

## Immortal 521

### Chapter 521: Guman Tong

Zu An smiled. He held Pei Mianman's soft hand and said, "She's been a great help to me, not just in this dungeon, but outside as well."

Pei Mianman stiffened. She hadn't expected him to suddenly hold her hand. Now that the danger had passed, however, she was able to let herself relax a little. She closed her hand over his and leaned against his shoulder, her cheeks blushing beautifully.

Mi Li was completely speechless when she saw the two of them embracing so intimately. What the hell did she do to deserve this? She had no desire to watch this disgusting and adulterous couple engage in such a public display of affection!

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 333 Rage points!

She decided to go back into the Tai'e Sword so that she wouldn't have to witness any more of this.

Zu An knew that he had truly angered her when he saw the Rage points she had contributed. However, there was nothing else he could do! There was no way he could just refuse Big Manman's affection! I'm sure big sis empress will get used to it eventually.

If Mi Li had known what he was thinking, she might really have exploded from anger.

Pei Mianman said, "Ah Zu, are we going down?"

She actually enjoyed this rare moment of warmth. She didn't want to ruin this moment of intimacy and dive straight into dangers unknown.

Zu An nodded. "Yes. It's not just to find the way out. There might be a huge opportunity down there as well..."

He roughly explained what he'd learned from Mi Li. At the same time, he thought to himself that this was probably one of the Twelve Unknowable Regions. A secret manual was hidden here! If he could obtain it, it could unlock a new function in the Keyboard system.

Pei Mianman wasn't all that interested in any huge opportunities, but she knew that hanging around this area wasn't going to solve their problems. It would be better to find a way out first, then take the time to enjoy their relationship.

The two reached an agreement, and headed down the stairs.

When they passed the large cauldron, they noticed that the malicious spirits had already disappeared. Of the crocodile and the taotie, only two sets of bones remained.

Zu An noticed two special bones with rings of ancient patterns on them. They even flickered with electricity.

He recalled that these were the two horns on the Taotie's head. Things that could release electricity were definitely extraordinary goods, so he gathered them and put them away.

He instinctively turned around towards the remains of the giant taotie. Its two horns were even larger, so they should be even more precious.

He moved to pick them up, but when he stepped on the stairs, the strange melody began to play again, and the surrounding air became colder. The flames on the walls flickered as well.

Zu An immediately pulled back his foot. What kind of joke was this? He didn't want to summon those malicious spirits again! He didn't have any more sacrifices to give!

Despite his regret, he had no choice but to give those two horns up.

The two of them each removed a torch from the wall, then they headed down the dark tunnel.

The stairs weren't perfectly straight, but rather wound their way down, as though spiraling around a single pillar.

The images of many Shang warriors were engraved into the walls along the way, along with depictions of dragons, taoties, lightning, birds, beasts, and other decorative patterns.

Zu An wasn't an expert in this field, and could only rely on his knowledge from that one documentary.

He wanted to ask Mi Li for help, but Mi Li seemed really angry this time around, and didn't respond to any of his questions.

As for Pei Mianman, although she seemed to have experienced something magical earlier, that ability seemed to have disappeared, and there wasn't much she could say about those carvings.

A while later, the two of them finally reached the bottom of the stairs.

A grand and ancient-looking boulevard extended out before them, paved with countless massive slabs that had been laid out in an orderly fashion. The amount of manpower and resources needed to construct such a thing would have been staggering.

The two of them continued onward with torches in hand. As they made their way further along, Pei Mianman suddenly cried out in alarm and shrank into Zu An's embrace. "Ah Zu..."

Zu An followed her gaze, and noticed that there were deep pits on both sides of the boulevard. These pits weren't as large as the one they had fallen into, but both of them were similarly filled with white bones.

Zu An patted Pei Mianman's hand to comfort her, then walked over to the edge of one of the pits to have a look. This pit was only a few meters deep, and did not seem to be able to trap anyone.

However, he was worried that there might be something in the pit, or that there might be some of those strange snakes hidden within the white bones, so he didn't risk going in yet. Instead, he picked up a small rock and threw it in. Seeing that none of the dangers that he'd envisioned were present, he continued on with his investigation.

“Ah Zu, come back up already!” Pei Mianman was clearly unwilling to head down herself, and she was worried that something might happen to Zu An down there.

Zu An looked around for a while before jumping back out. “These are probably the pits where the sacrifices were placed. They’re different from the pit outside. These bones seem stronger, more nourished than those poor fellows outside.”

“You mentioned before that this might very well be Yinshang’s Imperial Tomb. The quality of the sacrifices here will surely be higher than those outside,” Pei Mianman observed.

“That’s right.” Zu An had a similar conclusion. “What’s strange is that those white skeletons outside weren’t really damaged, yet the bones here are scattered all over the place.”

The skulls of the skeletons here had been separated from the rest of the remains. It was impossible to figure out which skull belonged to which.

“Captive enemy peoples or warriors were decapitated before being sacrificed, to ensure the highest-quality offerings,” Pei Mianman suddenly said.

Zu An looked at her with shock. How the hell did she know that?

Pei Mianman also covered her mouth in alarm after saying those words. It took her a few moments to calm down again. “I have no idea what is going on either... I subconsciously blurted that out. Do you think I was possessed?”

She was extremely worried. Now that there was really something going on between Zu An and herself, she was hopeful for the future. She didn’t want anything bad to happen to her now.

Zu An said seriously, “I don’t think you’re being possessed. I’m guessing that you have some sort of connection to this place. You don’t need to be scared. It’s not necessarily a bad thing.”

He recalled what Mi Li had said earlier. Who knows, maybe this dungeon really does need the both of us to be here.

His comforting words helped to put Pei Mianman a little more at ease. However, a thin film of fear still clung to her, and she didn’t feel as confident and bold as she usually did.

The two of them continued onward, noticing similar pits appearing one after another as they kept on walking. The remains inside these pits had all been decapitated as well. All in all, there were well over a thousand skeletons.

Even though there weren’t as many as in the pit outside, these were all remains of the nobility or of strong warriors, so they were of much higher quality.

Zu An could feel Pei Mianman trembling slightly. Zu An held her hand and began to move faster. He wanted to leave this place as quickly as possible.

Soon, though, he had no choice but to stop. No matter how daring he was, the scene in front of him still made his scalp tingle with dread.

There was a sacrificial pit in front of him. This pit was smaller than all of the other ones, but the things inside were extremely unusual.

There were seventeen infants inside. They weren't bones, but looked like real babies. Not only were their bodies pitch-black, but there were all sorts of strange patterns on their skin as well.

If not for the fact that he didn't sense them breathing, he would've thought that they were alive!

"How can they be so cruel? They didn't even spare the infants..." Pei Mianman bit her lip, her voice quivering with fear and anger.

Zu An's voice was gloomy. "In that dream of mine, there was a country called Thailand. In ancient Thailand, there was a general called Kun Ping who conquered a city. The leader of the city offered his daughter to Kun Ping as a gift, whom Kun Ping eventually married. He even stayed in the city until his wife became pregnant. However, the relationship between Kun Ping and the leader soured, and the leader asked his daughter to kill Kun Ping by poisoning his meal. When Kun Ping learned of this plan, he killed his wife as revenge. After his wife died, Kun Ping ripped open his wife's stomach and pulled out her unborn child, then brought it to a temple. He lit a fire, and then he wrapped up the upper half of the infant's body in cloth covered in scriptures. He placed it on top of the fire and roasted it until the infant's corpse dried and shriveled up. Kun Ping chanted scriptures throughout the entire process. When the ceremony was over, the infant had become a soul that could communicate with him. Kun Ping called it 'Guman Tong'[1]. He brought it with him into battle, and was victorious every time."

Zu An paused for a moment. He looked at the scene in front of him and said, "These infants seem quite similar to that 'Guman Tong'. I never expected the people of Yinshang to be so ruthless."

As soon as he had spoken, the infant corpses, whose eyes had been closed all the while, suddenly opened them. Their eyes flickered with red light, and they slowly began to crawl out of the pit towards the two of them.

## **Chapter 522: Controlled**

Zu An felt his scalp tingling. Horror movies involving children or infants were always the worst ones, and now, there were suddenly so many of them crawling towards him. Anyone who was a little less brave would probably have fainted on the spot!

Pei Mianman's voice was quivering uncontrollably. "Ah Zu, did your dream tell you how to deal with them?"

Zu An was on the verge of tears as well. "No..."

He only knew about this legend, but he didn't know anything else about it.

The Guman Tong were coming closer and closer. Pei Mianman couldn't hold herself back anymore and unleashed her black flames on them. No matter what, she still saw them as undead creatures, so her flames should be effective against them.

However, her eyes went wide as she witnessed what followed. The Guman Tong were surrounded by black flames, but they showed no expressions of pain—instead, they laughed. As they crawled forward, they used their hands to caress the flames, as though encountering an old friend.

Pei Mianman immediately began to question her life. Her black flames were much more formidable than ordinary flames. It could even melt rocks and steel, let alone the flesh of a human body! However, it seemed to do nothing against these ‘infants’.

Zu An said with a gloomy voice, “These Guman Tong were created through secret rites involving raging fire. It’s to be expected that they aren’t afraid of fire.”

By now, several Guman Tong had reached them. Zu An hacked at one of them with his Tai’e Sword.

The bodies of the Guman Tong seemed as hard as metal. The sharp Tai’e Sword failed to leave even a single mark on them.

The two of them slowly retreated, keeping their guards up, and a moment later, Zu An let out a breath. “Even though these Guman Tong are extremely strange, they don’t seem to possess any strong offensive capability. We’ll be fine as long as we’re careful.”

Neither Zu An’s sword nor Pei Mianman’s flames did little to damage the advancing Guman Tong, but they were still infants, after all, so they did not know how to walk properly, but could only crawl. They did not move quickly, and their attacks were rudimentary at best.

As soon as Zu An had spoken, however, the sound of bones grinding together came from the sacrificial pits around them.

Cold sweat began dripping down the backs of the two humans. This sound was exceedingly familiar—it was precisely the sound the skeletal warrior from the gate had made when it walked.

