

The Immortal's Wine Store

#Chapter 271 - Beiming Chu Playing Tank - Read The Immortal's Wine Store Chapter 271 - Beiming Chu Playing Tank

Chapter 271 - Beiming Chu Playing Tank

Prince Dante stared at the demonic figure with a calm look, but he wasn't truly confident about facing this creature. However, he knew that he had to do something about this guy.

Swoosh!

Prince Dante took out his sword and initiated an attack on the raging demon. The guy was still occupied with the other applicants, so he wanted to try landing a surprise attack on it.

However...

To his dismay, the demonic soldier immediately sensed the danger and turned to look in his direction with its blood-red eyes that glowed with intense malice. There was also mocking a smile hanging on its terrifying face.

'Shit!' Prince Dante cursed in his heart when he saw the expression on the demon's face. He had underestimated this guy...

The demon adjusted its muscular body and struck a quick blow towards the pouncing Dante. Its movements were fast for its huge figure that it surprised the prince.

Prince Dante raised his sword upwards to block the incoming strike and...

Bang!

He was flung more than a hundred meters away with just one blow!

Cough! Cough!

Prince Dante coughed up several mouthfuls of blood as he stood up with great difficulty. He then stared at his sword that now had multiple cracks on it. It was an Earth Weapon, but it actually almost got destroyed after taking a single quick punch from that thing!

He then stared at the beast and saw the toying smile on its face. This sight angered him, but he could not do anything about it since it was outrageously stronger than him.

"This... This monster... Is it really part of the assessment?" He muttered while rubbing his aching shoulder.

Roaarr!!

"Humans, you actually dared to venture inside my territory! And now you plan on leaving this place alive?! Preposterous!" The demonic soldier. said in a deep baritone voice. Just the sound of its voice made everyone feel a chill running down their spine.

Prince Dante was also a bit tensed when he heard it speak, but he knew that this was also an opportunity.

"Esteemed demon, we are unaware that this is your dwelling place and I apologize on behalf of everyone. I hope that you would be kind enough to allow us to leave." Prince Dante said as he looked at the demon soldier. Since this guy could talk, he must use this opportunity to buy as much time as possible until Zhu Ren and the others manage to gather all the applicants present to fight this thing! That's the only way he could think of in this situation.

"Hahaha! You, a pesky little worm want to negotiate with me? Laughable! Extremely laughable! Hahaha!" The demonic soldier cackled. Its annoyingly high-pitched laughter gave off a malicious aura that stunned everyone in place.

Zhu Ren and the others were riling up the other applicants to join them, but not everyone was willing to fight with them.

"Brother Zhu, we managed to call a few dozen people, but are they enough to fight against that thing?" Beiming Chu asked.

Zhu Ren glanced at him with a serious look and replied. "I have no idea, but His Highness is still there buying us time to get these people. We must trust him."

Beiming Chu nodded his head solemnly and stared at the applicants who were willing to fight against the demonic soldier.

"Brothers and sisters! Follow me! Killing that guy might be a shortcut to becoming a disciple of the Heavenly Sword Tower! Let's go!" Beiming Chu stoked everyone's fighting intent with a few words. Even Princess Sylvia was quite surprised when she realized that this guy was actually not all muscles...

Roar!

The applicants let out a battle cry as they followed Beiming Chu's lead. All of them wanted to become a disciple of the Heavenly Sword Tower and a chance was given in front of them. Although the possibility of it being true was low, they were still willing to try it out.

Hm?!

The demon soldier who was still mocking Prince Dante heard the ruckus and turned its gaze to Beiming Chu and the other applicants. It was a strong being, but it was not that confident about fighting a large group of young elites.

The demon soldier's ghastly eyes flickered with animosity when it realized that it felt fear when it saw the incoming group of humans.

"How dare you lowly creatures fight against me?! Die!!" The demon soldier shouted as it pounded the ground with its huge fists.

Rumble! Rumble!

The ground shook as if a huge earthquake was occurring! The mob behind Beiming Chu was in a mess, but a little more than half of them were still able to follow behind Beiming Chu.

"Ridiculous!" The demon soldier angrily said as it lifted its fists in the air.

"I think I can only block it once, so use that opportunity to release your most powerful attacks on that shit's head!" Beiming Chu shouted as he took out a pair of arm shields that looked incredibly durable and hooked it on his arms. He then sprinted ahead of everyone and raised his arms to block the demon soldier's attack.

Hm?!

The demon soldier did not expect that there was actually an idiot who was willing to take his attack head-on. Is this human crazy or is he just a clown? The demon soldier thought at that moment...

The injured Prince Dante stared at this scene with a hint of worry, but he did not stay idle. He took out another sword and prepared to use his most powerful attack.

"Foolish!" The demon soldier laughed as it increased the strength behind its punch.

Baaang!!

Beiming Chu roared and received the punch with his arms! His arm shields broke apart and the ground beneath him crumbled apart, but he stood to his feet!

"This is fucking nothing!" Beiming Chu ignored his bloodied arms and shouted at the top of his lungs. A line of blood trickled down his lips and he could already feel his shoulders going numb. However, he ignored the pain and mustered all of his strength to resist the remaining power behind the demon soldier's punch!

Beiming Chu's knees finally gave in and he kneeled on the ground with one knee, but there was a faint smile on his face.

He was actually able to block an attack from a being that was more than two realms stronger than him! Unbelievable!

Chapter 272 - The Proud Demon Soldier

The demon soldier's blood-red eyes flickered with surprise when he witnessed the absurd scene in front of him.

The human that it had underestimated was actually able to successfully block its powerful blow despite the great difference in their cultivation levels!

'Shit!' The demon soldier cursed as it used its other hand to hastily cover a part of its head. However, a portion of his upper body became wide open as a result!

Prince Dante and the applicants used this opportunity to hit the exposed parts vital parts of the demon soldier.

The air rippled as dozens of attacks hurtled towards the demon soldier! Flames spells, ice spears, and other strong spells were speeding through the evil creature, making its heart pound heavily in trepidation!

"Damn humans!!" It let out a final shout before the dozens of attacks hit the creature without mercy!

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Everyone distanced themselves from the position of the demon soldier and they all stared at the huge cloud of dust ahead of them with serious gazes. Everyone felt nervous as they prepared to launch another wave of attacks.

"Is it dead?" Someone whispered in a slightly shaking tone, but no one replied. All of them stared intently at where the demon soldier once stood.

