

Immortal 1151

Chapter 1151: It's Everywhere

Meanwhile, Yan Xuehen and Yun Jianyue's battle was reaching its climax. But when they heard the terrifying noise, both of them agreed to stop.

"What's that sound?" Yun Jianyue remarked with a frown. As a grandmaster, she could tell that the entity that had made the noise wasn't something they should provoke.

"I do not know. I heard it earlier when I was descending into the mines. It is probably a kind of beast," Yan Xuehen replied. At the same time, her brows furrowed slightly. Zu An didn't run into that terrifying creature, did he?

Huh? Why am I worried about him?

Yun Jianyue frowned, remarking, "What kind of beast has this kind of terrifying pressure?"

"The world is big; nothing is too bizarre. We should treat it with reverence," Yan Xuehen said. "How about we just end things here? That creature is no weaker than us. If we fought until both of us were exhausted, it would be bad if the creature took advantage of our weakness then."

She recalled the result of 'great danger' when she had used her divination circle earlier. Back then, she had been quite curious as to how, even with her incredible cultivation, there could be anything that dangerous to her.

At first, she had thought that it was Zu An's pitch-black dagger, but now, she realized that the great danger probably came from Yun Jianyue or that unknown terrifying creature. She obviously didn't want to keep fighting at that point.

Yun Jianyue sneered and replied, "It's just a trifling unknown creature, and yet it's already made our honorable White Jade Sect Master scared? In that case, just hand over your life sooner!"

She came from the Devil Sect, and her presence carried a natural ferocity. She immediately surged with power when she sensed Yan Xuehen's intent to withdraw. This is the perfect chance to get revenge for Ah Zu!

When she recalled Zu An's appearance, her aura became even more vicious. She took out the Empress Lantern, and the dark cave immediately became enveloped in golden light.

"Crazy woman!" Yan Xuehen exclaimed. She obviously knew how powerful the Empress Lantern was! She didn't dare to underestimate it and quickly used her domain of Absolute Cold.

Both of them had been adversaries for many years. Even after all those years, a victory had never been determined. Now, however, she keenly sensed Yun Jianyue's killing intent, realizing that there was something wrong with her mood. If the situation continued, she really might suffer grievously. As such, she no longer held back and planned to deal with the woman before her first. Even though the wounds from her battle against Zu An and Yu Yanluo weren't light, Yun Jianyue was also wounded. There was no reason for her to be scared.

The two grandmasters' domains began to clash. The interfering laws caused areas to explode one after another. The entire mine began to tremble as if a huge earthquake had occurred. But neither of them could be bothered to worry about that. They now fought seriously, neither side holding back at all. At their level, whichever side held back would be seriously injured.

Meanwhile, Zu An and Yu Yanluo sensed the mines shaking slightly, and the rumbling continued. They couldn't help but look at each other in dismay.

"Don't tell me Yan Xuehen and that roaring beast are fighting?" Zu An remarked somewhat uneasily. He didn't know where the mysterious creature had come from.

Would Yan Xuehen be in danger? She was Chuyan's master after all, and he had used the Gold Phoenix ability on her. He just felt a bit sorry for her somehow.

But he quickly laughed that thought off. She was a powerful grandmaster, someone who could freely roam the world unworried. She was a human-shaped T-rex. The mysterious creature might even be scared if it saw her.

"Let's go and find Maid Xing's group first. I can't help but feel a bit uneasy about this," Yu Yanluo said while blushing, emerging from his embrace and sorting out her messy clothes.

"Okay," Zu An replied. However, cursed that mysterious creature to death inwardly. Can't you shout some other time? I was almost there!

The mood had already been right there, with both of them unable to hold back their emotions anymore, and yet they were suddenly interrupted. The mood was now completely gone and they obviously couldn't continue.

The two entered the pitch-black cave. Because of what had just happened, Yu Yanluo's face was red and she spoke much less. Even though she was a mature woman, she was as pure as a white sheet of paper. She had almost lost her chastity just then out of a moment of muddle-headedness. Although she was feeling embarrassed, she was also a bit worried about her personal gains and losses. Will he think I'm an easy woman because I agreed to him so easily?

Zu An noticed that there was something off about her. He sighed on purpose and remarked, "Sigh, what a pity."

Yu Yanluo jumped in fright, asking, "What's a pity?"

Zu An said, "It's a pity that there were no spectators. Otherwise, I would have been able to enjoy their jealousy." After all, considering Yu Yanluo's identity and her countless pursuers, who knew just how many Rage points he would have been able to farm from them.