They looked towards the source of the sound and saw many skeletons crawling out from those sacrificial pits. They held rusted spears that they picked up from who knew where. As soon as they were clear of the pits, they charged at the two of them.

“What the hell is this?!” The range of those spears was way too far. The dozen or so skeletons seemed to have some form of telepathy. They moved together like a real army formation and coordinated their attacks, forcing the two of them to dodge in a rather unflattering manner.

“These guys don’t even have heads. How are they even seeing us?!” Zu An was utterly despondent. Even though the skeletal warrior earlier on didn’t have actual eyes, it still had a head. The two red lights that burned within its sockets could function as eyes, so he could still understand its existence to some extent.

However, despite these skeletal warriors having absolutely nothing above their necks, their movements didn’t seem the least bit affected!

“Look at their backs!” Pei Mianman had sharp eyes, and she quickly noticed what was going on.

Zu An looked more carefully. The skeletons each had a Guman Tong hanging off their backs. Their bodies were already under the Guman Tong’s control, so they obviously didn’t need eyes anymore.

Even though the Guman Tong themselves did not possess any significant offensive prowess, they amplified it greatly by attaching themselves to these skeletons.

These skeletons were no match for Zu An and Pei Mianman one on one, but with more than ten of them working together, they created a semblance of a military formation, which multiplied their overall strength.

With a loud crash, Zu An sent his Tai'e Sword crashing against the long spears. He felt as if his fingers were splitting apart, and he almost lost his grip on his longsword.

As such, he immediately changed his strategy. He used his miraculous movement technique to weave around the skeletons, sneaking in hidden strikes with the Tai'e Sword from time to time.

The bodies of these skeletons weren't as tough as those of the Guman Tong, nor were they as hardy as that of the skeletal warrior they had faced aboveground. Soon enough, the sword strikes began to leave long scars on their bones.

Zu An glanced over at Pei Mianman. Black flames swirled around her, burning away at those skeletons until their white bones trembled wildly. Clearly, their bones were unable to resist the black flames. If it wasn't for the protection that the Guman Tong offered, they would have already been reduced to ash.

Zu An heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that she was unharmed, and turned his attention back to attacking those skeletons. Each time he saw an opening, he chose to strike at their legs. After striking the same point several times, the skeleton's leg bones would finally lose their integrity, causing the skeleton to lose its balance and fall to the ground.

Zu An used this chance to hack them to pieces, preventing the Guman Tong from controlling them any further.

Despite this, the fact that he had no idea how to deal with these Guman Tong frustrated him greatly. If he couldn't get rid of them, then they would just control other skeletal warriors. He would be worn out soon even if he didn't die.

A sudden thought struck Zu An, and he took out some rope to tie up the Guman Tong that had fallen off the skeleton. He stored many sundry items within the Brilliant Glass Bead, thanks to its incredibly large space, and he had no lack of lime powder for ambushes, ropes, hidden weapons, and other useful items.

It would have been great if he possessed the Embroidered Envoy's Soul-sealing Chains, which might have allowed him to actually restrain the Guman Tong. Even though these ropes were tough enough, they weren't magical weapons, and it was doubtful if they would be able to hold the Guman Tong for very long.

However, as matters stood, he didn't have any other means. He could only trap them for as long as he could.

He managed to take down several more skeletal warriors, and caught a total of seven Guman Tong.

He felt a sense of accomplishment well up within him, and called out to Pei Mianman, "Big Manman, knock those Guman Tong off the skeletons. I'll capture them!"

Despite shouting several times, however, he received no reply. Perturbed, he quickly turned around. He saw that Pei Mianman was fine, and the skeletal warriors that had surrounded her were all on the ground, lifeless. They had clearly been dealt with.

Zu An hurried over to her. “Big Manman, how did you do it? What happened to the Guman Tong on their backs?” he asked.

He was still expecting an answer when, suddenly, a torrent of black flame shot out at him.

Zu An had no idea she would suddenly attack him! He quickly dodged to the side, but wasn’t able to completely evade the stream of flame, and some of it caught a part of his clothes.

He had witnessed firsthand how strong these black flames were. Once they made contact, not even bits of bone would be left behind.

He quickly tore off that part of his clothes and patted down his body. He knew that, if any of those black flames came into contact with his flesh, it would be difficult—or even impossible—to put out.

Surprisingly, though, the black flames went out on their own in a moment, and did not spread to the rest of him.

He finally remembered the pendant she had given him, which made him immune to the black flames.

He had almost forgotten about it!

Zu An heaved a sigh of relief, and secretly rejoiced that he hadn’t returned the pendant yet.

He turned to Pei Mianman. “Manman, what’s gotten into you?”

Her eyes stared back at him, dark and overcast. She didn’t reply, but continued to attack him.

“Big Manman?” Zu An continued to yell, almost suffering severe injuries from several close shaves. Pei Mianman had more than just her black flames at her disposal, after all.

Mi Li’s cold voice spoke into his mind. “The Guman Tong has already taken control of her mind. If you continue to hold back, there’s a high chance you’ll be killed.”

“Big sis empress!” Zu An was both shocked and overjoyed. For some reason, he always felt a sense of comfort whenever he heard her voice.

At the same time, he quickly studied Pei Mianman, and saw that there was a Guman Tong hanging around her neck. Its lips cracked open a grin when it saw him looking at it.

Zu An felt a chill run through his body. He finally understood where the Guman Tong had gone after the skeletal warriors around her had collapsed.

Zu An felt his mind tremble with shock. “This thing can control people?”

Mi Li replied, “Of course. Didn’t you say earlier on that the general from Thailand was unstoppable when he brought his Guman Tong to battle? I believe it was probably because it could control the human mind.”

“Then why am I not being controlled?” Zu An recalled that some of the Guman Tong had touched him several times, and fear crept into his mind.

Mi Li snorted. “Your soul is bound to mine. There’s no way you could possibly be controlled by a mere Guman Tong.”

“Then how do I free someone who is controlled?” asked Zu An hurriedly.

Mi Li’s voice was like ice. “There is no way. You have to kill her.”

### **Chapter 523: The Girl From the Netherworld**

Zu An felt like he was about to burst. He finally couldn’t take it anymore. “Big sis empress, you can’t be like this just because her boobs are bigger than yours!”

She had been constantly expressing her dislike for Pei Mianman along the way, even inciting him to get rid of her several times. Now, yet again, she was asking him to kill her!

Mi Li sneered. “What a joke! Why would someone like me be jealous of her?”

Zu An rolled his eyes. “Am I wrong?”

“Of course you are! Even though...” —Mi Li suddenly no longer sounded so confident—“Even though her chest... is slightly bigger than mine. But I’m not that petty!”

Zu An sneered.

Mi Li huffed angrily. However, she had used the time to sort out her own thoughts. “It’s not as though you didn’t see it for yourself earlier on. You only managed to get those Guman Tong to detach themselves when you smashed apart the skeletons that they had been clinging onto. Your big-boobed sis has been possessed, just like them. What else can you do?”

Zu An didn’t reply. Instead, he tried to sneak behind Pei Mianman and stab the Guman Tong hanging from her neck with his sword.

Unfortunately, Pei Mianman’s movement technique wasn’t anything to scoff at. There was no way she would allow him the chance to do that so easily. Although there were some moments when she moved just a shade too slowly, the Guman Tong was just too tough. Its body was almost indestructible, and try as he might, the Tai’e Sword just could not scratch it.

All the while, Zu An was the one who had to be careful not to injure Pei Mianman, and so he was almost wounded several times.

Mi Li’s voice dripped with dissatisfaction. “Even though the black flames of this big-boobed sis can’t do much to you, she is still a sixth level cultivator. She had much more combat experience than a newbie like you. You might have been able to deal with her if this were any other situation, given your hodge podge of random skills. Right now, though, you’re worried about not hurting her, while she can attack you without any reservations. If this continues, you’ll eventually be exhausted and lose.”



“Do you think I don’t know that? But how can I hurt her?!” Zu An was starting to get annoyed. “Please be quiet if you have nothing constructive to offer.”

Mi Li fell into a stiff silence.

Zu An was surprised to find that there had been no Rage points even after all this while. “You’re not mad?”

“Why would I be?” Mi Li’s voice was actually quite calm.

“Weren’t you hollering at me to kill Big Manman just a moment ago?” Zu An asked.

Mi Li said coldly, “I was merely testing to see if you had the potential to be a powerful overlord. It’s truly a pity though that you do not. You cannot separate your emotions and desires from what’s most important. You’ve failed to sacrifice others for your own gain.”

Zu An said, “No matter how great your authority or status becomes, what meaning would there be to it if you sacrificed those you cherish to get there?”

Mi Li sighed wistfully, as if she had recalled something from the past. “I don’t know whether to call you naïve or farsighted. Many of those whose cultivation levels are much higher than yours have failed to see this point.”

Zu An grumbled. Being farsighted isn’t always something good either.

“Then why don’t you look all that disappointed now that you’ve found out I don’t have this potential to become an overlord?” he continued to ask.

Mi Li smiled ambiguously. “Why would I feel disappointed? It’s not like I need to rely on you to dominate the world. On the contrary, given our current situation, I’d actually prefer that you keep your kind and simple nature. Since you won’t abandon your big-boobed sis even though your life is hanging by a thread, you probably wouldn’t turn your back on me in the future either.”

“Aren’t you just being paranoid?” Zu An said gloomily. “You’ve tested me a few times in the past already.”

“What’s so bad about putting you to the test a few more times? Either way, I’m about to go crazy from boredom.” Mi Li’s lips curved upwards. She was clearly in a good mood.

“I don’t think that’s that great of an idea though. Your tests might still not get you to understand who I am. What if everything I’ve shown you is just a performance?” Zu An snorted. “You were already fooled once. Who would’ve thought that you would still choose to trust someone so easily after so many years have passed?”

Mi Li was stunned. She had never considered this before. She suddenly felt as though she had acted rather foolishly.

By this time, Zu An was truly starting to panic. “You’ve already posed whatever test you wanted. Can you finally tell me how to save Big Manman?”