Zhu Ren held the severely injured Beiming Chu while Princess Sylvia hugged her brother tightly in her embrace. They were also looking in the direction of the demon soldier, hoping to see its body on the ground.

Suddenly...

Everyone inhaled a mouthful of cold air when they saw that the demon soldier was still standing!

Its right shoulder was completely broken and a huge part of its torso was badly injured, exposing its flesh and muscles. A part of the demon's head was also bloody and ruined, but it was actually able to remain standing despite its grave injuries!

Cough! Cough! Cough!

The demon soldier spat several mouthfuls of blood. It then covered the exposed internal organs hanging on its mangled upper body. The demon soldier's body swayed a few times as it forced itself to remain standing.

'I have to escape here!' The demon soldier thought at that moment. When that idea came to its mind, it immediately used the remainder of its power to turn around and flee.

"Don't let it get away! Pursue it!" Prince Dante shouted as he gently pushed Princess Sylvia. He then pursued the demon soldier together with the other applicants. The little girl instantly followed her brother when she saw him rushing forward.

Zhu Ren wanted to help them, but he did not want to leave Beiming Chu alone. The guy was too injured to protect himself and there might be other applicants waiting for him to leave his injured friend. To prevent this from happening, Zhu Ren chose to remain and tend to his friend's injuries.

"Brother Beiming, I know that your Beiming Family's body strengthening technique is indeed powerful, but you must not do this again..." Zhu Ren said worriedly as he smeared a healing powder on Beiming Chu's arms.

Beiming Chu tried to speak, but he almost choked on his blood, so he could only flash a weak smile.

Looking at this, Zhu Ren could only shake his head. This friend of his was truly courageous and bold to dare take that demon's punch. Even he dared not think of doing it...

"Eat this and rest. Leave the rest to them. It should not be a problem for them to defeat an injured demon." Zhu Ren muttered as he glanced towards the distance.

Beiming Chu popped the pill given to him and nodded his head in agreement.

"Silver Sword Phantom!" Prince Dante shouted as he released his quickest attack.

A dazzling silver radiance sped towards the escaping demon soldier. The grievously injured demon soldier had lost more than half of its speed and it could no longer evade this sort of attack.

It tried to twist its body to evade a fatal blow, but the prince's attack still managed to make the demon fall to the ground.

Crash!

Prince Dante blocked the demon soldier's path of retreat and stared at the creature with calm eyes. He was also waiting for the other applicants to help him finish off this demon. That last attack had almost consumed his remaining true essence and he might not be able to kill it on his own, so he could only block the demon soldier from escaping.

The evil creature glared malevolently at the human in front of it. Its blood-red eyes emitted a gleam full of malice.

"Hu-Humans, yo- you cowardly trashes! You might have won against me, but there is a lot of my kind waiting to slaughter each and every one of you! When that time comes, I hope that I will meet you in hell! Hahaha!" The demon soldier stood up with difficulty. It did not even bother to hold its innards anymore and just cackled with a proud and unyielding expression.

Prince Dante narrowed his eyes as he looked at the arrogant demon. He could see its unyielding character beneath its malevolent appearance. The prince was feeling a bit nervous when he saw that the demon was still able to stand up even in its current state.

'This goddamn demon is resilient!' He shouted in his heart.

"Hahaha! I like that look on your face, but I hate myself for being defeated by weaklings like you bunch! I won't allow you trashes to kill me! Hahaha!" The demon soldier laughed in a crazed manner as it lifted its remaining arm. It then punched its own body and pulled its heart out before crushing it in front of Prince Dante!

Thud!

The demon soldier finally collapsed on the ground...

However, that last scene was deeply imprinted in Prince Dante's mind. The proud demon refused to get killed by its enemy, so it decided to end its own life...

Prince Dante was no coward, but he could not imagine himself pulling his own heart out. Not to mention crushing it without hesitation...

Chapter 273 - Ren Shuang's Cultivation

Prince Dante stared intently at the demon soldier's corpse. He carefully inspected the demon's body with his true essence to check if it has still a remaining breath. He only sighed in relief when he sensed that it was no longer breathing.

The prince recalled the last words of the demon soldier and he could not help but feel a bit of admiration towards its unyielding character and bravery.

"Are all the demons like that? If that is the case, then we're going to be fucked up really bad..." Prince Dante muttered to himself.

Swoosh. Swoosh. Swoosh.

A few applicants arrived at the scene and witnessed the collapsed body of the demon. They then gazed at the lone Prince Dante with a surprised look.

Although the demon was already severely injured, it would be troublesome to defeat it. However, this man right here had actually beaten it alone!

"Friend, did you defeat this demon alone?!" Someone asked with a shocked tone.

The other applicants stared at the prince with admiration.

Prince Dante recovered from his stupor and glanced at the other applicants with a calm smile.

"Thanks to everyone's effort in weakening this demon, I finally managed to slay it." He uttered, but his words made them inhale a breath of cold air. None of them were capable of defeating such a creature even in its most sorry state!

"Don't be humble, friend! That thing is at least a peak 7th-rank Emperor realm being. Killing it is a very tough task, but you've done it on your own!" Jon, who was among the applicants said as he flashed a thumbs up to the prince.

Prince Dante smiled at his words.

"I will remember everyone who took part in this battle. When we come out of this place, I will invite you to my place for a drink!" He said.

Jon and the other applicants felt relieved for some reason. Even if killing this demon might not give them points, they were still happy to befriend this man in front of them. Some of them were able to recognize the prince's clothing and they were happy to have befriended a prince of the Silver Wing Empire.

"Hahah! Good! I won't decline this invitation!" Jon smiled at the prince, while the other applicants also showed similar reactions.

Among the crowd, a poorly-dressed little girl stared at Jon with a relieved look. This girl is Sylphie and she had just arrived at the scene. She was worried about Jon and his friends, so she immediately rushed towards this place when she sensed the disturbance.

"This guy is so strong! He actually defeated this demon alone? Who is he?" Sylphie muttered silently as she stared at Prince Dante. She could see that his clothes were of great quality, so she was certain that he was of noble birth.

"Since they are safe, I should leave here and search for more tokens." She said after making sure that Jon and his two friends were not injured.

Lu Sulan was slightly surprised when she saw how the applicants managed to defeat the demon soldier. She was the one who suggested placing a demon soldier in the World of Illusion to test the applicant's heart and teamwork.

