tell her something like that?"

Satisfied, Pei Mianman sighed in relief. She bit her red lip, and then wrapped her arms around his neck again. She did her best to clasp her legs around his waist. Her entire body was now hanging off him.

The two of them were intimately wrapped around each other, and she could feel his masculine aura all around her. Even the usually flirtatious and bold Pei Mianman felt a little shy. She buried her head into his chest, and her body was trembling just a little. She didn't dare say a single word.

Zu An hadn't had any wicked ideas before, but when he sensed just how sensitive she was, his mind began to stir as well.

The hissing of the strange snakes below him dragged him back to reality. They weren't completely out of danger yet.

He was just about to move upwards with the Poisonous Prick when a few streaks of blue light shot towards them.

Zu An shivered in fear. He slashed with his blade, and the blue lights tumbled back down. He had already noticed that his attackers had been those strange snakes.

Several more snakes coiled their bodies, then shot upwards, flying at the two of them.

Zu An blocked them with his dagger. He was grateful that he hadn't thrust this blade into the wall yet. If both of his blades had been stuck into the wall, he wouldn't have been able to fend off those snakes in time.

Thankfully, he was suspended in midair, so only a few of the strange snakes on the ground could attack him in this manner at the same time. That was why he could just barely fend them off.

This was hardly something to celebrate, though. With the snakes attacking him, he had to focus on defense, and could not move forward at all.

Pei Mianman also noticed this predicament. She quickly said, "Give me a little bit of time. Once I recover, I'll help you out with my black flames. You can use that chance to climb."

"Okay!" This was the only option left to them. Zu An focused on cutting down the incoming strange snakes.

Pei Mianman pondered for a moment, then removed a pendant and hung it around his neck. "Wear this."

Zu An was stunned. "What is this?" He had noticed a red cord hanging from her neck for quite some time. However, what hung from it was always buried in her cleavage, so he had no idea what it was.

He watched her pull it out slowly from deep within her chest, her fair white skin faintly visible. Blood almost shot straight out of his nose.

"It's a protective talisman that my mother gave me. It can grant you immunity from the black flames. I'm not in the best condition right now, so I can't control the black flames as well as before. Since the two of us are so close, I don't want to accidentally hurt you," Pei Mianman explained.

"Huh?" Zu An was incredibly touched. He couldn't resist remarking, "Isn't this your most treasured possession? If you give this to me, doesn't that mean you're completely open to me? If I do end up having some wicked thoughts about you, you wouldn't be able to defy me."

After all, half of Pei Mianman's strength came from her black flames. If this pendant granted him immunity against those black flames, her life would be completely within his grasp.

Pei Mianman gave him a look of annoyance, then pouted playfully. "Why would I give that to you if I was worried about that? Focus already, and prepare to move."

"Understood!" Zu An didn't dare let himself be distracted in such a dangerous situation either.

"Let's begin!" Pei Mianman's hand surged with black flames as soon as she said this, and the incoming snakes shrieked and fell away.

Those strange snakes below were all scared of these flames, and became more apprehensive about attacking.

Zu An used this chance to plunge his dagger into the wall, and begin to scale it quickly.

He could feel that the black flames were now different. In the past, he always felt that the black flames were extremely frightening, and filled with destructive power. Now, however, they seemed warm and

comforting, perhaps even a little inviting. This was probably all because of the pendant. He could feel a wave of warmth spreading outwards from his chest. He wasn't sure if it was the pendant itself getting warm, or if it was just the lingering body heat of the beauty clinging to him.

"Help me defend against them!" Pei Mianman reminded him quickly.

Zu An was already prepared. He swung out with the Tai'e Sword, stopping the incoming snakes. Compared to the Poisonous Prick, the extra length of the Tai'e Sword made it more useful.

The snakes stopped their attacks. They probably realized that all of their efforts had only resulted in meaningless deaths.

Zu An exhaled in relief. The two of them hung in the air to rest. When Pei Mianman had recovered a bit of strength, they began to climb again.