Yu Yanluo replied in annoyance, "You freak, how could you let someone else see something like that?!"

"Of course I would only let them see me hug and kiss you. Did you think I was talking about something else?" Zu An replied with a strange expression.

Yu Yanluo was really embarrassed. She quickly swung her fist to hit him. As they fought playfully, the previous awkwardness completely faded.

Zu An suddenly noticed something, however. He exclaimed, "Huh? There seems to be something over there." He quickly walked over and picked up an item that resembled a palm-sized notebook.

Yu Yanluo followed him over. She cried out in alarm, "This is the memo book of a Yu clan guard!"

Zu An was stunned, saying, "Your clan's guards really are scholarly too."

Yu Yanluo explained, "The reason they carry these is because the Yu clan's guards often need to work in these mines. The mines are full of dangers, and unexpected things happen every day. If the cave collapsed, there might not necessarily be anyone who could provide aid immediately.

"That's why every single Yu clan guard was eventually assigned a memo book. They would write about their usual missions, and if something happened, it would serve as a keepsake for their clans."

Her expression became somewhat grim as she spoke. Such things had clearly happened quite often over the years. Each time, she had personally delivered the leftover items to their families. However, even though she always gave them generous compensation, whenever she saw an elderly couple who had lost their son, a young wife who had lost her husband, or a younger child wailing in despair after being orphaned, she felt truly awful.

Zu An had already opened up the booklet. There were quite a few things written inside, but the oldest entries just described ordinary missions. There wasn't anything really worth paying attention to in them.

But when he read the most recent recordings, he discovered some useful information. He read out, "...The cave seemed to be shaking, but then everything quickly returned to normal. No one treated it as a big deal... A strange black fog has appeared. We don't know where it came from, but it's all over the mines... We couldn't get rid of it even after using all sorts of methods...

"The black fog has corrosive properties. Normal soldiers' bodies begin rotting on contact, and not even we, the guards, can hold on. However, it seems that some senior officers with higher cultivation ranks can hold on for a short amount of time.

"We quickly discovered that the black fog has hallucinogenic effects. Many workers and guards who went into the black fog started to hallucinate. They all became crazier and crazier.

"The work in the mines clearly can't continue. We've contacted all of the miners to move toward the surface... But this black fog is everywhere, so we aren't sure whether everyone has evacuated successfully.

"Our mission is to search for anyone who might still be down here. A long time ago, the madam said we couldn't abandon anyone trapped in the mines, so we can't bring shame to the madam and the Yu clan."

Zu An couldn't help but give Yu Yanluo a look when he saw that. Yu Yanluo didn't feel proud at all, and her expression was filled with grief. Zu An held her ice-cold hand, then continued reading. The later entries became more and more illegible and intermittent.

"...Bad news today. Black fog has appeared in the middle of our path. We can't return...

"But we can't give up on our mission. We're going to look around first and gather all the trapped workers. Captain Ding told us that Cloudcenter City has already been informed about what happened

here. Madam will send people to save us. The Yu clan won't abandon a single person; I trust the madam...

"The madam really is beautiful. If we could personally meet the madam, I wouldn't even care about a reward. Just being able to see the madam up close would already be a blissful thing."

Zu An felt some grief when he saw that. The guard had still been fantasizing about his achievements allowing him to receive a reward from Yu Yanluo. Unfortunately, he hadn't known that something major had happened in Cloudcenter City. Yu Yanluo had been accused of being a fiend race person, while Yu Xuansu and any others who could help the people in the mine had also been arrested. The Yu clan was a complete mess, so none of them had known that something had happened at the mine. How could they send anyone to rescue the trapped people? The miners had been waiting for nothing.

Anger appeared in Yu Yanluo's eyes when she saw that. She no longer seemed as gentle as before. She was a clan leader, and thus carried responsibility for the entire clan. Because of what Xu Yu had done to her, the people at the mine had been left in a difficult situation. She obviously blamed him.

The two of them quickly kept reading. The reports were getting sloppier and sloppier. The writer's hands had definitely been shaking badly while he was writing.

"People are disappearing every day. My companions grow fewer and fewer..."

"Even the captain has disappeared! He's our leader, and the one with the highest cultivation rank among us!"

"There's something even more terrifying than the black fog, and it's everywhere. What exactly is that thing?!"

Chapter 1152: Strange and Life-Threatening

Zu An and Yu Yanluo could both sense the guard's fear conveyed through the distorted writing. The two of them exchanged a look, their expressions turning serious. They quickly continued reading to find out more information.

Unfortunately, there was nothing. There were no more recordings.