When she first suggested it to Jiu Shen, she did not think that the applicants would be able to defeat it. However, the scene in front of her proved her wrong. She had underestimated Prince Dante's group.

Although the demon took its own life at the very end, she still remembered all the faces of the applicants who joined the battle. She was planning to give them a bonus for their performance.

"Master intentionally told the Tree of Illusion to make the demon's character to be like this when he heard your suggestion. He wanted the applicants to know that the demons must not be underestimated." Long Meili said while looking at the screen.

"Master's wisdom is boundless. He gave this kind of hint to remind everyone that there is still a violent species of beast lurking at the sidelines. I suggested this idea, but I did not think ahead as the master did." Lu Sulan said in admiration.

She then stared at Long Meili and asked. "Sister Meili, do you think the master would help them if the demons will attack the Profound Dragon Continent?"

Long Meili wanted to say yes when she heard the question, but the word was stuck on her throat she recalled Jiu Shen's unpredictable personality. In the end, she could only shake her head.

"I don't know. Even after having close contact with the master, I still have no idea what's going on inside his mind. He's like the ocean, deep and unreadable..."

Lu Sulan's lips arched upwards when she heard the answer. She totally agreed to Long Meili's words, but she hoped that Jiu Shen won't sit idly when that time ever comes.

"However, if his wine business will be compromised, I'm certain that he won't remain at the sidelines." Long Meili added with certainty in her voice.

Lu Sulan was a bit surprised to heard and she chuckled at the thought of it. She was right! 'Master would never allow others to ruin his wine business!'

Jiu Shen gently caressed the face of Ice who was deeply asleep. He then stared ahead and called out. "Ren Shuang."

Swoosh!

A silhouette stood before him in an instant!

"Master." The man bowed his head respectfully.

"How's your progress in breaking through to the Nascent God Realm?" Jiu Shen asked as he looked at Ren Shuang.

Ren Shuang felt slightly nervous at the question, but he still replied calmly. "Master, give me a week. I will reach the Nascent God Realm by then."

Jiu Shen nodded his head at his words. He had taken a look at Ren Shuang's dantian through his spiritual vision and he saw that the man was just lacking a little bit more to break through his current realm.

"System, open the Spirit World for me." Jiu Shen said in his mind.

A wooden door suddenly appeared in front of Ren Shuang, making him unconsciously take a step back.

"Get inside the Spirit World. The true essence inside is more abundant and the environment right there will aid your breakthrough." Jiu Shen said.

Ren Shuang nodded his head and bowed towards Jiu Shen. "Yes, master."

He then pushed the door open without hesitation.

When Ren Shuang was already inside the Spirit World, the wooden door vanished. Jiu Shen was again left alone in his room.

"With Ren Shuang taking charge here, I will be more at ease when I go to the Divine Beast Continent..." Jiu Shen muttered to himself.

Chapter 274 - Second Assessment Complete!

After the death of the demon soldier, there were no longer any major events inside the World of Illusion. The applicants continue to hunt for lesser demons, but some still chose to rob the other applicants using their superior strengths. However, the vast majority chose to stay in groups to maximize their hunting efficiency and also to prevent themselves from being robbed by others.

Beiming Chu who was severely injured was helped by his friends to collect his own share of tokens. To this gesture, he was grateful that they did not leave him behind. He was happy that his little bit of sacrifice was worth it.

On the other hand, Sylphie remained hunting alone, so she took quite a bit more time to collect her remaining tokens.

"It's finally over." Lu Sulan muttered as she checked the time. She then took out something and pressed it hard.

The power of the Tree of Illusion was removed and the applicants slowly woke up one by one from that dream world.

Everyone was still very confused as they propped themselves up. What had happened? They were perplexed about how they were taken out from the World of Illusion. Some of the smarter applicants connected the dots and they were able to guess what might have happened to them during the last few days.

After everyone woke up, Lu Sulan clapped her hands to get their attention.

Clap!

The applicants turned their gazes towards her and waited for her to explain what happened.

Lu Sulan's expression remained calm when she saw everyone's bewildered faces. She then started talking. "I know every one of you is curious about what had happened, so let me explain this to everyone. All of you were taken to the World of Illusion with the help of this Tree of Illusion. In that world, you were tasked to look for tokens that can only be taken after killing a lesser demon. And to my surprise, more than 90% of you managed

to pass this test. I will show the names of those who passed this assessment. As for those whose names aren't shown on the screen, you may leave this place."

Lu Sulan waved her hand and a huge screen appeared in front of everyone. There were three rows on the screen, the first one was labeled as names, the next was the number of tokens that the applicants have, and the last label was their final remark (Pass, Fail).

Everyone stared intently at the screen and began searching for their names. The applicants who passed the assessment were jubilant, while the few who failed shook their heads in regret.

"I was so close to getting all the tokens. Too bad..." One of them said with a sad expression.

"Wait, how come I passed the assessment? I'm one token short of the required amount, so why did I get a passing remark?" One of the applicants asked in surprise when he saw his results.

"Yeah, me too! I'm three tokens short, but I also passed! Is this true?!" Another applicant voiced out his words with an excited tone.

The other applicants were confused about the whole matter. How come those guys passed the assessment when they failed to get the required amount of tokens?

"I don't accept this! Why did they get a passing remark?!" A bulky young man said with displeasure written all over his face.

Facing all their words, Lu Sulan remained indifferent. She scanned her icy gaze through the crowd, making all those who were clamoring to shut their mouths.

"There is a bonus reward inside the World of Illusion, and it is given to those killed the only demon soldier inside. Those who passed this assessment despite lacking in tokens participated in killing that demon soldier. Any more words?" Lu Sulan said in a cold tone.

So that was it? Everyone was finally enlightened after Lu Sulan explained the whole matter. As for those who voiced out their displeasure, they hid among the crowd in embarrassment.

"Hahaha! This father was right to join His Highness in killing that demon soldier! Great!"

"Goddammit! I should have joined those guys to kill that stupid demon!"

Prince Dante and his friends looked at each other with smiles on their faces.

"Brother Beiming, it is a good thing that we were transported into that World of Illusion. If not, it might take you more than a month to recover from that injury." Zhu Ren said in relief.

Beiming Chu's shoulders turned cold when he heard his words. He was right! His injuries at that time were too severe that he even had a hard time walking.