Zu An felt like teasing her as the scent of her fragrance filled his nostrils again, but his eyes suddenly narrowed. He noticed that a large number of the snakes had grouped up together below them.

He hadn't noticed it at first, but as more and more snakes gathered together, they gradually formed a ball of strange snakes.

This ball grew taller and wider as more snakes joined in, and the top of the ball slowly got closer and closer to the two of them.

Only some of the snakes had enough strength to successfully threaten them earlier. Now that they formed this sphere, however, many more snakes could crawl onto that sphere, which shortened the distance between them and their quarry.

"Hold onto me tightly! I'm going to move somewhere else." Zu An said with a stern voice. Staying here would only be asking for a beating.

"What? But I haven't recovered yet!" Pei Mianman's forehead was covered in sweat. The last scuffle had exhausted her quite a bit, and she had no energy left to protect him.

"It's fine. I can cover short distances quickly." Zu An wanted to save Grandgale for more dangerous moments, but it was too dangerous to linger here any longer.

Pei Mianman suddenly realized what he was talking about. She remembered that he had an ability that allowed him to instantly move across large distances. She exhaled in relief and wrapped herself tightly around him.

Zu An used Grandgale. In his current state, Grandgale could cover about a hundred meters per use. This pit was a few soccer fields in size, so he needed to use it at least five times before he could make it to the other side.

Unfortunately, three consecutive uses were his limit, and he would not be able to cover enough distance. However, that wasn't a concern right now. His first priority was to get away from this current spot.

A split second later, he reappeared a hundred meters away. Because he was still halfway up the wall, he made sure that he was facing the wall directly. The instant he reappeared, he stabbed his blades into the wall, and tried his best to cushion Pei Mianman from the impact.

However, the force still threw Pei Mianman violently into him.

Her face instantly turned red.

The two of them were already tangled around each other in the most intimate way, and pounding against each other only made their bodies shake even more.

Pei Mianman bit her lip, her eyes misty. She moved over to his ears and said quietly, "You're terrible... Chuyan has no idea just how perverted you are."

"You can't blame me for that! That's just my natural reaction. I have no control over this." Zu An wanted to cry. I'm just trying to save us!

"I know..." Pei Mianman paused, then added quietly, "I'm not blaming you for it."

Zu An's heart trembled. What are you trying to say?

Whatever it was, he didn't have time to think about it right now, because the massive ball of snakes was rolling towards them. As it rolled, it seemed to grow even faster than before, and it was only getting larger.

He cursed secretly. He gave Pei Mianman a warning, then used Grandgale again, jumping to another part of the wall.

Zu An was left gasping for breath after using Grandgale three times in quick succession. He would be unable to use Gandgale again for some time. Each time, he had also teleported the furthest he could manage, which took a great toll on him.

He watched as the massive ball of snakes pursued them relentlessly. Fortunately, Pei Mianman had managed to recover a little of her strength, and used her black flames to protect him.

Zu An used this chance to move a few more meters away. After that, however, the two of them found themselves out of options.

Zu An looked at those final few dozen meters, unwilling to give up. He was eighty percent sure that that tunnel was right there, but there was just no way that the two of them could make it.

He fended off the stray incoming snakes as he watched the massive ball get closer and closer.

He assessed their situation, and determined that they wouldn't be able to recover before the ball of snakes caught up to them.

His survival instincts still drove him to hack away at the closest snakes with his sword. However, when that ball of snakes finally rolled below them, the two of them were overcome with true despair.

Right at that moment, a nearby wall suddenly split open and a giant tongue shot out, thrusting straight into the terrifying ball of snakes.

Chapter 509: Ancient Beast

"Ah Zu, are we all going to die here?" Pei Mianman looked down at the giant ball of snakes below them. She could now clearly see the sinister and vile appearance of every single strange snake.