Zu An wondered seriously, "Could that thing he was talking about be the creature releasing those roars?"

"It probably is," Yu Yanluo said, taking the book from him. Her expression was grim as she continued, "In private, the other guards call these items death accounts. These books prove the guards' statuses and record their dying words, so they usually keep them close. Since it's been left here, that means he's already encountered something unexpected..."

Zu An fell silent. The pressure the mysterious creature gave off could even make them somewhat fearful, so how could it be something an ordinary guard could deal with?

Yu Yanluo closed the notebook. The owner's name was engraved on the cover: Peace. She felt pained when she saw that name, which carried his parents' blessings.

She didn't have any impression of his name. The Yu clan had many subordinates. As the clan leader, there was no way she could know every single person. And yet, it was precisely such an ordinary member who, despite being in danger himself, had first decided to help the missing miners before anything else.

"It was I, the clan leader, who failed to protect them..." Yu Yanluo's eyes became moist.

Zu An wrapped his arm around her shoulder and said in consolation, "It's not your fault. No one could've anticipated that all of this would happen when you were imprisoned."

Yu Yanluo gritted her teeth and said, "Xu Yu is a senior official in Cloudcenter City. Don't tell me he never noticed the abnormalities that were taking place in this mine?!"

Zu An thought to himself, Xu Yu carries the emperor's Imperial Edict. Taking down the Yu clan is the only thing on his mind. He couldn't be happier to see the Yu clan suffer a serious blow like this.

But saying all that would be completely meaningless. He looked around him and said, "According to what we read in that book, this mine might have other survivors. Let's look around and see if we can find anyone."

"Alright, let's do that!" Yu Yanluo replied, calmly putting the book away. A resolute expression appeared in her eyes. Now she was thinking not only about the Snake race, but also about dealing with this problem first.

Zu An sighed inwardly. Judging from the information he had received, those left inside were probably ordinary miners and some guards. But whether it was the black fog or that mysterious beast, neither were things they could deal with. Now that so many days had already passed, they were probably already...

Of course, he couldn't say that out loud, or else it would affect Yu Yanluo.

The two of them quickly began to search through the mine paths. At the same time, they were vigilant against any danger. According to the guard's recordings, apart from the black fog, there were other, even more terrifying existences inside.

But Zu An was still confused. Judging from the strength the mysterious beast had shown, if it made an appearance, just its power alone would have been enough to leave all the guards speechless, and even completely wipe all of them out. Why had they disappeared one by one?

Unfortunately, the two didn't have much information at all. There was no way for them to make an accurate judgment.

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The two walked for a long time. Apart from the black fog, they didn't encounter any other dangers.

Suddenly, however, Yu Yanluo squatted down by a corner. The dirt there was somewhat dark red; it would be hard to notice in the pitch-black cave if they weren't looking carefully.

Zu An squatted down and kneaded a bit of it between his fingers. Then, he sniffed it and exclaimed, "Blood!" Furthermore, it was human blood.

Yu Yanluo nodded, looking upset. Soon afterward, the two of them found a broken sword nearby. It was a standard-issue Yu clan sword. She said in shock, "This seems to have been someone who accompanied me."

Zu An was confused. Yu Yanluo explained, "The sword hilt's decoration is different. The guards who stay at my side have all taken the Yu surname."

She pointed at the sword hilt. There was the character 'Yu' engraved there. She picked up the broken sword and examined the damage. "Even though these guards' weapons aren't divine weapons, their quality is definitely excellent. It's not so easy to break them."

Zu An gave it a look and said, "It doesn't seem to have been artificially broken, or broken by another weapon... The surface is covered in fine sawtooth marks that are easy to overlook if you don't check carefully."

"If the sword remains, so does the owner. If the sword is ruined..." Yu Yanluo mumbled to herself. At the same time, she seemed to be looking around for something. Suddenly, her eyes widened. She ran over to an area nearby and saw a booklet embedded in the wall. Their attention had previously been focused on the ground, which was why they hadn't noticed it.

She removed the booklet from the wall. When she saw the name on the leather cover, her expression darkened as she said, "It's Yu Bin."

Zu An asked in alarm, "Yu Bin?"

Back in Brightmoon City's outskirts, Yu Bin had been one of the guards protecting Yu Yanluo. When Zu An had come to Cloudcenter City and visited the Yu clan for the first time, Yu Bin had been the one who passed by and helped him out too. That bright and radiant youngster appeared in Zu An's mind, and he sighed inwardly.

Yu Yanluo opened the booklet, but her hand immediately stiffened. Many parts of the book were covered in blood that had already congealed.