"Don't do that kind of thing again, Brother Beiming. Your Beiming Family's body strengthening technique might be powerful, but who knows what might happen in the future. You have to be extra careful." Prince Dante patted his friend's shoulder as he said those words.

Princess Sylvia nodded her head in agreement, but she still glared at her brother. "You're one to talk! You foolishly charged towards that demon soldier alone! I never thought you were that crazy! Hmph!"

Prince Dante scratched the back of his head in embarrassment as he appeased the raging little demoness.

Looking at this, Zhu Ren and Beiming Chu chuckled heartily.

"Silence!" Lu Sulan said in a cold tone.

All the applicants immediately shifted their gazes to this beautiful elder, but they did not dare have any lecherous thoughts about her. Who would dare do that when the woman in front of them was the disciple of the renowned Sect Master Jiu Shen?! Only a retard would provoke her...

"The third assessment will be held tomorrow morning. Make sure that none of you will be late. All of you may now go back to your rooms." Lu Sulan said before leaving the scene.

The assessment passers excitedly talked with their new friends as they went back to their rooms.

Long Meili who was standing on top of the Tree of Illusion's branch stared at Sylphie's lone back with many thoughts in her head.

Chapter 275 - Mirror Of Truth And Deceit

The next morning, everyone was excited about the third assessment. If they managed to pass this final test, they would become disciples of the Heavenly Sword Tower!

"What do you guys think would be tested in the final assessment?" Beiming Chu asked. He was truly curious about the final exam especially after Lu Sulan spoke about it. Although she said that it was the easiest exam, Beiming Chu was a bit skeptical about that. Who knows maybe Lu Sulan might have said those words to fool them...

Zhu Ren shook his head after a moment of contemplation. He also had no idea as to what would happen during the next assessment. However, he told himself to never fail it.

"No matter what will be tested, I'm certain that all of us will pass." Princess Sylvia muttered with certainty in her tone.

Prince Dante smiled at her words, but he internally agreed with what his sister said. It wasn't because he was arrogant, but it was his trust towards everyone's talents.

The venue for the final assessment was another huge room. However, there was nothing noteworthy about this room except for the door-like object at the center.

This object emitted a deep aura, but the thing that made everyone wary was the feeling of being seen through every time they glance at this door.

Prince Dante went closer towards it, his gaze carrying great curiosity. His sister and the other two followed behind him when they saw him walking towards this 'door'.

Upon coming at a close proximity to this 'door', Prince Dante exclaimed when he realized that he could actually see his reflection on it.

"Is this a mirror or a portal?" He muttered in a daze.

"It looks like a portal, but it also looks like a mirror. What could this thing be?" Beiming Chu said as he glanced towards this 'door'.

It wasn't just them, all the remaining applicants came closer to this 'door' and inspected it carefully. They wanted to find out what kind of object it was since it might be related to the next assessment.

However, none of them were able to tell what it was even after looking at it for more than thirty minutes. They could shake their heads regretfully after failing to guess what it was.

"Where's the overseer? It's almost the start of the final assessment but I can't see any elders of the Heavenly Sword Tower inside this room-" Just as that applicant uttered those words, he suddenly felt a cold gaze piercing through his back. He slowly turned around and saw the familiar face of a woman.

"Young Miss Theia! I mean Elder Theia! This..." He felt horrified at the sight of this beautiful grim reaper.

'Is she the overseer for the last assessment? I thought that this would be the easiest one... Was Elder Lu Sulan messing with us yesterday?' The applicant wanted to cry, but no tears came out...

Those who knew who this woman was immediately stood like statues when they spotted her. As for those who came from outside of the Silver Wing Empire, they gazed at her deeply.

Theia was after all a stunning beauty with a great figure. If not for her notoriety, she would have dozens of suitors lining up her door.

"Woah! Who is this beautiful elder? She looks very pretty!" An applicant exclaimed in admiration as he looked at Theia's devastatingly beautiful face.

Smack!

Suddenly, someone smacked the back of his head and this made him furious.

"Hey! What the hell is that for?!"

"Brother, you are not a resident of our Silver Wing Empire, so you might have not heard of that woman. Listen closely or you might regret it later. Her name is Theia and she is a waitress in Sect Master Jiu's Immortal Wine Store. Don't provoke her if you don't want to die without a proper burial."

Those that heard those words immediately retracted their filthy gazes off of Theia, but there were still a few who failed to contain their lustful gazes.

"Insolent fools!" A cold voice echoed inside the room as a wave of powerful true essence swept through everyone like a gust of wind!

Swoosh!

The dozen applicants who were ogling at Theia fell to their knees in just a blink of an eye!

Thud! Thud! Thud!

The remaining applicants who managed to hold their lust were looking at the scene with horrified expressions. They praised themselves for listening to the other's advice.

"If this happened outside of our Heavenly Sword Tower, I would have already killed you all. Thank you lucky stars that you are currently applicants who might become disciples of our sect." Theia uttered in an icy tone, making everyone gulp nervously.

At the far corner, Prince Dante and co. smiled at the scene with a hint of schadenfreude.

"They actually dared to look at her with such obscene gazes. Truly tired of living. Hmph!" Princess Sylvia said in a mocking voice.

Prince Dante and the other two chuckled at her words.

Theia scanned the crowd with an indifferent and cold look. She could see a few familiar faces, but she did not even bother to greet them.

After a moment of silence, Theia's cold and emotionless voice echoed inside the room.

"You guys have already seen the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. It is the portal-like door that you see in front of you. This thing will play a significant role in this assessment, but you guys have nothing to worry about it. The only thing you needed to do to pass this assessment is that you must be able to pass through the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. As for those who would fail in doing it, you can scam out of this building!"

Mirror of Truth and Deceit? Just what was this thing able to do?

Everyone was curious, but nobody dared to raise their hands to ask about this.

"Elder Theia, I have a question." Princess Sylvia raised her hand as she asked fearlessly.

Theia glanced in her direction and said. "Speak."

"What is this Mirror of Truth and Deceit and how could we pass through it?" Princess Sylvia asked.

Everyone turned their gazes towards Theia and waited for her to answer.

Theia's eyes remained calm as she answered in a dull tone. "This thing is capable of seeing through your hearts and as for how you can pass through the Mirror of Truth and Deceit, you will know soon..."

Chapter 276 - The Ability Of The Mirror?