Pei Mianman's attacks were becoming more and more vicious, and other possessed skeletal warriors had swarmed over to him as well. Even though Zu An had Sunflower Phantasm, he couldn't avoid all of their attacks, and he was swiftly covered in wounds.

Mi Li shook her head. "Even though I was testing you, I didn't lie. Aside from killing her, I really do not know any other method."

Zu An felt as if he had been thrown into an ice bath. He rubbed the pendant around his neck, recalling Pei Mianman's smile. He gritted his teeth and said, "There is definitely a way! I will save her!"

Suddenly, a melodious singing voice began to echo around the tomb. The voice was beautiful, like that of an oriole, clear and moving. The voice definitely belonged to a young lady in the prime of her youth.

However, they were in a strange and sinister place right now! Why would there be an ordinary young lady here?

The song was also strangely alluring, and Zu An felt as though it was similar to the songs of the sirens from the games he used to play, both beautiful and dangerous.

Both Pei Mianman and the skeletal warriors around him stopped attacking. The Guman Tong on their backs turned their heads to listen to this song. Their vicious expressions gradually disappeared, and their lips curved upwards in the pure and innocent smiles of infants.

"Ga ga ga~"

The Guman Tong laughed as they jumped off of their hosts and crawled towards the source of the sound.

Whatever force had been holding the headless skeletal warriors up left them, and they collapsed to the ground, becoming lifeless bones once more.

Pei Mianman's rigid body relaxed as well, and she fell to the side.

Zu An rushed over to support her. "Manman, how do you feel?"

Pei Mianman slowly opened her eyes. She was moved when she saw Zu An looking down at her. "Ah Zu, you're okay?"

"Why wouldn't I be?" Zu An smiled. He gently wiped away her tears.

"I'm sorry... I couldn't control my body earlier on. I could only watch as I continued to attack you." Pei Mianman apologized again and again. She looked really ashamed of herself.

"It's not your fault. You were being controlled by a Guman Tong," Zu An said as he looked at the strange infants. He became more and more confused.

"Why did they suddenly leave?" Pei Mianman was clearly shaken by what had just happened.

"I think it's that song." Zu An grew serious. Whatever could control these Guman Tong was surely a boss-level monster.

The laughter of the Guman Tong gradually grew more distinct. They had returned.

The two of them instinctively took a step back, watching these Guman Tong vigilantly.

The Guman Tong were crowding around a petite figure. Those that weren't clinging to her legs, were crawling around her.

They finally saw the figure clearly. She was a beautiful teenage girl wearing a straw dress. The dress only covered her most intimate areas, and exposed a large amount of skin.

"This girl is dressed so boldly!" Pei Mianman blushed. She was usually the one who was bold and daring when it came to fashion, yet she was completely shocked by how much skin this girl was showing! Even brothel girls rarely put on so little.

But the strangest part was that this girl was not giving off even a trace of sinister energy. They had no idea how she was doing what she was doing.

Zu An frowned. "I believe this is how the early primitive tribes dressed. Back then, the spinning and weaving industries weren't as developed as they are now. Their clothes often only serve to cover the private parts."

"Primitive tribes? Then doesn't that mean she is..." Pei Mianman was shocked.

"Indeed, I've already been dead for many, many years." Despite her smile, the young lady's words were absolutely terrifying.

Zu An whispered to Mi Li, "Big sis empress, you might have to call this little girl your grandma..."

"Screw you!" Mi Li spat.

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 111 Rage points!

"If I'm not wrong, she's from the Yinshang period. That means she's way older than you. Maybe it's not enough just to call her grandma."

Mi Li was beyond speechless.

Zu An walked forward and clasped his fist at this girl. "Thank you, young lady, for saving us."

#### **Chapter 524: A Young Lady's Request**

"Huh? You aren't scared of me?" The girl was surprised. Her body was semi-transparent, and there was a slightly eerie quality to her voice.

She was similar to those malicious spirits on those stairs, but her expression was much more serene. She didn't share their viciousness and resentment.

Zu An smiled. "You're quite cute. Why would I be scared of you?"

Even though the girl in front of him wasn't as pretty as Pei Mianman or Mi Li, she was still a little beauty. She gave off an air of youthfulness, and the addition of her stunning outfit left him with a good impression of her.

Pei Mianman smiled when she heard what he said. Mi Li rolled her eyes. This fellow always went into full sweet-talk mode whenever he saw a girl! She was sick and tired of it.

"I do not deserve such praise," the girl replied, a hint of redness coloring her face.

Zu An kept his momentum going. "I'm Ah Zu, and this is my friend, Pei Mianman. May I ask what your name is?"

"My name is Jiang... Jiang..." The young lady frowned midway through her sentence, seeming slightly uncertain.

"You're Jiangjiang?" Zu An felt that this was quite the special name.

"No." The girl shook her head and blushed. "It's been too long, and I've forgotten my name. I only remember that my surname is Jiang."

She couldn't help but burst into tears.

Zu An was left speechless for a moment.

How could you even forget your own name? Just how much time passed?

Mi Li sighed. "She is truly pitiful."

She suddenly felt a pang of sympathy for this poor girl. She too had been sealed away in a tomb for more than ten thousand years, all by herself. If it wasn't for her unyielding nature and desire for revenge given her past betrayal, she might have forgotten her own name as well.

This girl was clearly much younger when she'd died, and she hadn't lived as grandly as Mi Li herself had. When she passed away, she had to endure an even longer period of time as well. It was completely understandable that she had forgotten so many of the things that had taken place when she was still alive.

Zu An spoke up to comfort her. "I'll just call you Jiangjiang, then. It sounds pretty good."

"Jiangjiang?" The young lady froze for a moment, then flashed a bright and beautiful smile. "Sure!"

"By the way... did you raise these Guman Tong? They seem to get along with you quite well." Zu An looked at those Guman Tong who moved around her feet and swallowed.

"I didn't raise them. But after spending so much time together, we've already become friends. They're like my younger brothers." The young lady squatted down and rubbed their heads, a doting expression on her face.

Zu An asked, "Jiangjiang, what kind of place is this?"

"This is the capital city of the Shang Dynasty, of course." A hint of fear flashed across her face when she mentioned Yinshang. "Are you two Shang people?" she probed.

Zu An shook his head. "No, we're not. We are only travelers who accidentally find ourselves lost in this place."

He noticed that her expression changed when she mentioned Yinshang, and he added, "By the way, Yinshang has long been destroyed..."

"Destroyed?" The young lady seemed shocked by this, but there was an unmistakable hint of happiness in her voice.

Zu An grunted in confirmation, then roughly explained the history of the fate of the Shang Dynasty. Pei Mianman looked at him in shock. Why had she never heard about these things before? Was this also a part of the world in his dream?

As she listened to his recounting, the young lady was at times shocked and surprised. As he wrapped up his story, she expressed her gratitude to him, then said, "So, ten thousand years have already passed."

Her emotions overcame her for a moment, and she let out a deep sigh. Another thought suddenly struck her. "Then what about the Eastern Barbarians?"

Zu An replied, "The Eastern Barbarians were wiped out as well, but they were destroyed after Yinshang."

"So they've also become extinct..." The girl was lost in her own thoughts for a moment, then sighed again and said, "I knew in my heart that that was the likely outcome. No countries exist forever, after all."

"Jiangjiang, are you an Eastern Barbarian?" Zu An asked.

The girl nodded. "I was the daughter of the leader of the Eastern Barbarians."

"So you were their princess! There's no need for you to feel too broken-hearted. Even though the Eastern Barbarian Country has been wiped out, their bloodline continued on, having merged with that of the other clans of the Central Plains to form the origins of the Chinese people. For example, the progenitor of the Qin State, who later on destroyed the Zhou Dynasty, was rumored to be a descendant of the Eastern Barbarians."

He secretly turned to Mi Li and said jokingly, "Big sis empress, doesn't this mean that this little girl might really be your grandma...?"

Mi Li was not amused.

Her face became red. She clearly found it hard to accept that this girl was actually her ancestor. "Hmph, that just means that the people of the Qin Dynasty had something to do with the Eastern Barbarians. Even though I was the empress of the Qin State, I am a daughter of the Chu State. What does that have to do with me?"

Zu An didn't reply, but only chuckled.

Mi Li felt weirdly frustrated when she saw that smirk on his face. She really wanted to beat him up.

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 55... 55... 55...

Sure enough, the girl's tears turned into a smile, and her mood improved significantly. "Thank you, big brother."

"Big brother?" Zu An had a strange look on his face. This girl is ancient enough to be the great, great grandmother of my own ancestors... How can she call me big brother?!

It seemed like she still saw herself as a teenage girl.

Now that he knew more about her, Zu An felt as though a huge boulder had been lifted off his chest. He had really been worried that she was yet another overpowered hidden boss. "Right, Jiangjiang, why are you here? Do you know how to get out of this place?"

"I was captured during a previous battle between Yinshang and Eastern Barbarians, and brought here as a prisoner." Her face became downcast again. This was clearly a painful memory for her. "As for the exit, I can only guess. I'm not sure."

"Please tell me," Zu An said excitedly. Pei Mianman was also happy. She clearly didn't wish to stay here any longer.

The young lady pointed towards the distant darkness. "There is a trial below. I heard that if you can pass the trial, not only can you leave this place, but you can obtain an unimaginable boon as well. Unfortunately, there are special restrictions that prevent me from entering."

Pei Mianman thought things over and asked, "Jiangjiang, if you can't go in, how do you know about it?"

The girl replied, "I overheard the people who built this place say this, many, many years ago. They couldn't see me, so they weren't on guard against any eavesdroppers."

Zu An found this interesting. She was probably already a spirit back then. There's a lot she could have overheard.

The girl suddenly raised her head to look at the two of them. "Big brother, big sister, can the two of you help me with something?"

Zu An thought about how the people of Yinshang had treated their captives, and he could imagine just how bitter her experience had been. He was immediately overcome with pity. "Jiangjiang, ask us anything you want. We'll definitely help you as much as we can."