Zu An worried that she might be struggling with the reality of what had happened. He took the book from her and helped her flip through it. The first half just consisted of normal, routine recordings, although there was quite a bit of admiration and reverence for Yu Yanluo mixed in.

Zu An was already used to that. Yu Yanluo's prestige in the Yu clan was incomparable; that wasn't something that could be achieved purely through beauty. He could sense that they all felt the most sincere respect for Yu Yanluo, who definitely treated them quite well. He could tell from the ordinary recordings that Yu Yanluo wouldn't abandon even a single person who encountered trouble in the mines. All of them had believed that she would come for them...

As he continued to flip through the pages, he quickly found the most recent recording.

"There has been news from the Civil Affairs Manor, that the madam seems to have been imprisoned. There are even rumors that the madam is the Medusa? How is that possible?!"

"The elders were also arrested by the Vice Magistrate. The soldiers carried the court's arrest orders, so those left have no idea what to do either."

"...The Yu clan is a mess; I do not know where Maid Xing went either... I want to discuss things with Sir Zu. He is a member of the Imperial Envoy, he should have a solution... But those Armed Escort soldiers all say that he is recovering in seclusion and will not receive guests.

Zu An's brows furrowed tightly. Never had he imagined that this guy would come looking for him. Unfortunately, he had been busy looking for a way to save Yu Yanluo and completely overlooked such things.

"Right, the duke definitely has a solution."

"...I heard that the duke personally went to demand the madam's freedom. I also went with many of my companions. However, Sir Vice Magistrate had an Imperial Edict, so the duke also backed off...

Zu An sighed and said, "I didn't expect him to have been there back then too."

Yu Yanluo pursed her lips and didn't say anything. She obviously heard about what had happened when Zu An went as Jian Yanyou.

"...More and more information is saying that the madam really is the Medusa... How could the beautiful and elegant madam be an evil and vicious Medusa?

Yu Yanluo's expression darkened. She muttered, "It seems ordinary people really can't accept something like this after all." Even her guard couldn't accept it, let alone someone else.

Zu An continued to flip through the pages.

"...Even if the madam is a Medusa, so what? I know about the things she has done over all of these years better than anyone. Even if she is a Medusa, she is definitely a good Medusa. She will forever be our madam!

Yu Yanluo was stunned when she saw that. Her eyes also began to shine a bit.

"...Maybe it is because Sir Vice Magistrate was worried that we might do something, so that was why they transferred us to the mines. We wanted to go against those orders, but...

"Oh my goodness, something so big actually happened in the mines! I wanted to go back and report this to the city, but the Vice Magistrate's people stopped me. Those bastards!"

Yu Yanluo's expression grew cold when she saw that report. So Xu Yu knew about what was happening and had sealed off the information!

Even Zu An began to curse Xu Yu. At first, he had still felt some admiration for the man as a capable subject, thinking that what had happened was only because they belonged to different factions. His methods were also formidable.

But now, after something bad had happened in the mines, Xu Yu had deliberately sealed up information in order to act against the Yu clan. There was no way Zu An could forgive his decision to harm the lives of so many people.

"He met Maid Xing!" Yu Yanluo cried out in alarm when she saw what Yu Bin had written afterward.

Zu An immediately looked at the entry, and only then did he find out that Maid Xing had brought her clansmen near this place, but was almost noticed by Xu Yu's men. Fortunately, Yu Bin had been present too and had come to their aid.

When he found out that Maid Xing had arrived with those people on the madam's orders, Yu Bin had hesitated at first, but had still decided to help escort them in the end. Because of the things that had happened recently, and because he had seen that Maid Xing was injured, he had been worried about their safety. In his opinion, that was the only thing he could do to help the madam.

There were a few other guards who had shared his thoughts. However, worried about raising suspicion, they hadn't let too many others know. Only the closest guards had escorted Maid Xing's group.

Later on, they had encountered the black fog, so they'd had no choice but to move around. Suddenly, an earthquake had occurred and the mine passage collapsed. He had rushed out to save the others, but had gotten stuck behind fallen rocks himself.

He had wanted to go through a different path and meet up with Maid Xing's group again, but then, soon afterward, he had heard a strange and life-threatening voice.

Chapter 1153: A Ghost Around the Corner?

"At first, it was a 'scratch scratch' noise, like that of a fingernail scraping against metal. Later on, the voice became extremely strange and terrifying, and hard to describe with words. Right, it was a bit like the sound of that waterphone instrument the merchants from the west brought and played at the manor."