"Is there anyone else who has questions?" Theia moved her gaze through the crowd and she smirked coldly in her heart when she saw that no one dared to ask anymore.

A few applicants wanted to raise their hands, but when that pair of cold gaze swept through them, their bodies instantly went cold, making them halt their movements. This woman is so scary! Everyone thought in their hearts.

"Since you don't have any questions, all of you can line up according to the sequence that I'm going to show you." Theia said as she waved her hand.

A large screen emerged in front of the crowd and they saw a list of their names from the top scorer of the second assessment down to the last person. From the looks of it, the sequence was according to everyone's final results in the second assessment.

Everyone followed Theia's instructions without making a fuss. They lined themselves in front of the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. The applicants were curious as to what this thing was capable of doing.

"Dante Silveria, you may step inside the Mirror of Truth and Deceit." Theia said expressionlessly.

Since the prince was the one who got the top score during the second assessment, he was also the first one to step inside the Mirror of Truth and Deceit.

Prince Dante nodded his head at Theia when he heard his name being called.

Under the curious gazes of everyone, the prince walked towards the door-like object while hiding the rising tension in his heart.

As the prince went closer to the Mirror of Truth and Deceit, he saw that the space within this thing was rippling like water.

'This thing won't kill me, right?' He nervously muttered in his heart.

At this moment, the prince was only a few steps away from the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. The nervousness he was feeling was becoming heavier and he could already hear the violent beating of his heart.

"What do you guys think would happen to him once he steps inside that thing?" Somebody silently raised a question.

The crowd pondered, but they had no idea what the answer was, so they just remained silent as they watched the prince as he slowly walked.

Prince Dante inhaled and exhaled deeply before he took the last step towards the 'door'. And to everyone's surprise, nothing noteworthy happened to him. He just passed through the Mirror of Truth and Deceit as if he was just walking towards a normal door.

The only thing that everyone saw was the rippling of space within the door when the prince stepped inside. Other than that, there was truly nothing else to see.

"What? What happened?" Someone asked in shock.

"Look! Look at his face!" Somebody pointed out.

Everyone immediately turned their gazes back to the prince and they saw that he was now sweating heavily.

Just what had he experienced that even as the top scorer, he actually revealed that kind of reaction? Thinking about this, the remaining applicants became even more nervous.

"Brother, just what did you see behind that door?" Someone asked the prince.

Prince Dante glanced at the guy with a blank look and replied in a slightly shaky voice. "I cannot speak about it."

He then turned around and left after saying those words.

The crowd was silent at his reply.

"Next person. Go inside." Theia's cold voice awakened them.

The remaining applicants stepped inside the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. Everyone who had gone through that door would always have the same weird and fearful look.

Suddenly.

"I can't get inside?! What's happening?!" An applicant exclaimed nervously. He tried stepping inside the Mirror of Truth and Deceit, but he could not even take another step forward. It was as if an invisible wall was blocking his path.

Hearing this, Theia glanced at the applicant with a cold look.

Everyone could sense the killing intent emitted from that gaze. However, they were all astonished about this. Why would she reveal that kind of killing intent towards an applicant when he merely failed to pass through the Mirror of Truth and Deceit?

"You, stand behind me." Theia pointed at the guy.

The man nervously nodded his head before he walked behind Theia.

What was happening? Did the man pass the assessment while the rest of them failed? No one was certain...

The assessment continued and a few other applicants failed to pass through the door. There were fourteen of them in total. It was just a small amount from the hundreds who passed the second assessment.

"Those who managed to pass through the Mirror of Truth and Deceit, you may stay here and wait for further instructions. As for the people behind me, follow me to meet my master!" Theia said in a neutral tone.

"What?! How lucky! Did they pass the third assessment?"

"They actually have the chance to meet the legendary Sect Master Jiu..."

"I envy them..."

The fourteen people behind Theia were initially feeling nervous, but when they heard that they could meet with the renowned Sect Master Jiu Shen. All their worries vanished and their faces lit up in excitement.

Theia snorted in her heart when she saw everyone's reaction. She then brought the fourteen people to Jiu Shen's room.

Prince Dante knitted his eyebrows as he looked at those people. He knew nothing about them, and he was curious as to what was waiting for them.

"Brother, did we fail the exam? Why did Elder Theia bring those guys away?" Princess Sylvia asked worriedly.

Prince Dante smiled at his sister and patted her head. "Don't worry. I think we are the ones who passed this assessment."

Princess Sylvia's eyes lit up when she heard his words. "Really?"

"Of course!" The prince nodded his head with great certainty.

"You sensed the killing intent earlier, right? I think there is something wrong with those people and that was why they were rejected by the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. Furthermore, I already have a few guesses about what this thing is capable of doing." Prince Dante added in a calm tone.

Chapter 277 - Exhilaration

Jiu Shen who was standing by his window suddenly moved his gaze to the door. With just his keen senses, he could already tell that a few people were walking towards this place. He then used his spiritual sight to check who these people were. When he saw that it was just Theia and a bunch of young cultivators, he removed his gaze from them and continued staring at the beautiful scenery outside of the window.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

"Come in." Jiu Shen calmly said.

Creak...

Theia opened the door after getting her master's approval. She then went in front of him and bowed in subservience. "Master, I've brought them." Her tone was a tad warmer compared to how she had sounded earlier during the assessment.

The fourteen young cultivators glanced at this man with curiosity. They wanted to see what was special about him that even the whole of the Profound Dragon Continent trembles at the mere mention of his name. However, aside from his devilishly handsome face, they did not even sense an ounce of strength coming from him.

If not for the rumors and pieces of evidence about his strength, they would have believed that he was just an ordinary handsome wine seller.

"Greetings, Sect Master Jiu Shen!" They bowed respectfully as they greeted him.

Jiu Shen did not even glance at them and just silently watched the outside scenery, but upon seeing this, no one dared to make a fuss.

"Theia, you may leave. You know what to do with the other applicants." Jiu Shen's calm voice drifted inside the room.

"Yes, master. I shall take my leave now." Theia bowed her head and left. As she went out of the room, she did not even bother to look at the fourteen young cultivators. In her eyes, they were already dead people...

After Theia left the room, an awkward silence soon followed. Just as the young cultivators were about to go crazy, Jiu Shen suddenly asked a question.

"Do you know why I called you guys here?"