There was still some distance between that strange ball of snakes and themselves, but they could tell that it wouldn't be long before more and more snakes would crawl their way up, and then catapult towards them.

"We won't give up until the very last second," Zu An said firmly. He was trying his best to think up possible methods of dealing with this densely-packed ball of strange snakes, but ended up throwing them out one after the other.

Pei Mianman looked up at him. "Will you feel regret if Chu Chuyan wasn't by your side at your final moments?"

Zu An hacked away the incoming snakes. He shook his head and said, "Why would I regret that? I'm already quite satisfied having you here with me."

Pei Mianman's lips curved upwards when she heard this reply, and a hint of joy appeared on her pale cheeks. She suddenly thought of something and said with a sigh, "Say, how great would it be if the two of us had met first?"

Zu An subconsciously replied, "If we had met first, you wouldn't have even given me a second glance."

"At least you know yourself well," Pei Mianman said, laughing. She was fully in agreement. Given her own personality, if it hadn't been because Chu Chuyan had ended up marrying him, she wouldn't have even given him a second look.

Zu An chuckled and said, "Why are you suddenly asking me something so weird? What, did you really fall in love with me?"

Unexpectedly, Pei Mianman didn't get annoyed or embarrassed. Instead, she calmly raised her head, looking into his eyes with her own, which he noticed were pure and clear. Then, she suddenly pressed her lips against his.

Zu An was stunned. Those soft red lips and her sweet fragrance made his body quiver. He almost lost control of himself, and the incoming snakes almost reached him. He quickly swung his sword at them to stop them.

The moment dragged on, and Pei Mianman's weak and pale face seemed to grow a little pink. She turned her head away in embarrassment. "Don't misunderstand, I just felt that it would be a pity to die without ever experiencing a kiss, so I gave it a try. You don't have to overthink it."

Zu An was crestfallen. "Why does it sound like you would have been okay if it had been any random man?"

A slight smile spread across Pei Mianman's face. "It didn't have to be you."

Zu An laughed and said, "There's still many more things you haven't tried yet. I'll gladly take you for a ride."

"Get lost!" Pei Mianman scoffed. However, no Rage points accompanied it, so it seemed she wasn't actually angry.

The air of ambiguity that this exchange created gave this treacherous and vicious pit an unexpected hint of warmth, but both of them knew that they were running out of time.

The giant ball of snakes stopped, apparently happy with how close they were to their prey, and the ball stopped growing. A wave of strange snakes crawled to the top of the ball, preparing to launch themselves upwards.

The number of snakes attacking them had increased severalfold, and Zu An didn't believe that he could stop all of them. Even if he made it through one wave, there would be many more to come. The two of them were already at the end of their ropes.

As despair began to creep in, a section of the wall nearby suddenly split open. A thick, greenish gray object thrust out, stabbing straight into the ball of snakes. It retracted again, drawing a staggering amount of struggling strange snakes in with it.

Sounds of chewing came from behind the hole in the wall, as if something was enjoying a snack.

Zu An and Pei Mianman looked at each other, not knowing what to say. Zu An swallowed with difficulty. "Was that... a tongue?"

Pei Mianman shared his horror. "I think so."

That tongue was so big and long... What kind of creature has a tongue like that?

Zu An clearly remembered that the blood of those snakes were highly toxic and corrosive. However, that unknown creature behind that wall had chewed and swallowed them up just like that.

Won't its stomach be left full of holes?

That tongue was a weird greenish gray color too, which doesn't look healthy at all...

A bunch of random thoughts ran through Zu An's mind. Those strange snakes that had been attacking them wave upon wave finally seemed to have met their natural predator, and they quickly scattered in alarm.

The massive ball of snakes, which had been massive just a second ago, instantly crumbled. The strange snakes seemed to lose all will to remain, and fled in all directions.

However, they had gathered in such great numbers that escaping was tricky, and the strange snakes at the center were unfortunately out of luck. As panic overtook them, they couldn't manage to wriggle free in time, instead growing even more tangled together.