Zu An was a bit surprised when he saw that. He hadn't expected this world to actually have a waterphone. Most of the terrifying sounds from the horror movies of his previous world had been made using a waterphone.

"I heard from my colleagues that whenever that strange noise went through the mines, a companion would go missing. Not even their corpse could be found..."

"I suspect that the sounds are made by a certain monster."

"Also, the black fog is probably left behind when that monster moves around."

"I am really scared... but as the Yu clan's guard, I have to remember my clan's glory. I cannot bring shame to my uniform..."

"I cannot let anything happen to Maid Xing's group, so I am trying to find a way to draw this monster in the other direction."

"I do not know how long I will be able to last."

"It is a pity that I will never be able to meet the madam again. I hope that she can at least make it through these troubled times."

...

A tear trickled down Yu Yanluo's cheek when she saw those words. She learned her forehead against Zu An's chest. Her body was shaking slightly, and she was clearly filled with emotion.

Zu An patted her shoulder to comfort her. At the same time, he continued to flip through the pages. There had been a line or two recorded later on, but unfortunately, it was too hard to read through all the bloodstains. Then, the recordings came to a sudden stop. When he connected that fact to the broken sword, Zu An realized that everything pointed at disaster.

He analyzed the situation and said, "This notebook was previously embedded into the wall. He probably threw it here with all of his strength when he was in danger. He probably wanted to leave this behind so others would know what happened."

"If he threw it at that time, considering the angle and direction..." He looked around the area. Soon afterward, he arrived near a section of the black fog. He reached out his hand and pressed against the wall, saying, "The earth here is softer than the rest. The walls of a mine should be reinforced to prevent cave-ins; there's no way it should be this loose. Something probably rushed out suddenly from here and ambushed Yu Bin."

Yu Yanluo also surrounded herself with her elemental barrier and walked over. She examined the wall and said, "But even though the earth here is loose, there are no traces of a cave here. If a monster really emerged from inside, it would have left a huge hole behind, right?"

Zu An shook his head and said, "It's probably an earth element monster, one that can move freely underground. It wouldn't really need to make a hole. It's only because the earth here was affected by the earth element that the dirt here is a bit different."

"You're right. Looks like we have to be careful of something suddenly coming out of the walls," Yu Yanluo said, her expression carrying a hint of grief. She said, "All of this was information Yu Bin left behind at the cost of his life."

Zu An patted her shoulder. Anything he said at that point would pale in comparison. After Yu Yanluo calmed down a bit, however, he said, "The first priority is to rescue the survivors and to prevent a repeat of this tragedy. Since Yu Bin intentionally drew that beast here, Maid Xing and the others should be on the other side."

Yu Bin had been cut off from Maid Xing's group because of the collapsed passage, but with the pair's cultivations, that wasn't too big of a problem. They could just break through. They had finally gotten some clues about Maid Xing's group, so they naturally had to take a look.

Yu Yanluo nodded. She didn't even know how terrible she would feel if something similar had happened to Maid Xing's group too. She put away Yu Bin's booklet and said seriously, "Once I return, I'll establish a monument for these brave soldiers who have sacrificed themselves. Even though they've died, I must let their wills live on, to continue existing in the hearts of the Yu clan's people."

Zu An instead felt a bit worried. Now that Yu Yanluo's Medusa identity had been exposed, she might not be able to return to Cloudcenter City's Yu clan anymore...

Of course, he wouldn't bring up something like that while she was grieving.

...

The two of them then headed in the opposite direction. Along the way, they found some traces that had most likely been left behind by Yu Bin.

Eventually, they arrived at a collapsed area. Zu An looked at the wall in front of him and reached out a hand. After sensing it for a bit, he opened his eyes and said, "This path is being blocked by around a dozen meters of rock. We should be able to dig our way through."

"Sounds good!" Yu Yanluo replied. She had already rolled up her sleeves, prepared to take action.

Zu An couldn't help but laugh, saying, "Just leave this to me. You're injured and should use this chance to catch your breath a bit."

Yu Yanluo looked at his chest worriedly, saying, "Your injuries were even more serious than mine. If it were anyone else, they might already have died from a wound like that. I think you should rest and let me do this."

Zu An pulled aside his clothes and moved closer to her. He was worried that she might not be able to see clearly, so he placed the hand she was holding up on his chest, saying, "I told you my body was tough, right? I even ate Yan Xuehen's pill, so the wound has already healed. Look, it's already formed a scab."

Yu Yanluo's finger gently caressed his wound and discovered that it really had closed up. She exclaimed, "It really healed that fast? White Jade Sect's Ice Heart Pill really is as miraculous as the legends state..."