The fourteen cultivators were silent for a moment. Just then, one of them answered with uncertainty. "We failed to enter the Mirror of Truth and Deceit. The people who weren't called all managed to pass through that door. As for those of us here, we failed to do so."

Jiu Shen turned around and glanced at the young cultivators with an indifferent expression. He then walked towards his chair and sat calmly.

"You're smart, but I don't need rats in my sect." Jiu Shen uttered in a calm tone, but his words made these young cultivators sweat heavily.

All of them came from different sects and families. Their goal was to become disciples of the Heavenly Sword Tower and bring back the valuable sword techniques and cultivation techniques owned by the sword tower to their respective families and sects. In short, they were spies!

"Se-Sect Master Jiu, wh-what do you mean?" Someone feigned innocence, but his shaking voice confirmed Jiu Shen's words.

The other young cultivators also became nervous. They involuntarily took a step back while preparing to flee at any moment.

Since their identity was already exposed, they could no longer remain here. However, they could no longer move when Jiu Shen's expressionless gaze shifted towards them!

"That's why I didn't establish a sect before. It is too troublesome." Jiu Shen shook his head as he muttered to himself.

"Sect Master Jiu! Don't kill me! I'm innocent!" One of the cultivators shouted with a pitiful look.

"Too noisy." Jiu Shen said as he did a snapping motion with his finger.

Snap!

Right after that moment, the bodies of the fourteen individuals inside Jiu Shen's room suddenly exploded.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

Blood, bones, and pieces of meat splashed, but they seemed to have been suspended in midair without even touching anything inside the room.

Jiu Shen flicked his finger and produced a small wisp of black flames before sending it towards the broken pieces of human remains.

Crackle! Crackle!

Crackling sounds echoed inside the room as the mangled human carcasses were burned in mere seconds.

After less than ten seconds, the cracklings sounds vanished. The room went back to its previously tranquil state.

Jiu Shen scanned the spotlessly clean room with a poker face as he muttered. "Now, my sect has a few hundred disciples to train. It's almost time to visit the Divine Beast Continent... I can finally complete that mission. It has been a while since the system has given it..."

The room lapsed into silence after that. No one else would have known that fourteen talented young cultivators died inside this room in just a snap of a finger...

Theia headed back to where she left the other applicants.

Upon arriving in that room, her presence immediately attracted everyone's attention.

"From now on, all of you here will be disciples of our Heavenly Sword Tower." Theia announced. Her words instantly made the crowd erupt into joyous cheers.

"YESS!!"

"Awesome!!!"

Waaahhhh!!

"Silence!" Theia shouted, immediately silencing everyone, but their eyes were still filled with excitement.

"After you leave this room, someone will give you guys your uniform and a few other things for your cultivation. You can also choose to go back to your respective families today, but you have to be here tomorrow. Remember, you are now disciples of the Heavenly Sword Tower. However, you will have to follow the rules of the sect or you will immediately be expelled!" Theia said.

Everyone nodded their heads seriously. No one even bothered to ask what had happened to the fourteen individuals earlier. All of them were smart enough to not ask that question.

"Dismissed!"

Theia left the room after that announcement.

Waaahhhh!!

"I can't believe it! I've actually become a disciple of the Heavenly Sword Tower!?
Hahahah!

Everyone was filled with glee and excitement as they cheered.

Standing at the furthest corner was the lone Sylphie. She also displayed an exhilarated look.

"With the Heavenly Sword Tower's backing, I can finally avenge my family and my kingdom! Crimson Sun Sect, just you wait!" Sylphie's eyes flashed with murderous intent as she muttered coldly in her heart.

Chapter 278 - Yang Zenke's Shocking Reveal Of Power

Yang Zenke was responsible for the distribution of the new disciples' robes and cultivation resources. It was hard to do it alone, so he called a few other disciples to help him.

"Brother Yang, we are the first batch of disciples, so the new ones should call us 'senior brother'. I like the sound of that. Hahaha!" Han Sen smiled from ear to ear. He was excited to see the new members of their sect.

Yang Zenke ignored the shameless fellow and continued to distribute a few boxes to his friends. Inside of these boxes were the robes and cultivation resources of the new disciples.

"Brother Han, are you sure about that? Some of the new disciples are quite strong and they might not be willing to call you their senior." Xiao Hua chuckled softly.

Han Sen glanced at Xiao Hua, but he merely smiled at her words. He was confident that he had already surpassed all the other young experts in the Silver Wing Empire. With the exception of Yang Zenke, he was confident that no one else could defeat him.

Looking at the smug look of his friend, Yang Zenke was at a loss. This brat was becoming more shameless and confident, but too much of it was not a good thing. Thinking about this, Yang Zenke smacked the back of Han Sen's head and fiercely said. "Fool! Don't forget what the master had told us before. We must not be arrogant with the little achievements that we have and everyone must always strive hard to become even stronger. We might be considered as strong in the eyes of the other young experts, but in master's eyes, we are nothing!"

Initially, Han Sen wanted to fight back, but when he heard his friend's words, his back was suddenly covered in a cold sweat. 'That's right! Since when did I become this

arrogant? I have been blinded by my rising cultivation level that I've forgotten where I came from!"

With a grateful look, Han Sen solemnly said. "Many thanks for opening my eyes, Brother Yang."

Yang Zenke nodded his head at Han Sen as he patted the guy's back with a bit of force.

"Take this and come with me to meet our juniors." Yang Zenke said as he handed a box to Han Sen.

Prince Dante and the other new disciples waited inside the huge training hall on the lowest floor of the sword tower. They have been here for more than an hour, but everyone waited calmly for their rewards.

"Even until now, I still can't believe that I actually passed all three assessments..."

"I knew some of those who failed the assessments. They aren't weak at all. All the people who signed up for the recruitment are the best of the Profound Dragon Continent, but only a few of us remained. I wonder what our future would be like after becoming disciples of the Heavenly Sword Tower..."

The new disciples eagerly chatted with their new friends. Everyone was still jubilant after they passed all three assessments.

Just then... Everyone suddenly sensed the arrival of a few people. They stopped talking and turned their gazes to the newcomers.

Upon seeing the embroidered black robes of the newcomers, they became certain that these people were among the first batch of disciples that the Heavenly Sword Tower had accepted.

At first, everyone was still calm, but when they noticed the aura of the man leading this group, the new disciples immediately stood to their feet.