The massive tongue struck again, and this time, Zu An caught a much better view of it. The tongue wasn't soft like what he had imagined, but seemed more like a steel spear. It instantly pierced through

the ball of snakes and came out the other side. A mixture of snake blood and strange sticky saliva dripped from the tip of the tongue.

The tip of the tongue was sharp and had three prongs, and the edges of the tongue were barbed. It gave the two of them chills just by looking at it.

“What... What kind of monster is this?” Pei Mianman’s voice was extremely soft, as though she was scared of alerting the creature to their presence.

Zu An shook his head, unable to answer. He stared at the spot in the wall not too far away. That was surely where they had fallen in from! That was supposed to be their way out, yet they now had this new and terrifying gatekeeper to worry about.

Most of the snakes had either been eaten or had fled after the tongue thrust out a second time. The massive ball of snakes was almost completely gone. The terrifying tongue shot out a few more times, but did not find much joy each time.

The monster within the wall was clearly annoyed by this, and slowly emerged, its heavy footfalls echoing across the pit.

The first thing that caught their eye was a massive mouth filled with two rows of terrifying teeth. Every single tooth in that mouth seemed as long and sharp as a blade.

Saliva dripped continuously from its mouth and onto the ground. It was viscous and thick, and nauseatingly disgusting to look at.

Zu An swallowed. Why does this thing look a little like a T-Rex from the movies?

But he quickly changed his mind. Despite the similarities in their jaws, the other aspects of the monster were different. The first thing was its build. This monster looked like it was only about three meters tall, and its four limbs were better-proportioned. Even though its hind legs were a little beefier, the two arms in front weren’t tiny, and the sharp talons at the front end were definitely not just for show.

The point of its long tail was incredibly sharp as well, and fine ridges extruded from its tail and all the way up its spine, similar to the xenomorphs from the Alien movies in his previous world.

Its head seemed rather weird as well, and was large and long. It was clearly a carnivore, yet a pair of horns perched on its head that made it seem like a herbivore, perhaps a goat.

However, that wasn’t the strangest thing about it. The most bizarre thing about it was that there were no eyes on its head!

Strange patterns covered the top of its head and its horns, giving it a ruthless and mysterious look.

“Those patterns are almost identical to the ones on the seal above!” Pei Mianman whispered to Zu An.

Zu An nodded. They were indeed exactly the same. In fact, the same patterns could be found on the bronze artifacts from the Shang and Zhou Dynasties that had been unearthed in his previous world.

This ancient beast opened its massive mouth and roared. However, it wasn't as earth-shaking as they had imagined. It was hardly mighty or ferocious, but instead sounded quite... pathetic. It sounded like the wailing of an infant.

Despite this, those strange snakes slithered away like mice in the presence of a cat. Many of them even forgot how to flee, and froze in place instead.

Zu An and Pei Mianman also felt the blood drain from their faces. This sound went completely against their expectations, and sounded extremely off-putting. Paired with the creepy environment that they were in right now, any audience watching this in a theatre back home would have been scared half to death.

That monster leaped straight towards the highest concentration of snakes. Its tongue shot out again, piercing the snakes that were frozen in fear, and dragged them back into its mouth.

The rest of the snakes finally seemed to shake off whatever daze they were in, and began to flee as fast as they could.

Zu An finally noticed the creature's eyes. Its eyes weren't on its head, but rather, on its shoulders.

The legend of a certain ancient beast suddenly surfaced in his mind.

Chapter 510: At Death's Door

"Mount Gouwu is filled with jade above and copper within. Around it roams a beast with the body of a goat and face of a man. Its eyes are beneath its armpits, with fangs and claws of a tiger. Its cry sounds like the wailing of an infant. It is known as the paoxiao, a man-eating beast."

This was a record from the 'Classic of Mountains[1] and Seas' from ancient China. Its description was way too similar to the beast that they were seeing below them.