Zu An couldn't help but chuckle. It seemed it was really hard for ordinary people to understand his body's toughness. They always subconsciously thought his recovery speed was because of medicine.

"Sigh, it really is amazing. How could Yan Xuehen be willing to give you such an important medicine?" Yu Yanluo mused, her expression strange. She just felt that the matter was way too absurd.

"Maybe it's because I'm handsome and she ended up liking me," Zu An replied.

"Look at you!" Yu Yanluo rolled her eyes and shot back, "If Sect Master Yan heard that, she might just skin you alive."

Zu An sighed and said, "I'm telling you the truth, but you don't believe me."

He quickly approached the collapsed area. His hand pressed against the surface, and he slowly began digging through the wall. However, he didn't smash into it with his fist. They were underground, after all, so he was worried about causing a second collapse.

Instead, he used a weaker force to slowly soften the earth through vibration. At the same time, he protected the surroundings with his ki. That way, he slowly drew out the dirt; in time, a long, circular tunnel appeared before them.

"You're completely covered in sweat from all that work," Yu Yanluo said. She took out her handkerchief to help Zu An wipe away the sweat on his forehead.

When he saw her shockingly beautiful face up close, Zu An couldn't help but raise her chin and kiss her. Yu Yanluo was caught off guard. At first, she hit him lightly with her fists, but eventually, she returned the affection.

"You really are beautiful..." Zu An said with sincere admiration when their lips separated again a while afterward.

"You're also really handsome," Yu Yanluo replied, her eyes sparkling. They really were like the most beautiful gemstones in the world.

"Let's take care of more important matters first," Zu An said. He knew that Yu Yanluo had just experienced several tragedies, so she was definitely broken-hearted. He didn't want to take advantage of her at such a time. He said as he crawled into the tunnel, "I'll take the lead. You have to be careful."

Yu Yanluo giggled when she saw his bottom stick out clumsily. She was an intelligent woman; how could she not tell that he was doing that on purpose to cheer her up? She immediately felt warm inside. When she looked at him, her expression became even gentler.

The two crawled through the long and narrow tunnel. They weren't scared of dirt covering their bodies because of the protection of their elemental barriers. Soon, they arrived on the other side. After they took just a few steps, a few more paths appeared in front of them.

"This way," Yu Yanluo said, having quickly detected a code Maid Xing had left behind. The two of them followed the marked path.

The paths gradually grew growing wider and wider. Judging from their previous experiences, there would be an underground miner resting station nearby. Such places were usually where the ore went through rough processing, and were also where goods were gathered. That was why such areas were usually a bit more spacious.

Yu Yanluo was about to say something when Zu An's expression changed, and he pointed into the distance. He whispered, "Shh! There seems to be someone there." Black fog filled the paths, so his spiritual senses weren't as sharp as usual.

"Is it Maid Xing's group?" Yu Yanluo asked with pleasant surprise.

"I'm not sure. This place is way too strange, so we need to move carefully," Zu An said, standing in front of her protectively. The two of them moved forward quietly. He intended to secretly head over first to examine the situation.

Right at that moment, a wave of sound rang out. Both of them immediately felt a stinging pain in their minds. A long and slender sword shot out at Zu An like a viper.

Chapter 1154: Old Acquaintances

Zu An was shocked. At first, he had only planned to secretly investigate them, but now it seemed as if he had fallen into their trap.

Fortunately, he had already condensed his soul. He instantly recovered from the stinging pain, and his finger shot out to deflect the thin and narrow sword. He was just about to retaliate when the attacker disappeared into the shadows.

Endless yellow and white paper strips descended from above. While initially soft, those paper strips soon became incredibly sharp, leaving deep gashes in the nearby walls.

Yu Yanluo reacted swiftly to the attack. She took out her World Painting and covered her head, sucking in all the descending paper. Suddenly, a thin sword stabbed toward her neck from the shadows.

Zu An's soul had become incredibly perceptive. He quickly grabbed the sword, not giving the owner a chance to run away. He pulled the attacker toward him and unleashed a palm strike.

"Please be lenient!" someone cried in alarm.

At the same time, several figures flew over. Zu An frowned when he saw who those people were. He redirected his strike toward the attacker's chest instead of their head.

Spurt!

The shadow vomited blood, then withdrew.

Just then, several daoist figures appeared. They were all people Zu An knew. In the lead was the Fiend race's master rank cultivator Kong Qing; next to him was a little child with a rattle-drum in hand.