"Thank you, big brother!" The young lady smiled sweetly. She pointed into the distant darkness. "There should be a jade badge over there. It's a sacred object belonging to our Eastern Barbarian Country which is rumored to allow communication with the divine. After our defeat in the previous war, many of my clansmen were captured and used as offerings. Because of Yinshang's formations, they have not been able to rest in peace. I do not know if you've encountered them, but I've heard that they are trapped within a staircase. With that jade badge, I can carry out a ceremony and help their souls find peace."

"So they were your clansmen!" Zu An's expression grew sour. Those fellows had almost devoured all of his flesh.

The young lady wept when she heard about his experience. "I'm sorry, big brother. They aren't doing it because they want to..."

"I understand, I understand," Zu An hurriedly consoled her. "Look, we're all in one piece, right? Don't worry, I'll help you find that jade badge."

"Thank you, big brother!" The young lady beamed with happiness. "There's something else I would like to entrust you with. Could you help me look for my missing head later on?"

Zu An was momentarily at a loss for words.

Why did that sound so weird and creepy?

"Did I scare you guys...?" The young lady was embarrassed. With difficulty, she carried on with her explanation. "From what I remember, I was brought here by the people of Yinshang as a prisoner. According to their customs, human sacrifices made the best offerings. Because I was a special person within the court of their enemy, they cut off my head and put it on a Shang monarch's grave to serve as an offering..."

"Jiangjiang..." Even Pei Mianman began to sob when she heard about her tragic past. She subconsciously wanted to hug her to comfort her. Unfortunately, she was a soul body, so her hands passed right through her.

Zu An was overcome with sympathy as well. "Don't worry, I will definitely find your missing head. There is a problem, though... I won't know which head is yours."

## **Chapter 525: Ya Zhang's Tomb**

Ever since they had entered this dungeon, they had seen bones everywhere. The pit that they had fallen into on the surface had contained more than ten thousand skeletons, and the skeletons they had seen while exploring this palace numbered well into the thousands as well. Since they were proceeding further into a tomb, it was obvious that there would be even more of them waiting ahead. Finding Jiangjiang's head out of all of them was really going to be a huge issue.

The worst part of it all was that her head would probably bear no resemblance to what it had looked like before. After so many years, it was bound to end up looking like a normal skull. It was going to be like finding a needle in a haystack.

The young lady said, "I heard some people mention that, because of my special status, they placed my head in a Yin and boiled it. I don't think this happens too often. If you find a skull in such a vessel that is roughly the size of someone my age, that would probably be the right one."

Zu An was horrified, as were Pei Mianman and Mi Li.

This girl's fate was truly tragic. She'd been captured by her enemies, and her head had even been boiled after she had been decapitated.

As if she could sense what they were feeling, the young lady smiled and said, "It's all right. Even though it was painful back then, a long time has passed, and I've already forgotten all about it."

Zu An's voice was filled with quiet determination. "Jiangjiang, I will definitely bring your head and that jade badge back to you. All of you will be able to rest in peace."

"Thank you, big brother." The young lady smiled sweetly. "I'll bring you to the entrance to the tomb."

The young lady led them further in, the Guman Tong following alongside them.

They had been terrified of these Guman Tong earlier on, but they seemed quite adorable now.

"You should be careful. We don't know what's really going on in this girl's head. She might be tricking you," Mi Li warned him in his mind.

Zu An shook his head. "Big sis empress, you can't keep being so paranoid, even if you were betrayed in the past."

Mi Li snorted. "Explain this to me, then. Why did all of her clansmen turn into mindless malicious spirits, while she alone retained her will? She was so young back then, and she was probably much weaker than most of the experts in her clan."

"I agree that it does seem a little strange," Zu An said in a low voice, "But I trust her. I can sense the sincerity in her words, and in her gaze as well."

"Hah!" Mi Li sneered. "Could it be that you don't know that women are naturally gifted liars? Many countries make use of female spies, and all of them are masters of acting. Those who fall for their tricks are always left clueless in the end."

Zu An shook his head. "I know that such people exist, but she is definitely not one of them."

"You'll regret it once you've realized you've been tricked." Mi Li could see that he had made up his mind, and did not bother to try to convince him otherwise. "By the way, do you know what this Yin she's talking about looks like?"

"Of course. It's a traditional vessel for cooking. The upper section, called the Zeng, is used to hold food. Beneath the Zeng is a perforated Bi, which allows steam to pass through. Under that is the Ge, the section where water is boiled. The entire thing is similar to a modern steamer," Zu An replied.

Mi Li was shocked. "You actually know some stuff, huh? Even things like this."

She had wanted to give him some pointers to make it easier to find, especially since not many people knew about such an ancient cooking device. It seemed her advice would be unnecessary.

Zu An smiled without replying. There was one other reason why he trusted that young lady that he didn't speak about. The documentary about Yinshang that he'd watched in his previous life made mention of a bronze artifact with a head inside. That bronze artifact was called a 'Yin', as the documentary explained.

Clearly, this young lady wasn't lying.

The group of them walked on for a while before arriving at the mouth of a tunnel. The young lady pointed inside and said, "The graves of successive Shang monarchs are buried inside. The Shang people have set up a restriction that prevents my younger brothers and I from entering, but I believe that the two of you can enter freely."

"Jiangjiang, I will definitely find your head and the jade badge," Zu An promised her again. He was truly sympathetic to her plight, and he wanted to help release her from this burden as soon as possible.



“Thank you, big brother!” The young lady’s eyes sparkled. “You guys have to be careful. There might be dangers along the way.”

Zu An nodded. He would’ve been careful even if she hadn’t said anything. How could he let his guard down in this sort of place?

After bidding her farewell, Zu An made to go in. However, he felt as if he had rammed straight into a glass door.

“A seal?” Zu An’s expression grew perturbed. He noticed the outline of a light-blue barrier. The familiar taotie runes ran along its surface, as well as all sorts of mysterious birds and dragons. However, this looked like a much higher-level seal than the one in the giant pit on the surface.

“Ah!” The young lady cried out in alarm, and her jovial mood deflated. “I didn’t think that it would prevent you from entering as well. I thought that this restriction only applied to us.”

Zu An consoled her immediately. “Jiangjiang, you don’t need to feel dejected. Let’s try to find another way to go inside.”

The entrance was right there. He had to go inside no matter what.

He recalled the oracle script on the stele that took them into this dungeon, and tried to find a similar mechanism. Unfortunately, his search was in vain.

Zu An’s head began to throb, and he had no choice but to turn to Mi Li. “Big sis empress, do you have any suggestions?”

Mi Li snorted. “If I was at my peak, this sort of seal wouldn’t be able to stop me at all.”

“What about now?” Zu An pressed her.

Mi Li seemed a little embarrassed. “Now, I have no idea either.”

Zu An shook his head.

Why did you have to show off if you can’t do anything about it now? Are you trying to act cute?

Pei Mianman spoke up. “Ah Zu, it seems that I... can go straight in.”

Zu An was stunned. He turned around and saw Pei Mianman reach her hand inside the tunnel. Her hand passed right through the barrier without any resistance.

He quickly ran over to give it a try, but his hand would still not pass through.

“This woman might have some type of connection with Yinshang. It looks like it really was heaven’s will that the two of you entered this dungeon together,” Mi Li said.

Zu An remembered how various fragments of memory had appeared in Pei Mianman’s mind from time to time, and he nodded in agreement.

Pei Mianman held his hand. “Let’s see if we can both enter if we do this.”

Zu An held her hand and tried to enter. To his shock, the wall-like barrier immediately became intangible, and his hand was able to easily pass through it.

He pondered for a moment, then turned around towards the young lady behind them. "Jiangjiang, let's take you inside as well."

The young lady was excited as well. Unfortunately, they tried several times, but they couldn't find a way to physically link hands, the formation still prevented her from entering the tunnel. "Big brother, big sister, it looks like I can't go in," she said. "All I can do is trouble you guys to help me with those tasks."

Zu An didn't try to force the issue. After saying a few words of consolation, he followed Pei Mianman through the seal.

The two of them went down a flight of stairs. It felt like they had gone down another level before the ground flattened out again.

They proceeded onwards carefully, and soon enough, a temple loomed in front of them.

Zu An was shocked. Why would there be a temple in this sort of place?

The two of them went inside to take a look. It didn't take them long to realize that it wasn't a temple, but a small sanctuary. This was a place where a memorial tablet had been consecrated, a place where sacrifices were offered to departed spirits.

Mi Li recognized the characters on the tablet. "Ya Zhang's tomb."

"Who is this Ya Zhang?" Zu An asked.

Mi Li shook her head and said, "Yinshang existed more than a thousand years before the Qin Dynasty, and many records were lost. I have never heard of this name. But from the weapons arranged nearby, he was probably a general when he was alive. The fact that he was buried together with a king means that he commanded great status. The jade badge you are looking for might just be up ahead. You should head inside and take a look."

"Go further in?" Zu An froze.

Mi Li said, "The sanctuary and the tomb would not be located too far apart from each other. Traditionally, in the Shang Dynasty, the coffin would lie right beneath the sanctuary. Take a look around. There should be a way to go down."

Zu An recalled the sorrowful past of the girl that they had left outside. He didn't want to pass up any chance to help her, so he agreed to Mi Li's suggestion and began to look around. He thought that finding the entrance into the tomb would be difficult, but it was actually right behind the sanctuary. He saw it as soon as he walked around.

This made sense as well. This was the tomb of a Shang monarch, after all. There were layers of defenses outside, including vicious beasts, malicious spirits, and a skeleton warrior. The final entrance to this place was even sealed off by a formation. There was no way an ordinary person could get inside, so there was obviously no need to make this area more complicated than necessary.

Zu An and Pei Mianman walked over to the opening. There was a chunk of a broken dragon statue behind it, but it was not big enough to obstruct the two of them. They used their ki to move the dragon statue aside, then pushed open the door to the tomb.

Pei Mianman produced a flame to light up the interior. The inside of the tomb was simple. It was only several square meters in size, and a massive coffin lay in the center of it.

Mi Li suddenly spoke up. "Huh? Something's not right!"

## **Chapter 526: A Victim of Violence**

"What's wrong?" Zu An was shocked. His body immediately tensed, instinctively expecting danger.