"This guy... How the hell did he break through by this much?!" Beiming Chu exclaimed when he sensed the aura of this familiar young man.

Beside him, Prince Dante and the others were also stunned.

Yang Zenke smiled inwardly when he saw the dumbstruck gazes of the new disciples. He purposely released his aura to warn the new disciples that he as the senior must be respected.

After their long training inside the Endless Forest, his cultivation level leapfrogged into the initial stage of the 6th-rank King realm! How could this group of new disciples not be shocked to see such a young and talented individual?

"Greetings, my junior brothers and junior sisters. Congratulations on passing the three assessments and finally becoming disciples of our Heavenly Sword Tower! I won't say too much bullshit. Our task is to deliver these items to you guys, so please line up and receive your rewards." Yang Zenke said as he scanned the crowd. He was no longer the weak servant boy that he once was. He had become someone with great status and it would be a lie if he said that he wasn't proud of himself. However, he will never let this proudness get the better of him.

"Brother Yang, you could have introduced us as well..." Han Sen whispered sorrowfully as he poked Yang Zenke's back with his finger.

Black lines could be seen on Yang Zenke's forehead when he heard Han Sen's words.

Xiao Hua giggled when she heard Han Sen. This guy was still the same...

"I will give you face and not smack you in front of the new disciples. Just start distributing the boxes to our juniors." Yang Zenke said in a serious tone.

Han Sen chuckled dryly when he saw the look on Yang Zenke's face. He then put on a bright smile as he distributed the robes and cultivation resources of the new disciples.

Looking at this, Yang Zenke could only sigh as he shook his head.

"Brother Yang, you've become even stronger after merely leaving for more than a month. I don't know if I could still take one of your blows." Yang Zenke shifted his gaze to Prince Dante who had just arrived in front of him.

Yang Zenke remained calm at his words. "You flatter me. I've merely done my best to cultivate. All the rest is thanks to the teachings of Sect Master Jiu Shen." He wanted to say master, but he changed his words after thinking carefully. It would be more proper to call Jiu Shen as Sect Master while they were in the presence of others.

They weren't Jiu Shen's personal disciples since they were only disciples of the Heavenly Sword Tower. It would be more accurate to call them Jiu Shen's sword servants, but the latter treated them as if they were his personal disciples. Even so, they were already satisfied with the status quo.

Chapter 279 - Invitation

"Don't be too humble, Brother Yang. Your talent deserves to be praised!" Beiming Chu suddenly said.

Yang Zenke's indifferent face warmed up a little bit when he saw their friendly attitude. He wasn't close to this bunch, but they seemed to be treating him as a friend.

"I won't stay here for long since I still have to report back to Sect Master Jiu Shen." Yang Zenke said.

Prince Dante nodded his head when he heard Yang Zenke's words, but he suddenly recalled something.

"Wait. Before you go, I would like to invite you to come with us to the imperial palace later. We will be holding a banquet to celebrate our success and I do hope that you will be there, Brother Yang." The prince smiled as he invited Yang Zenke.

Yang Zenke wanted to decline, but Han Sen abruptly stepped forward and said with a broad grin. "Alright. We accept your invitation. You don't mind a few of us coming with Brother Yang, right?"

Prince Dante turned his gaze to the smiling Han Sen. He could still remember this fierce fellow who tried to break through during his fight in the last annual martial arts contest. The prince could never forget such a barbaric fighter who fought like a madman. This guy was even crazier than Yang Zenke!

"Brother Han, it's been a while! It looks like your- huh?! Your cultivation..." Prince Dante was speechless when he sensed the aura of Han Sen.

Peak stage of the 5th-rank Spirit realm!

Zhu Ren and the others finally discovered this as well when they saw the prince's unusual reaction. All of them could only stare at Han Sen and Yang Zenke with utter astonishment. Just how did these two freaks manage to cultivate themselves this fast!?

Looking at their dumbfounded gazes, Han Sen laughed in his heart. Of course, he still put on a smiling expression outwardly.

"Hahaha! Yo! I knew that you guys would pass the assessments! Congratulations!" A voice suddenly interrupted everyone's train of thoughts.

They glanced at the source of the voice and saw the dashing Liu Mengdi who was wearing his sect robes. A blood-red sword can be seen behind his back.

"Brother Liu!" Prince Dante and the others greeted.

Liu Mengdi smiled at them as he asked. "You guys wouldn't mind if I join this banquet, right?"

"Of course not! It would be more fun with Brother Liu around. I will also invite a few disciples of our sect to join the banquet." Prince Dante said. He will honor his promise to those who have helped them in fighting the demon soldier inside the World of Illusion.

"Great! In that case, I won't hold myself back! Hahaha!" Liu Mengdi laughed heartily.

"Brother Liu, how is your Liu Family faring? If you need help, our Beiming Family will gladly support you." Beiming Chu patted his chest as he said those words.

Liu Mengdi's eyes flashed for a moment, but it soon reverted to normal. "Everything is good. If I ever need help from the Beiming Family, I hope that Brother Beiming won't forget his words." He forced out a smile.

At the mention of his Liu Family, Liu Mengdi recalled his father. It was so painful, but he maintained his smiling facade.

Cough!

Prince Dante faked a cough to gather everyone's attention.

"Alright, everyone! Let's go back to our new rooms and put on our sect robes. After that, we will go to the imperial palace and start the banquet." The prince changed the topic to avoid soiling the warm atmosphere.

"Right! Let's go! I want to see how I look in this sect robes!" Princess Sylvia dragged her brother without even bothering the others.

"Hey, wait!"

Prince Dante could only helplessly glance at the others as he was dragged by his younger sister.

Looking at this scene, everyone laughed.

"Brother Yang, Brother Han, make sure that you both will be there. You too, Brother Liu." Zhu Ren said before he followed the brother and sister pair. Behind him was Beiming Chu who was following him like a shadow.

Han Sen turned his gaze to Yang Zenke and said. "Brother Yang, this is such a rare occasion. It does not happen often. I know that you don't want to waste your precious cultivation time, but cultivation will tire you out if you don't take a break."

Yang Zenke glared at him fiercely, making the latter shrink.

"You've already accepted his invitation. What else can I do?" Yang Zenke sighed as he shook his head.

"Good! Hahaha! Let's bring Sister Xiao and her friends with us. The banquet would look bland without them." Han Sen said as he glanced towards Xiao Hua.

Smack!