However, Zu An and Yu Yanluo both knew he wasn't a child, but rather just a midget. It was the infamous Venom Child. The stinging pain that had appeared in their heads had been caused by the sound waves emanating from Venom Child's rattle.

On the other side stood a woman dressed in bridal clothes; it was Paper Bride. The flying strips that had descended from above were her work. She had trapped Zu An for some time in their previous encounter. That experience was still fresh in his memory.

As for the unfortunate man who was vomiting blood in the corner, he was a dark elf. However, he seemed to be a bit different from the one Zu An had met previously. At that moment, he looked at Zu An resentfully.

Zu An ignored him and remarked, "So it was Sir Kong. I really didn't expect us to meet here."

"I didn't expect to meet little friend here either," Kong Qing replied with a smile. However, he gave the dark elf a look, then said with a frown, "It's just that little friend isn't too kind. You clearly recognized us, and yet you still acted so fiercely."

Zu An replied, "Your side attacked me first, okay? This fella kept striking at our vitals too. If it hadn't been because I recognized you and went easy on him, he would already be in the afterworld right now."

He actually hadn't had to hurt the dark elf, but he had been annoyed at how vicious the elf's attacks were. Furthermore, it was hard to say whether Kong Qing was a friend or foe, so weakening one of his subordinates was definitely a good thing.

"This is called being merciful?" the dark elf spat, coughing out another mouthful of blood. All of his blood and ki was surging, and his entire body felt as if it were about to collapse. He would need around half a month to recover from his injuries.

Paper Bride said with a cute laugh, "You should be grateful. If that young master Zu hadn't held back, he would've smashed your head open like a melon with a single palm. You wouldn't even be able to say a thing right now."

Even though the dark elf knew that was the truth, he was still unhappy. He shot back, "Damn woman, whose side are you on?"

"I'm just speaking the truth." Paper Bride walked over to his side, her hips swaying from side to side seductively. Her red fingernails gently moved across his face as she continued, "Also, please be a bit more careful when you speak. It wouldn't be very hard for me to end your life in your current state at all."

That dark elf didn't have any thoughts of admiring Paper Bride's seductive posture, instead, he was so scared he trembled. He quickly shrank back, not saying anything else.

Venom Child remarked mockingly, "Paper Bride, don't tell me you ended up liking that pretty boy?" He was obviously unhappy that he had suffered a loss to Zu An last time, and thus took the chance to throw out a snide remark.

"Young master Zu is handsome, and his cultivation is high. His character isn't bad either. He's much better than you all. It shouldn't be surprising that I admire him," Paper Bride replied, deliberately giving Zu An a flirtatious look.

Zu An said with a slight smile, "Paper Bride's charm must've won over the hearts of countless young men; what can I do..."

Yu Yanluo thought to herself that these people from the sinister faction really acted however they wanted, but she hadn't expected Zu An to actually tease them right back. She secretly gave him a pinch on the waist.

You have successfully trolled Yu Yanluo for +7 +7 +7...

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. He hadn't thought the remark would make the beauty by his side jealous. However, not only did he not get angry, he instead felt happy. He secretly reached for her hand.

Yu Yanluo's face turned red. She was a bit embarrassed in front of so many people and quickly pulled her hand back.

Zu An tried to grab her hand again. The two went back and forth that way playfully. Fortunately, they were quite close and their bodies hid their movements. The cave was dark too, so no one else noticed such small movements.

"Hahaha~" Paper Bride covered her mouth, her body rocking back and forth as she laughed. She continued, "Receiving the young master's compliment really makes me happy~"

"But I know my limits. In terms of charm and grace, how can I compare to Madam Yu, who's already at your side?"

Yu Yanluo actually felt a bit embarrassed when she heard Paper Bride's praise, which almost made it seem as if she were being selfish. Huh? I'm not like this normally. Why am I acting like this?

Kong Qing coughed. He couldn't take Paper Bride's flirting anymore either. He looked at Zu An and said in shock, "Hm? It has only been a few days since we last met, but the young master's cultivation seems to have advanced considerably again."

After all, upon reaching the later stages of cultivation, every single bit of improvement would become tens or even hundreds of times more difficult. Just how many days had it been since they last met? And yet, Zu An had improved again.

"I'll have to thank all of you for the combat experience from last time," Zu An replied ambiguously. He noticed something and remarked, "Hm? Sir Kong seems to be wounded."

He hadn't noticed anything at first, but after Kong Qing had spoken, he could tell the other man's inner ki wasn't as stable as before. Even though Kong Qing had been hiding it, Zu An's soul had become extremely perceptive.