Mi Li continued, "According to the burial customs, both the tomb and the path leading to it would be constructed to represent the status and glory of the one buried there. The tombs of the most glorious individuals would have four paths leading up to the tomb, from the four cardinal directions. These tombs have layouts that are similar to the character 'ya' (亞), which is why they call it the 'Ya' style tomb. Only monarchs are bestowed the honor of being buried in these types of tombs. For those in the next highest rank, their tombs have two paths to the north and south, and they have 'Zhong' (中) style tombs. These are usually the tombs of high nobles. They are located in a different place, and the tombs are smaller. For individuals with status just below that, their tombs have only one path leading up to it, and their tombs are called 'Jia' (甲) style tombs. These are often granted to lesser nobles.

"In summary, those who were considered of significant status while they were alive would all be buried in one of these three types of tombs. However, this tomb only has a tomb pit, and not even a single tomb path leading to it, so the one buried here should be someone ordinary. However, considering the scale of the sanctuary above and the abundant amount of items they were buried with, as well as the fact that they were buried near the monarch's tomb, the occupant of this coffin should have been an extraordinary figure, no matter how we look at it. However, their tomb is so... so simple."

"Perhaps Yinshang's tombs were different from those of later generations," Zu An remarked. "I'll check to see if the jade badge Jiangjiang needs is somewhere here."

There was a large pile of items around the coffin, and he couldn't make them out clearly from where they were standing.

Pei Mianman was worried that something might happen, so she followed him down into the tomb pit.

There were all sorts of burial gifts arranged around the tomb pit. Most of them were bronze artifacts, but there were also several artifacts made from jade, ceramic, bones, ivory, and other items of jewelry.

To the north of the coffin were all types of bronze cauldrons. In ancient times, cauldrons weren't only used to cook food, but were also a symbol of authority.

On its south side were square wine vessels, square cups, earthenware, jars, pots, goblets, and other articles the deceased had used while they were alive. The burial customs of the ancient Shang Dynasty attached great importance to making sure that the dead were treated just as they had been while they were alive, which was why these things would accompany them in burial.

Of course, Zu An didn't recognize these bronze artifacts, which were all of different shapes and sizes. Mi Li was the one who explained them to him.

She was a Qin Dynasty empress, so she knew much more about these things. She also had the accumulated knowledge of the imperial library at her disposal, so her knowledge was even more extensive. She felt incredibly refreshed after explaining everything to him.

Zu An wasn't all that interested in her ramblings, yet he didn't want to dampen her enthusiasm either, so he changed the topic instead. "The things off to the side seem to be weapons. Huh? What is this weapon?"

Zu An noticed that there were many bronze weapons on one side of the tomb. There were spears, pikes, and arrows, but one particular type of weapon seemed strange to him. It was shaped like an axe, but the blade pointed upwards.

"That's a Yue!" Mi Li's expression grew serious. "That isn't an ordinary weapon. It's not usually used on the battlefield, but is used as a symbol of authority instead. It is often bestowed by the emperor upon a general, granting him the power to command the military wherever he wishes. One, two, three... There are actually seven such weapons here. This individual must have wielded exceptional authority within the military! Why have I never heard anything about him before, though?"

"The people of this era did not have the ability to leave books or other written records for later generations to study, so it's quite expected for you not to have heard of him," Zu An remarked. "There isn't any jade badge here. Let's take a look elsewhere." Zu An thought about bringing back some of the bronze artifacts with him. After all, every single one of them would be priceless national treasures in his previous world!

However, he swiftly changed his mind. These things weren't very valuable in this world, and they were just some ordinary artifacts with nothing really special about them. They weren't really useful to him at this point.

Pei Mianman suddenly spoke up. "Hey, this thing is really cute."

Zu An rushed over. He thought that she found the jade badge or something, but she was only staring at a bronze artifact with a big smile.

The bronze artifact was indeed special. It looked like a water buffalo, but it was also rather different from an ordinary depiction of a buffalo. This bull had a well-built physique. Its head stretched forward, and its mouth was slightly open. The other parts of it, like the eyes, ears, nose, horns, torso, and tail, were vivid and lifelike.

There were dragon, bird, tiger, elephant, and other animal designs carved all over its body, giving it a rather magnificent and elaborate look.

Even though it looked bold and powerful, its head was tilted slightly, and its mouth was open as well, which made it look charmingly naive. No wonder Pei Mianman had taken a liking to it.

"If you like it, we can take it with us." Zu An held Pei Mianman's hand, a doting smile on his face.

Mi Li rolled her eyes.

"It's okay." Pei Mianman shook her head. "Since this was buried with the deceased, it was probably something they liked when they were alive. Let's not steal something like that. Also..."

She glanced at the giant coffin beside her, then moved over to Zu An's side. She said in a quiet voice, "This place is way too strange... Things could get messy if we incur the owner's anger and it comes out to settle things."

Zu An couldn't help but smile when he heard this. Pei Mianman always seemed so bold and daring. He didn't expect her to be so afraid of these supernatural things.

Mi Li's voice sounded in his head. "Stop flirting already. There's another place you haven't looked at yet."

Zu An jumped in fright when he saw her eyeing the coffin. "You want to open the coffin?"

Mi Li snorted. "Of course! The best funerary objects are always buried inside the coffin. Your jade badge might just be inside."

Zu An swallowed. "Isn't that a little improper? We'll be disturbing his sleep."

"Closed-minded!" Mi Li berated him. "This is an opportunity! The one who refuses to explore a mountain of treasure is the greatest fool. You even promised that girl that you'd find it, and you need to find the mechanism to leave this dungeon as well. This tomb is quite unusual. Who knows if there are any key clues hidden inside?"

Her words seemed reasonable to Zu An, and his resolve was further strengthened when he recalled the girl's tragic past. He made up his mind. "Fine, then!"

Pei Mianman jumped in fright when she saw that he was going to open the coffin. She quickly moved to stop him, but Zu An repeated what Mi Li had said to her.

Pei Mianman bit her lip, but nodded in assent in the end. "Okay then. Since you've already made up your mind, I'll support your decision. Just be careful."

Zu An gave her an acknowledgement, then bowed towards the coffin. "Respectful elder, I apologize for disturbing your peace. We need to find a way out of here, and have been left without a choice. Please forgive our actions."

Mi Li snorted when she saw his actions. "What a waste of time!"

The coffin had two parts to it—an inner and outer one.

The outer coffin was painted mainly in black, with some red and yellow patterns.

After Zu An paid his respects, he picked up a bronze spear from the side and inserted it under the lid to lever it open.

Several funerary objects were placed in the space between the inner and outer coffins, for example, the helmet of a general and some fine pottery. However, the jade badge the young lady had spoken of was nowhere to be seen.

Despite this, their hope swelled. The stuff inside the coffin was much better than what was left outside, which meant that the inner coffin probably held even more valuable items. The jade badge might just be inside!

The inner coffin was painted red, and covered in delicate dragon and fish designs. The lid of the coffin was bordered with gold leaf. Gold was scarce back in the Yinshang period, and given the amount of gold on the coffin, it was easy to imagine the respected status of the one buried here when they were alive.

Zu An wanted to copy what they did in ‘Ghost Blows Out the Light’[1], which was to light a candle in the corner of the coffin and see if it went out, just as a precaution. But after thinking about it, he reasoned that the both of them were cultivators, so any traces of carbon dioxide inside the coffin would probably not do them much harm. If worse came to worst and something weird jumped out at them, they would still be able to fight it off. Given the number of times they’d already fought against the undead, lighting a candle as a precaution really seemed a little excessive.

As such, he warned Pei Mianman one last time to be on her guard, before using the spear to pry the lid open.

There were many jade artifacts inside. A jade annulus and other jade pieces were arranged along both sides of the buried individual’s upper body, and four dragon-shaped ornaments were arranged on his back, forming almost a straight line from top to bottom. Jade pipes were placed on its chest and abdomen, while shells were on his lower body. The bottom of the coffin was full of cinnabar.

Pei Mianman subconsciously leaned against Zu An. “Why... Why is his posture so strange?”

The buried individual hadn’t been reduced to bone yet, but seemed like a rather complete and dried up corpse. They could even vaguely picture what he would have looked like while he was still alive.

This wasn’t strange, however. What was strange was how the figure had been placed in the coffin.

He wasn’t lying on his back or his side like how a regular person would have been buried. He was facing downwards instead.

Mi Li’s voice sounded. “This is probably what was known in legends as the prone burial. Only two types of people are buried like this. The first is those of inferior status, which is clearly not the case. This leaves only one other possibility. This man didn’t die naturally, but suffered a violent death!”

A sinister wind blew around them as soon as she said this. The temperature dropped, and chills ran down their bodies.

## **Chapter 527: Going Against the Grain**

“He was killed violently...” Zu An had a weird look on his face. If this had been ‘Ghost Blows Out the Light’, something would have surely been about to pop out.

Mi Li pointed at the corpse. “Look, there are a total of seven wounds on his body. Six of them are concentrated around his left side. His left arm, thigh, and pelvis have injuries made by both blunt and sharp weapons. Some of them have healed, while some haven’t. This means that he suffered merciless blows even while he was dying.”

“Was he a living sacrifice?” Zu An asked. They had run into too many sacrifices along the way. Knowing the culture of Yinshang, something like that was not beyond them.

Mi Li shook her head. “I don’t think so. The people who lived in the time of Yinshang reveled in living sacrifices, but such a fate was reserved for enemy captives, and not for their own citizens. They would never do such a thing to a general of such stature. From his wounds, he probably died on the battlefield, and his corpse was later buried here with the rest of the monarchs.”

“Oh...” Her analysis did seem to make a lot of sense to Zu An.

“What’s that?” Pei Mianman suddenly exclaimed. While they were talking, she had been carefully observing the coffin and its interior, and had suddenly noticed a strange object.

Zu An looked in and noticed an artificial hand on the right side of the corpse. It seemed to be made out of bronze. The hand was nearly identical to a real hand, and even had fingernails on it.

There were taotie runes carved onto the back of the hand, as well as other designs, giving an unusual aesthetic.