"You! You just want to show off!" Yang Zenke smacked Han Sen's head without hesitation. Luckily, the new disciples were busy seeing that embarrassing scene.

"It's fine, Brother Yang. I also wanted to see what an imperial banquet would look like. I'll also bring some of my friends with me." Xiao Hua said with a sweet smile.

Hearing Xiao Hua's confirmation, Yang Zenke could only agree.

Standing at the side, Liu Mengdi secretly laughed when he saw this.

"Master, they have already distributed the new disciples' robes and cultivation resources. Do you have any more instructions for me?" Long Meili asked with her head down.

Jiu Shen leaned on his chair and replied in a calm tone. "Observe that little girl Sylphie and when the time is right, accept her as your disciple. With your guidance, this rough pearl would one day shine as bright like a diamond."

Long Meili nodded her head and accepted the order. She was also captivated by the little girl's tenacious spirit and willpower. Even without Jiu Shen's words, she would still accept Sylphie as her student.

"I obey, master." She said.

"Oh right. Before you go, tell the kitchen staff to make more bottles of milk and ask them to bring it here." Jiu Shen added.

'Master is pampering that little tiger too much...' She muttered in her heart, but she still nodded her head at her master's words.

"I'll inform them immediately."

Chapter 280 - Ren Shuang's Breakthrough

"Master, Yang Zenke, and a few disciples went out of the sword tower together with a group of new disciples. The direction that they are headed to seems to be the imperial palace. Do you want me to send an elder to protect them in secret?" Lu Sulan said as she bowed respectfully at Jiu Shen. She looked around Jiu Shen's entire room, but she failed to see the silhouette of Long Meili. This made Lu Sulan quite confused since Long Meili was always present no matter where Jiu Shen was.

"Yang Zenke is already strong enough to protect himself, but he might not be able to save the others if something unexpected happens. Ask Hu Xiandao to tail them in secret, but tell him that he must only act when the disciples are in a dire situation." Jiu Shen said after a moment of thought. He must not allow anything to happen to those kids.

Lu Sulan acknowledged the order with a nod of her head. "I'll inform him immediately... Uhm, master, where is Sister Meili?" She could not help but ask.

Jiu Shen stared at his disciple who had a face full of question marks. "She is still inside the sword tower. I just sent her to do something." He replied.

Hearing his answer, Lu Sulan knew that there was something more about it, but she chose not to ask more questions. "I'll take my leave now, master."

Jiu Shen nodded his head at her and waved his hand impatiently.

Lu Sulan's mouth twitched when she saw that, but she knew that her master was always like this, so she could only leave the room with a slightly downcast look.

Jiu Shen closed his eyes and focused his attention on the events happening inside the Spirit World. He sent Ren Shuang inside the Spirit World to maximize his chances of stepping into the Nascent God Realm. He wanted to see what the guy's progress was.

The moment he adjusted his spiritual sight, he noticed the turbulent weather inside the Spirit World. Looking at this scene, Jiu Shen knew that Ren Shuang was currently facing his tribulation lightning. If he managed to survive this, he would become a Nascent God Realm expert!

"With Ren Shuang's talent and foundation, he should have no problems in achieving this breakthrough. I should not show myself for the time being or he might be flustered if he sees me." Jiu Shen removed his gaze from the Spirit World and calmly waited on his seat. It shouldn't take much time for Ren Shuang to breakthrough.

"After Ren Shuang finishes his cultivation breakthrough, I will immediately prepare before I visit the Divine Beast Continent." Jiu Shen muttered to himself as he stood up from his seat. He then walked towards his bed and gently sat beside Ice who was sleeping peacefully like an angel. He gently stroked the girl's head and let out a warm smile.

With her eyes shut tight, Ice extended both of her arms and tightly held Jiu Shen's hand. She then snuggled her face to the palm of his hand, her face filled with a bright smile.

"Just a bit more..." Jiu Shen whispered softly.

Inside the Spirit World.

Flashes of purple lightning webbed through the skies, illuminating the world with a bright glow. The savage beast living inside the Spirit World was horrified at the sight of this.

Sitting atop a tall mountain was a man with long wavy hair. His eyes were closed but he seemed to be gazing at the lightning that covered the skies.

"This should be the last wave of tribulation lightning. I never knew that it would be this horrible. If not for my strong foundation and the abundant amount of true essence in this world, I might have failed to achieve a breakthrough. Since I have all these, I will never fail master's expectations!" The normally silent Ren Shuang muttered with confidence as he opened his eyes and glared in the direction of the lightning.

Crackle! Crackle!

The ear-splitting crackles of lightning covered the firmament, but Ren Shuang remained stoic, looking rather heroic with his fearless and almighty figure.

ZAP! Rumble!

A few streaks of lightning sped towards Ren Shuang's lone figure, looking like dragons made of pure lightning!

Facing the incoming threat, Ren Shuang erupted with power! He channeled his true essence out of his body and covered himself with it. He then stretched both his arms, intending to punch the incoming bolts of lightning! If anyone would have seen this, they might think that this guy was a madman. However, Ren Shuang's gaze was filled with inhuman calmness as if this was nothing in his eyes!

BANG!

The moment his fists came in contact with the bolts of lightning, a violent sound echoed about, and the entire mountain where he stood slowly cracked. The ground beneath his feet abruptly caved in, producing a huge crater that spanned more than a hundred meters!

Rumble!

The surrounding savage beast near the vicinity of the mountain turned tail and fled, afraid that they would be implicated by these violent lightning strikes.

After that final strike of tribulation lightning, the Spirit World recovered its previous tranquility.

The tall mountain which received most of the strikes was now gone. Only a huge pile of boulders and stones can be seen...

Within the crater, a figure suddenly emerged, his eyes shone like the stars as he swept his gaze in his surroundings. He slowly floated in midair and checked the condition of his body.

"The Nascent God Realm is indeed many times stronger compared to the 9th-rank Saint." He muttered when he sensed the massive leap in his power.

"Since I have already reached the Nascent God Realm, I should report back to the master. However, how do I return to Nuar?" Ren Shuang might have reached the Nascent God Realm, but he was still unaware of the secrets behind the Spirit World. He didn't know how his master managed to send him here nor he was aware of how his master was able to command such power...

Just then, a wooden door suddenly emerged in front of him.

Ren Shuang knew what to do when he saw this door. Without hesitation, he pushed the door open.