The paoxiao had a name that was more commonly used, which was the taotie!

What the hell is going on today? First, I run into all these weird snakes, and then I run into an ancient beast?! My luck is bloody terrible!

Wait a moment. Does that mean that, by the laws of moral conservation, I am destined to draw something amazing from the lottery?

Of course, this was just an idle thought. He wouldn't dare let himself be distracted right now by drawing the lottery.

Pei Mianman's arms tightened around his neck. People were most scared of the unknown, and that creature below was a horrifying representation of that.

"Do you think it'll notice us?" Pei Mianman finally recovered a little, and asked Zu An via ki transmission. She was worried that the monster might hear them if she uttered even the slightest bit of sound.

Zu An wasn't certain. "I don't think we'll be that unlucky."

As soon as he said this, he wanted to smack himself on the mouth. It seemed like being in this world for so long had undermined his vigilance. Why the hell was he planting random flags for no reason?

Fortunately, that taotie didn't raise its head to look at them, but instead continued to chase after those strange snakes. It searched for them through the white bones.

Whenever its tongue shot out, the skulls that it targeted would shatter, and the snakes inside would be devoured.

Something clicked in Zu An's head. No wonder he had seen so many smashed bones earlier. It didn't look like they'd been destroyed by a weapon earlier on, so he just assumed that they had corroded over time. He didn't expect it to be collateral damage thanks to this fellow's feasting!

At the same time, he was thoroughly unimpressed by those strange snakes. They didn't seem to be putting up any resistance. Just swarm this dude! Even elephants can be bitten to death when there are enough ants!

Weren't you going all out against the two of us earlier? Why the hell are you all turning into wimps now?

All joking aside, this was their one opportunity. Zu An turned to Pei Mianman. "This is a good chance. We'll move towards that tunnel while it's busy eating."

He was actually rather thankful. If this taotie hadn't appeared, the two of them would have been done in by these strange snakes. Now, not only were they free of the threat posed by those strange snakes, they didn't have to search for the escape route anymore. The only thing they had to watch out for was being noticed by that taotie.

But, the taotie seemed to be having the time of its life gorging itself, and hadn't yet noticed the two of them.

Pei Mianman nodded, a twinkle of eagerness appearing in her eyes. She did not want to stay even a second longer in this place if she could.

The two of them moved towards the hole stealthily. When they reached it, it was just as expected. It was close to where the two of them had fallen, and was around five to six meters above the ground.

It was a difficult height for ordinary people to reach, and the special modifications made to the walls made it even harder. It would be a challenge even for cultivators who had fallen in to get back up here. As such, there was no way they could unravel this secret.

Zu An again used the Tai'e Sword and Poisonous Prick like climbing claws, alternately stabbing them into the wall to scale it. After a short while, they finally reached the hole in the wall.

Some of the taotie's saliva still coated the entrance to the tunnel. It was quite gross to step on, and there seemed to be quite a bit of it inside as well.

However, as they looked upwards at the inclined tunnel, the joy of finally being able to escape was enough to make them completely ignore all of this.

Pei Mianman smiled. She was thinking about what she should say to him. After all, she had only kissed him so daringly because she thought that they were already doomed. Now that there was a hope of escape, she felt a little embarrassed. Then again, Zu An and Chuyan were already divorced, but chasing after the man who had once belonged to her closest friend still seemed kind of wrong.

Suddenly, blood gushed out of her shoulder, and the smile on her face froze. She looked down in shock. A section of a savage tongue had penetrated right through her body.

She didn't even have a chance to think. A powerful force pulled her backwards. She was already weak and seriously wounded. Even though she had recovered a little of her strength, her shoulder blade was now punctured, and the last bit of ki that she had in reserve was instantly scattered. How could she possibly hold onto Zu An? Her entire body was flung backwards.

Zu An saw the tongue shoot out of the taotie's mouth and stab Pei Mianman right through the shoulder, dragging her back in towards its mouth.