Mi Li said, “This was probably the mortal wound. His arm was severed on the battlefield, which caused him to bleed to death. From the looks of it, though, the soldiers of the Shang Dynasty weren’t able to retrieve his arm from the chaotic battlefield, so they could only make him an artificial one to ensure that his body was whole when they buried him.”

“An artificial limb?” Zu An explained everything to Pei Mianman, a strange look on his face. He hadn’t expected things such as artificial limbs to exist in such an ancient period.

Pei Mianman sighed in amazement. “A general who died on the battlefield! He is someone worthy of respect.”

With their hearts thus moved with admiration, they continued to look around inside the coffins a little more. Even though there were other precious golden and jade artifacts, they didn’t find any sign of a jade badge.

Zu An was just about to put the lid back on when Mi Li said with surprise, “You’re leaving just like that?”

“What else would I do?” Zu An was confused. He didn’t get what she was saying.

“You’re not taking any of the treasure with you? You have more than enough space in your Brilliant Glass Bead.” Mi Li looked rather aggrieved. “How can you come to a place of such treasure but leave empty-handed?”

Zu An shook his head, unmoved by her objection. “I’m no tomb raider. How can I steal any of these items, especially since they were things that this individual used and treasured while he was still alive?”

“You’re so close-minded!” Mi Li was not happy that she wasn’t able to bring him around. She turned her head away and sulked.

You have successfully trolled Mi Li for 22... 22... 22...

Pei Mianman also had no interest in any of the items. The two of them were of one mind. They both turned to leave.

A sudden creaking issued from behind them. Both of them jumped in alarm and spun around.

They noticed that the lid of the coffin—which they had firmly closed just moments earlier—had suddenly shifted to the side, opening just a crack.

Pei Mianman shivered. “Ah Zu, did you close the lid properly?”

Zu An swallowed. “I did.”

Doesn’t that mean that the corpse just moved?

As soon as this thought appeared in their minds, a desiccated hand reached out from within the coffin and grabbed the side of the coffin. A chill wind swept through the entire tomb, and the temperature dropped substantially.

“Ah!!” Pei Mianman cried out in fear. This sight was just too frightening, even for a cultivator.

“Let’s get out of here!” Zu An knew that the situation was going south very quickly. He grabbed Pei Mianman and ran.

“Moo~!”

The powerful cry of a bull echoed through the tomb, and a massive bulk charged right at the two of them.

Neither of them dared face this attack head on, and they both frantically dodged to the side. As it passed them, they finally recognized what was attacking them.

It was a large water buffalo! It was the same shape as the bull they had noticed earlier, but was several times its size.

When they looked in the direction of where that bull statue had been, sure enough, that bronze bull was gone.

With a loud thud, the lid of the coffin was shoved aside completely. The desiccated corpse within it slowly stood up.

Zu An and Pei Mianman both stared at it, their mouths dropping open.

The water buffalo happily danced over to the newly-arisen corpse. The two of them looked rather close and intimate.

Zu An couldn’t help but say, “Elder, we were just passing by. Respectfully, we did not rob your tomb, and we even covered you back up. There’s no need for you to see us out!”

The corpse seemed to have heard him. He turned around to look at Zu An, his eyeballs vaguely visible. His mouth opened and closed, forming words with great difficulty. “Outsider, intruder, die...”

It stretched out a hand. A spear flew into his grasp, and the corpse slashed it at them viciously.



A green bolt of energy shot out at the two of them. Zu An and Pei Mianman hurriedly drew upon their own unique methods to defend themselves, but were still sent flying into the wall behind them. Sand and dust poured down from above.

Zu An was terribly shaken, and his fingers were bleeding as well. He had a rather awful look on his face. That was just a casual attack, yet it already packed so much power! His strength was clearly far above that of the previous skeletal warrior.

The two of them hadn't even been able to defeat that skeletal warrior—how could they possibly face this general?

Zu An's mood soured. If I was the protagonist, and things played out in the same vein as those tired web novel clichés, I would only be facing arrogant fifth or sixth rank cultivators. They'd be strutting around, mocking me and making sure I know just how big of a difference in strength there is between us, only to have me slap them all in the face afterwards.

But why are there eighth, ninth, and even master rank experts popping up left and right? If my ass isn't getting beaten up, then I'm on the way to getting my ass beaten up... What the hell is this?

Damn it all!

The skeletal general—who was probably Ya Zhang—was stepping forward. He subconsciously moved to kick away the obstruction in front of him, but halfway through his motion, he stopped. He looked down and saw that it was his own coffin, which he would need if he wanted to return to his slumber. As such, he jumped over instead.

Bracing himself, Zu An used his Sunflower Phantasm, splitting himself into two copies and charging at his opponent.

Ya Zhang brandished his spear, cleaving straight through the clones. Both figures shattered, leaving Ya Zhang stunned. It didn't feel like he'd hit anything.

Zu An appeared behind him in the next instant, swinging his sword towards the general's head.

Thanks to the fight with the skeletal warrior, he already knew that these bastards' heads were their weak points. He wanted to see if he could somehow catch him off-guard.

If Ya Zhang were still alive, then such an ambush would never have worked, given the gap in their cultivation. However, he was now a dried corpse, and the clarity of his mind and the flexibility of his body should surely be in an inferior state. It seemed like a worthwhile gamble to Zu An.

Sure enough, his plan worked! Zu An was overjoyed as he saw his sword flashing towards his opponent's head.

The sword was on the verge of entering the back of his head when a deep bellow reached his ears, and a massive figure rammed into his body.

The bull statue was protecting its owner! Zu An felt as if he had been hit by a fire truck, and his body was sent flying.

Blood spurted out of Zu An's mouth, and half of his body went numb from the pain. Any normal cultivator would have had half of their ribs crushed, and he would have suffered the same fate as well, if not for his special constitution.

That bull charged at him again, its massive horns glinting with a murderous light. If they scored a blow, the tomb floor would be covered in his internal organs.

"Ah Zu, be careful!" Pei Mianman flew towards him as well. Her fair hand swept out, releasing a black fireball that exploded against the onrushing bull.

The bull cried out, leaping about in anguish. Unfortunately, these black flames were extraordinary, and the bull was unable to extinguish them no matter how hard it tried.

General Ya Zhang was by its side in an instant, reaching out a hand to caress its back. A black mist spread across the bull's body, slowly extinguishing the flames as it spread across it.

He looked coldly at Pei Mianman. "You've hurt my beloved bull. Die!"

## **Chapter 528: Let's Make a Deal**

He brandished his long spear as he stalked forward one step after another, closing in on Pei Mianman. "Be careful!" cried out anxiously.

The impact had left him struggling for breath, and there was no way for him to help her even if he wanted to.

However, Pei Mianman didn't panic. She weaved to and fro, leaning backwards and avoiding her opponent's vicious attack. Her movements were extremely graceful, as though she were performing a beautiful dance instead of fighting a battle where her life was on the line.

Zu An felt immensely relieved for her. He wasn't that concerned about Pei Mianman's flexibility. Instead, his mind was on her voluptuous chest. It was easy enough for the rest of her to avoid the deadly spear, but if she was stabbed in the chest, she would surely die.

Fortunately, she had accounted for that as well. She bent backwards, almost touching the ground, and the spear passed barely half an inch above her.

Zu An let out the breath he was holding. He belatedly realized that she was clearly used to her own body. She'd grown into it, and had been fighting for many years with it, which meant that she was in tune with what it could and couldn't do. There was no need for him to be worried for her at all, at least not about this.

However, what he saw next made his heart race with anxiety once again. Having missed his first blow, General Ya Zhang immediately slashed his spear back towards her. Pei Mianman had leaned so far backwards that she was practically parallel to the ground, and there was no way for her to avoid it.

He was just about to rush forward to help when he saw Pei Mianman reach out her hand. She tapped it lightly against the spear, and she somehow managed to regain her balance. She pivoted about on her toes, her body bending like a willow branch, bending and weaving around the spear as it moved.

Ya Zhang swung his spear about, but it seemed there was no way for him to injure her. On the contrary, he seemed to be at a bit of a disadvantage. He wasn't able to bring the powerful strength of his spear to bear.

"Entangling Feathersilk Art!" Zu An immediately recognized this movement technique. This was a close-quarters technique that she had taught him previously, and she was a skilled proponent of it. He had no idea that it could be used like this.

Again, it belatedly struck him that Pei Mianman wasn't the delicate sort of girl that needed protection. Rather, she was a rare cultivation genius. It was only because of this dungeon, and all the unknown things within it, that she was left rather shaken. Thanks to the strange snakes, ghosts, and other oddities that had popped up one after another, she had only been able to display fifty to sixty percent of her abilities. Her compromised state was why she had been in danger several times, and he had to step in to save her.

She had finally managed to recover her usual air of dangerous seduction, perhaps because she had gotten used to her surroundings, or because something had happened while she passed through the barrier that had sealed the entrance to this tomb. Despite facing someone who was clearly far stronger than her, she didn't seem at all as though she was at a disadvantage.

Zu An didn't waste time admiring this. With Pei Mianman occupying General Ya Zhang's spear, he took the opportunity to thrust his Tai'e Sword at the general's skull.

The water buffalo had recovered by now. With a loud bellow, it ran over to help its master again.

Zu An was prepared for this. He took out a pair of red underpants from his Brilliant Glass Bead and waved it in front of the onrushing bull.

Ever since he'd obtained the wonderful spatial artifact that was the Brilliant Glass Bead, Zu An had filled it up with all manner of things. Aside from several treasures, he also kept all sorts of daily necessities within it.

As for the red underpants, it wasn't because he had a weird fetish or thought it was a lucky color. He had underpants of all colors inside it—orange, red, blue, purple, green... Wait, no... No green underpants.

The bull's eyes immediately became bloodshot when it saw red, and charged straight at the pair of underpants.

Zu An tossed the red underpants at the wall, and the bull followed after it, ramming straight into the wall.

With a loud boom, the bull smashed its head into the wall, sending large chunks of debris tumbling down.

The walls of this tomb weren't made of normal dirt. They were special, made of dirt that had been compressed through repeated hammering, and then mixed with glutinous rice, tung oil, and other adhesive materials. It was so tough that regular blades would have been unable to leave a mark.

Despite this, a part of it was still shattered by the bull's charge. It was easy to imagine just how powerful it was.

Of course, there was no way the bull would be unaffected. It was left dizzy and confused. Its horns were embedded deep into the wall, and no matter how hard it tried, it couldn't free itself. It would take a while before it was able to rejoin the fray.

Excitement shimmered in Zu An's eyes. This was the opening he needed to pierce General Ya Zhang's skull. However, a bronze hand suddenly appeared in front of him, blocking his lethal strike.

There was a loud clunk, and he felt a tremendous force travel up the body of his sword, almost knocking it right out of his hands. The bronze hand shot towards him again.

In a panic, Zu An brought the longsword in front of his chest to block the blow, but even so, he was unable to completely ward off this attack, and the hand struck his chest. If it had been anyone else with his cultivation level, they would have been knocked out right away.

Pei Mianman was finally unable to handle the attacks from the general's spear, and was flung to the side.

Both of them were breathing heavily, having exhausted quite a bit of energy during that brief exchange.

"Big sis empress, I'm really going to die if you don't help us!" Zu An cried out in despair. There was no way he could beat this general. In the face of absolute strength, all his techniques and strategies were meaningless.

He could tell that General Ya Zhang was at least at the ninth rank, but his cultivation could easily surpass the master rank. The difference between the two of them was so great that he couldn't properly gauge it.

Fortunately, Mi Li wasn't feigning sleep. Instead, she replied calmly, "It's not as though you have no way of dealing with him yourself. Why are you asking me?"

Zu An was stunned. "I do?"

Mi Li said, "The second level of the Primordial Origin Sutra can ward away evil. It is the bane of the undead! Isn't that what you used to purify the twenty thousand departed spirits previously?"

Zu An stared blankly.

Mi Li's expression grew a little strange when she saw his reaction. "Don't tell me... you don't remember?"

Now that he'd been reminded of it, Zu An finally remembered. He couldn't help but scowl. "I really did forget."

Sometimes, knowing too many things wasn't necessarily a good thing. It was easy to forget his techniques.

If he had remembered, he wouldn't have been in so much danger on that staircase! He could have completely destroyed them!

Then again, those were all Jiangjiang's clansmen. If she'd found out that their spirits had been extinguished, their conversation might not have gone so smoothly.

He wondered if the Primordial Origin Sutra could deal with the Guman Tong as well...

I guess I managed to make it this far because of those mistakes, though.

Even though he tried to console himself in this fashion, Zu An was still rather sullen. "Why didn't you remind me about this earlier?"

Mi Li smirked. "You were constantly relying on the Phoenix Nirvana Sutra, so I thought you were intent on training yourself while being close to the brink of death. Besides, you seem to constantly want to fashion dangerous situations in order to steal the heart of that big-boobed sis. Either way, you got through all of this more scared than hurt, so why would I stop you?"

Zu An could not believe what he was hearing.

Do you think I'm that shameless? I would rely on my own charms if I ever wanted to steal a girl's heart, okay?!

"Ah Zu, be careful!"

Pei Mianman's cry brought him out of his reverie. General Ya Zhang's spear was flying towards Zu An. The general was clearly upset by how his beloved cow had been deceived and bullied.

Zu An began to draw upon his Primordial Origin Sutra, applying the primordial ki to his Tai'e Sword. At the same time, he began to mutter to himself, "Return to dust, this is not your home, cease..."

Before he could finish his incantation, General Ya Zhang stopped, holding out a hand to forestall him. "Wait, we can talk this out! Let's make a deal!"

Even though his voice was cryptic and hard to understand, Zu An could just about make out what he was saying.

Zu An was surprised. This fellow was actually still intelligent! He was similar to that girl outside. "What kind of deal?"

General Ya Zhang wiped a hand across his forehead when he saw Zu An stop, as if he was wiping away his sweat. Then again, how could he sweat in his current condition? "I know that you might possess a way of harming me, so there is no need to continue fighting. I can bring you to the trial left behind by the Shang monarchs."

## **Chapter 529: The Destined Ones**

Zu An was astounded by what he was hearing.

He couldn't help himself. "Bro, where's your integrity?" he yelled at the general. He didn't even feel like calling this corpse 'elder' anymore.

Even though General Ya Zhang had never heard of the word 'integrity' before, he could more or less guess at the meaning. "I am in charge of guarding this place and preventing intruders from entering. My job is to wait until the destined ones come to undergo the trial. I can tell that you two are fated to take the trial, so there is no need for us to fight anymore."

Pei Mianman came up to Zu An to find out just what the hell was going on. This dried up corpse had been hostile and aggressive a second ago, yet its attitude had completely changed in an instant.

Zu An told her through voice transmission that he had a means to eliminate evil spirits.

Pei Mianman beamed. She was pleasantly surprised at first, but then it hit her—if this was the case, why did they bother letting themselves get beaten up in the first place?

As if he could read her mind, Zu An explained awkwardly, "I know too many things, so I sort of forgot about it..."

Pei Mianman stared at him in disbelief.

To hide his embarrassment, Zu An quickly turned to the general and asked, "How do you deduce if someone is destined?"

He left out the second part of his question. Don't tell me you're calling me some destined one just because I have a way to hurt you...

General Ya Zhang had already walked over to the wall. He stabbed his spear into the ground, and freed his bull from the wall.

The bull was still dizzy after being pulled free, but when it saw Zu An, it bellowed and prepared to charge again.

General Ya Zhang placed his hand on its back and caressed it gently, and it gradually calmed down. The two of them seemed to share a special understanding.

The general finally replied to Zu An's question. "First of all, the trial must be attempted by both a man and woman at the same time. If only a single man or woman entered, they would not be the destined ones. Furthermore..."

He paused for a moment, and then he turned his dried-up head towards Pei Mianman. "There is a familiar aura coming from her."

Pei Mianman stared at him in puzzlement.

Zu An recalled the strange things that had happened to her along the way, and quickly asked, "What do you mean?"

General Ya Zhang replied, "She seems to possess the aura of a Shang queen."

"A Shang queen?" Zu An frowned. "Which queen?"

General Ya Zhang shook his head. "It isn't a specific queen. Instead, I sense many queens within her."

Zu An narrowed his eyes.

What the hell is this? Is this guy coming up with bullsh\*t just to swindle me?

Pei Mianman was a little frightened when she heard this, and subconsciously leaned against Zu An, as if he was her only source of reassurance.

Zu An held her comfortingly.

Mi Li's voice whispered into his ear, "Kid, your luck with girls really is good. Who knows, even queens from another dynasty might be joining you in bed."

She immediately regretted these words when they came out of her mouth. Wasn't she a queen herself?

Zu An rolled his eyes. "Manman is just Manman, how can she be anyone else? I refuse to believe in such coincidences. How likely is it for us to run into another queen like you who isn't dead yet?"

Mi Li sniffed. She also knew that such a thing was rather unlikely. Her circumstances were exceedingly unique. Who else could end up with her rotten luck?

"Follow me," General Ya Zhang said.

He bent his knees slightly, then leapt up to the surface. The bull mooed a couple of times, then jumped out as well. It was difficult to imagine how something with such a stout body could leap so gracefully.

Zu An and Pei Mianman exchanged glances, then followed their lead as well.

Seeing that the two of them had exited the tomb pit as well, Ya Zhang turned and led the way, his bull following alongside.

It was reassuring to know that the guardian of the place was personally leading the way.

Despite this, though, Zu An wasn't ready to completely let down his guard. He exchanged glances with Pei Mianman, and saw that she was doing the same. Both of them remained vigilant, ready to act instantly if anything strange occurred.

Zu An needed to know more, so he asked, "Excuse me, General. Are you Ya Zhang?"

"Yes." Ya Zhang replied. "My name is Ya. Zhang is my tribe."

Zu An was stunned. "You aren't a member of the Shang?"

Ya Zhang replied, "My tribe served the Shang monarch, so we can be considered half-Shang."

"It looks like the Shang monarch trusted you quite a bit since he put you in charge of guarding the tomb." Zu An showered him with a healthy dose of praise. He didn't know if this fellow was a man or a ghost, but whatever he was, he would probably like hearing something like this.

Sure enough, a proud look appeared on Ya Zhang's face. "I have made countless heroic contributions to the Shang monarch, and my rank in the military is second only to Fu Hao. I am ranked beneath her not because my achievements are beneath hers, but because of her status as the queen."

"Fu Hao?" Zu An recalled the history lesson Mi Li had given him as they perused the murals in the palace earlier.

"But the queen is an amazing woman, beautiful and excellent in battle. I have no complaints about being ranked beneath her." Ya Zhang's voice seemed to color with a different sort of feeling.

Zu An smiled. "It seems like the general admires Fu Hao quite a bit."

Ya Zhang's 'face' changed. "Please do not say such irresponsible things! If His Majesty heard that, we would be offered up as living sacrifices."

As he said this, he looked all around him in panic, as though he was scared of something.

A sudden thought struck Zu An. "Is your monarch still alive?"

Ya Zhang shook his head. "My beloved bull and I are the only ones left in the tomb. I have always revered His Majesty and the queen like deities. It was an instinctive reaction."

Zu An smiled. "You only mentioned that you were afraid of incurring the wrath of your king. You did not dismiss your adoration of Fu Hao."

Ya Zhang stiffened, and remained silent for a long while. Eventually, he sighed deeply. "Who wouldn't adore a heroic figure like the empress? But everyone reveres her like a deity. None of us have any other inappropriate thoughts."

Pei Mianman couldn't help but pinch Zu An's waist. Why was this fella so gossipy? He was being rather rude towards these ancient people.

Zu An judged it a good enough time to cut the small talk, so he used the momentum of the conversation to pivot to what was important. "By the way, what is the nature of this trial that you mentioned?"

"I do not know what kind of trial awaits you inside either. The two of you must explore it yourselves." Ya Zhang paused for a moment, then added, "Let me offer you a warning. Several pairs entered the trial over the past ten thousand years, all of them giants among men. Their strength were far greater than yours, but none of them passed the trial."