The two terrifying rows of teeth only needed to close around her gently in order to cut her to pieces before chewing her to a pulp.

Zu An's eyes immediately turned red when he saw the despair in Pei Mianman's eyes, and how she frantically tried to reach for his hand. He let out a ferocious roar, and then ran after her.

The tongue was retracting way too quickly, and there was no way he would reach her with his regular speed of movement. He had to use Grandgale.

He had just barely recovered a single use of Grandgale after all this time, and he could not teleport as far right now. Fortunately, the taotie's tongue wasn't a hundred meters long.

Pei Mianman had already given into despair. She never expected that she would die in such a miserable way... If she had known that this was going to happen, she would have rather lost her life to those strange snakes. It seemed like the less painful option right now.

The next instant, she suddenly saw Zu An reappear at her side, like an angel from heaven. Everything seemed so surreal, she thought that she had to be dreaming.

Zu An didn't have any time to explain. He wrapped one arm around her, brandishing the Poisonous Prick in his other hand. He hacked it downwards, aiming for the section of the tongue that had skewered her shoulder.

He was actually incredibly worried. The taotie's tongue looked a lot different from the tongue of a normal beast, and seemed more like a spear than an actual appendage. It was perfectly straight and covered in barbs. If he couldn't cut through it, he was afraid that he wouldn't be able to prevent Pei Mianman from being swallowed by this monstrosity.

Fortunately, the Poisonous Prick cut through iron like tissue. It sliced cleanly through the taotie tongue.

A screech tore through the air. The taotie was in incredible pain from having a piece of its tongue chopped off.

Zu An fell through the air with Pei Mianman in his arms. He immediately asked her, "Manman, are you all right?"

"It's really you? I wasn't dreaming?" Pei Mianman wept tears of joy. She seemed like she had endless things to say, but her brows suddenly knit together tightly, and she groaned in pain.

Zu An quickly removed the piece of the tongue that was still embedded in her shoulder. In that instant, he felt a stinging pain. He tossed the piece of tongue aside and looked at his hand. His hand had been scorched black! The creature's blood clearly had powerful corrosive properties, which was probably a result of it constantly ingesting those strange snakes.

Zu An cursed. This thing was just as annoying as one of those xenomorphs.

He quickly examined Pei Mianman's injuries. A bloody hole had been torn right through her shoulder, trailing wisps of smoke. Clearly, the powerful corrosive properties of the taotie blood was causing severe damage to her body.

Zu An panicked. He fished out the bottle of antitoxin that he'd gotten from Ji Dengtu, but it didn't seem to do anything when he applied it. Ji Dengtu had never seen a taotie before, and there was no way he could have produced something to counteract its venom.

Zu An took out his Tai'e Sword, intending to cut away the corroded flesh. However, the wound was too large, and there was nothing he could do. If he really did try to cut away the infected flesh, her entire shoulder might fall off, and she would die even more quickly.

His eyes turned red, and he squeezed his fist so tightly that his fingernails made deep gouges in his palm.

Despite all this, Pei Mianman seemed relieved. "Ah Zu, you don't need to worry about me anymore. I know that I am already done for... You don't know how happy I was to see you appear at my side again after I was caught by that monster... I thought to myself, why didn't I decide to be with you earlier... Chu Chuyan, the clan mission, I don't care about any of that anymore..."

Tears trickled down her beautiful face. Her sentences started to become a bit disjointed. She was already approaching death's door.

Zu An felt as if a knife had been plunged into his chest. The pain he felt was indescribable. "No! I won't let you die!" he yelled.

He was just thinking about what he could do to save her, when Pei Mianman exclaimed in alarm, "Hurry... you need to run away... don't worry about me anymore!"

The thudding of heavy footsteps came from behind him, and Zu An turned around. The giant taotie was lumbering towards them with a furious expression.

Zu An was horrified. Hadn't he wounded this thing with the Poisonous Prick? Why wasn't it dead yet?!