Pei Mianman's face drained of color, and she quickly asked, "What happens if you fail the trial?"

"Death, of course." Ya Zhang looked at her, and his voice became much gentler. "But you two do not need to be too worried. Even though your cultivation levels are lower than the others, he has many secrets on him, while you have the aura of the queens. Who knows, the two of you might really be able to unlock the secrets of this dungeon."

Zu An asked, "What if we don't participate in the trial? Is there a way to leave this dungeon?"

Since his primordial ki was enough to overcome the general, it was not absolutely necessary to take the trial.

Ya Zhang shook his head. "There isn't. You can only leave this place by passing the trial. Also you must participate as quickly as possible, or else you will be assimilated into this dungeon, and your bodies will become a part of the dungeon as well."

Their expressions immediately grew alarmed, and they quickly examined their own bodies. Sure enough, their ki was flowing out of their bodies at an extremely slow rate. They had initially put it down to



fatigue after all the constant fighting, but now they knew that it was a consequence of just being in this dungeon.

Pei Mianman bit her lip. She had just confirmed her relationship with Zu An earlier, and she had wanted to enjoy a bit of peace with her lover here. Now, it looked like they wouldn't have that chance.

"In that case, General, do you know where we can find the jade badge of the Eastern Barbarians?" Zu An asked gravely. His agreement with the Eastern Barbarian princess was still firmly on his mind.

"The jade badge?" Ya Zhang thought for a moment. "I have an impression of something like that. The queen was quite fond of it in the past, I believe, so His Majesty buried it with her in her tomb. You can enter the queen's tomb once you pass the trial."

Zu An laughed bitterly. It seemed like there was no other choice but to take the trial.

By this time, they had reached a large hall. When they saw the interior of it, both Pei Mianman and Zu An were shell-shocked.

### **Chapter 530: Roiling and Churning**

Inside the palace, rows of meat hung in midair.

Zu An's first reaction was that they were some form of preserved meat, but that didn't seem right. When he looked more carefully, he realized that they were human corpses!

The internal organs of these human corpses had been emptied out, and their bodies were cut open down the middle and hung from the ceiling by hooks. They looked like livestock hung up on a butcher's line.

Pei Mianman let out the breath she had been holding. "How could there be such cruelty in this world?"

Zu An also felt extremely disturbed. Even though they had seen many sacrificial pits along the way, the sacrifices within them had already turned to bones, and so the visual shock wasn't as great.

These dried-up corpses had been air-dried, and had not turned to bone. Not only that, their bodies were displayed the way butchered livestock would be.

Even though he had always been aware of the concept of human sacrifices, it was never something he had come into personal contact with. He never expected to actually see humans treated as livestock one day!

"This wasn't a form of punishment, but rather a sacrificial method known as mao sacrifice." General Ya Zhang replied hurriedly, as though Pei Mianman's question had caused him some distress.

"Mao sacrifice?" Zu An pondered on this a moment. These corpses were cut open down the middle... their remains did resemble the 'mao' (茅) character.

General Ya Zhang continued, "When we offered sacrifices to the heavens, the best offerings were human sacrifices. We offered their internal organs, their blood, and the head. As for the other parts of the human sacrifice, these could be roasted, boiled, stewed, or air-dried into dried meat..."

“Stop, stop, stop!” Zu An was scared witless. “Stop talking about this as though you’re making food!”

“We are preparing food, though.” General Ya Zhang had a bewildered expression on his face. “After all, they are food offered to the deities. According to our customs, as the deities enjoy the offerings, they will bestow their blessings upon them. That is why, once the ceremony ends, these blessed offerings become delicacies that only the few of high status could partake of.”

Zu An almost did not want to process what he was hearing.

He felt his stomach churning. It was all too distressing to listen to.

Pei Mianman wasn’t faring much better. She ran off to the side and began to retch.

They didn’t dare linger in this place any longer, and quickly proceeded onwards. Soon afterwards, they arrived in front of a tribute altar with all manner of bronze tools arranged on it. Mi Li had told him the names of these articles before, but the words were all so unfamiliar that he didn’t remember a single one of them.

Some of the plate-like vessels held a sort of paste. He was rather astounded. After all, after ten thousand years, even things stored in freezers would have decayed into nothingness. Why did they still seem to retain the same appearance that they had during the ceremony? It appeared that there was a mysterious power preserving all of this.

Seeing them staring at the paste-like substance, General Ya Zhang stepped in to explain. “This is the minced-meat sacrifice, which is created by mincing human flesh into a paste. Those who are of high status, usually the leaders of a faction, are used in this sort of sacrifice. Such a sacrifice is considered extremely precious. Would the two of you like to give it a taste?”

He scooped up a bit of paste from one of the plates and offered it to the two of them.

“No, no, no!” Zu An and Pei Mianman both backed away quickly, waving their hands vigorously.

This is too bloody hardcore, man! What the hell is wrong with these Shang Dynasty people!

Zu An suddenly remembered that the ‘Investiture of the Gods’ described how the Zhou King would not hesitate to have people chopped up into mincemeat. For example, both Bo Yikao, the eldest son of King Wen of Zhou, and Queen Jiang’s father were chopped up into mincemeat and later eaten.

He’d held onto the belief that this was just something made up in order to make the Zhou monarch look like a brutal freak. Now, he knew that this was actually a common sacrificial method used in the Shang Dynasty!

“What a pity.” General Ya Zhang shook his head at the two of them, as though they were ignorant of the luxuries in life. He placed his finger into his mouth and had a taste. “It’s been so long since I’ve enjoyed such a delicacy. Thank you for waking me up again.”

Zu An and Pei Mianman stared at him, speechless.

The two of them were on the verge of a breakdown. They felt extremely uncomfortable walking next to a cannibal.

Zu An pulled Pei Mianman closer to him as they continued on swiftly. The last thing he wanted to do was to stay in a place with human mincemeat.

As they walked on, they encountered a large bronze cauldron in the middle of their path. It was different from the empty cauldron outside. This one was filled up with what looked like some sort of meat jelly, or a mass of solidified grease.

Zu An had a look of helplessness on his face. "You don't have to tell me. This is also human flesh, right?"

Ya Zhang nodded. "This cauldron can cook more than forty people at once. Only the king's cauldron is allowed to be this massive."

His tone was full of adoration and envy. He placed his dried-up hand along the edge of the cauldron, and waves of black smoke spread out from it. The chunks of meat jello inside began to melt, and they could see bits of recognizably-human pieces bobbing up and down inside.

Pei Mianman didn't dare give the contents another look and hid behind Zu An. Out of sight, out of mind.

Zu An's heart was pounding as well. Seeing General Ya Zhang's expression of excitement, he quickly said, "Excuse me for saying this, but if you fish some of that out again and start eating, I'm going to exorcise evil here and now, and to hell with whatever trial awaits!"

General Ya Zhang looked confused. "Divine sacrifices are the most solemn and sacred things in the world. These offerings have been blessed by the deities themselves. How can any of this be evil?"

Zu An knew that the general was expressing his honest beliefs, because this was how the people of Yinshang were like. That was why he did not become enraged. "Human sacrifices have long been abolished in later generations. Can you please not do this in front of us?"

"Fine." General Ya Zhang could sense the primordial ki swirling around his sword, so there was nothing he could do. He didn't press the issue, and removed his hand from the cauldron. The meat jello that was starting to boil gradually stopped simmering.

A thought surfaced in Zu An's mind, and he remembered the request that the Eastern Barbarian princess had made. "Use your spear and poke around inside for me. See if there's a head inside," he asked General Ya Zhang.

He didn't want to do it himself. The pot of meat jelly was just too big, and to be honest, it really was quite horrifying to look at.

"A head?" General Ya Zhang wasn't sure what he wanted, but he still stirred the pot with his spear.

Zu An stared at it uncomfortably. He saw several heads, but none of them seemed like they belonged to a young lady.

He gave up the search, and they continued on through the grand hall.

After they had covered some more ground, General Ya Zhang announced, "We've arrived at the location for the trial."

Zu An and Pei Mianman looked at what was in front of them. There were all sorts of patterns carved on the walls, from murals to formations.

At the very center of it all was a small circular platform, and a strange bronze artifact sat on it. This bronze artifact only had three legs, and it was shaped like a bird.

“Is that the Three-legged Golden Crow?”[1] This was Zu An’s first reaction, but he quickly shook his head and dismissed the idea. He noticed that the last leg wasn’t a leg, but the tail feathers of the bird.

The entire bronze artifact was covered in patterns. Its beak and breast were adorned with cicadas, and feather patterns covered its head. The underside was decorated with depictions of Kui,[2] and a twin-headed Kui was drawn on each side. Long, coiling snakes wound around its wings, interspersed with rhombus patterns. The head of a beast was stamped behind its neck, and soaring wings decorated the rest of its back.

The design of the bird was quite intricate, and it was truly a sight to behold.

General Ya Zhang looked at this bronze artifact with eyes full of adoration. “This is the queen’s favorite owl statue, and marks the entrance to the trial.”

The people of Yinshang believed that this quiet bird that roamed the night was full of mystery, like an emissary sent by the deities. That was why they had made such a fine and detailed statue of the owl.

These statues were also ancient wine vessels.

Zu An immediately asked a key question. “How do we start the trial?”

General Ya Zhang pointed at the statue. “You can enter if each of you holds onto one of the wings of the owl statue. I wish you two the best of luck.”

Zu An didn’t walk over to it right away. Instead, he turned to Pei Mianman and said, “Manman, we don’t know what awaits us in this trial. Let’s take some time to rest first.”

This was exactly what she was thinking as well. The two of them took some medicine then sat down to rest. They had fought battle after battle to get here, and were both quite exhausted. It was only natural for them to want to regain their peak condition before taking on the challenge of this dangerous trial.

General Ya Zhang shook his head. The corners of his lips curved upwards, as if smiling in ridicule. Not a single pair had succeeded after all these years, and these two possessed the weakest cultivation. What difference would a little more preparation make?