Kong Qing was a bit surprised. He hadn't expected Zu An to have noticed his condition. As such, there was no point in refuting it. He replied, "Indeed, I was injured a bit."

Zu An was surprised. He asked, "Just who could possibly have hurt Brother Kong?"

Kong Qing was a peak late-stage master rank cultivator and one of the fiend races. He had a group of cultivators around him too. Could he have run into Yan Xuehen?

"Just a minor mishap," Kong Qing replied. He clearly didn't want to talk about it in detail, and instead asked, "Why are the two of you here?"

Zu An said with a smile, "This is the Yu clan's mine; isn't it natural for the two of us to be here? I should be the one asking why you're all here."

Kong Qing said with an embarrassed expression, "We have been hearing about the reputation of the Yu clan's mines for some time, so we decided to take a look in passing."

"I suspect you are here to steal ki stones, while also investigating the secret passage to the fiend race territories. Is that right?" Yu Yanluo sneered. As the Yu clan's leader and the head of the Snake race, she had access to a lot of intelligence.

Kong Qing's expression changed. He asked, "There really was a secret passage to the fiend race territories here?"

Yu Yanluo shook her head and replied, "Of course not. I do not know where those rumors came from." She obviously couldn't tell him the truth.

Kong Qing frowned, not trusting Yu Yanluo's answer. The two of them stared at each other, making the atmosphere a bit awkward.

Paper Bride stepped forward to mediate things, saying, "The two of you must've come here because you sensed something was strange with the mine and came here to investigate, right?"

Zu An exchanged a look with Yu Yanluo and asked, "How long have you been here?"

"A few days," Paper Bride replied with a sigh. "I really want to see the outside world again... I feel as if I might turn into mining slag if I continue to stay here."

Zu An thought to himself, Could it be that they don't know what happened to Yu Yanluo? "You've all already been here for so long. Have any of you noticed anything strange, or encountered any formidable creatures?"

The others' expressions changed. In the end, it was Kong Qing who spoke. "At this point, there is no point in hiding it. Has the young master noticed that someone among our party is missing?"

Zu An looked around and said, "I felt that there was something off earlier. Where's the Gray Wolf King?"

Kong Qing said with a pained expression, "The Gray Wolf King was eaten by that monster."

Chapter 1155: Surrounded

"What?!" Zu An and Yu Yanluo both exclaimed in shock. After all, they had fought against the Gray Wolf King before. It was at the ninth rank, and its body was massive. It would be difficult even for a human master ranked cultivator to defeat such a creature, and yet such a powerful vicious beast had actually been eaten?

Kong Qing frowned as he continued, "My injuries were also caused by that beast."

Zu An and Yu Yanluo were even more shocked. After all, the Gray Wolf King had been Kong Qing's mount, which meant the creature would have had to face two powerful experts. Even the infamous but powerful cultivators Paper Bride and Venom Child had been there to help them. And yet, the creature had actually wounded Kong Qing and eaten the Gray Wolf King?

"Just what kind of thing is it?" Zu An asked.

"I don't know," Kong Qing said through gritted teeth.

"You don't know?" Zu An exclaimed in disbelief.

He wouldn't even have been too shocked even if he had been told it was the Emperor, Zhao Han himself; and yet, the reply was actually that they didn't know? Kong Qing was a master rank cultivator. There were so many powerful experts present, and yet they hadn't even seen what had attacked them?

Kong Qing's group looked a bit embarrassed when they sensed Zu An's strange expression. Paper Bride explained, "There's always a black fog surrounding that creature when it comes and goes, so we couldn't see its full appearance at all. Furthermore, that black fog is extremely corrosive. Not even spiritual sense can penetrate it."

"That is why we were caught off guard when we were ambushed," Kong Qing explained, a hint of fear flickering through his eyes. As a master rank cultivator, he could usually clearly perceive his surroundings. He never could have expected there to be something lurking nearby that he couldn't sense at all. He continued, "It suddenly emerged from underground, slaughtering the Gray Wolf King in an instant. The wolf didn't even have time to retaliate."

"The creature killed it instantly?" Zu An asked, exchanging a look with Yu Yanluo. Just how terrifying did it have to be to instantly slaughter a ninth-ranked Gray Wolf King?

“Did you not have a chance to retaliate?” Yu Yanluo asked curiously. Those present were all top-ranked cultivators. With the Gray Wolf King as their meat shield, they should at least have been able to react, right?

“We did, but our attacks didn’t seem to be effective against it.” Paper Bride said with a miserable expression.

“Nothing at all?” Zu An replied with a frown. Even if it were Yan Xuehen who had to face these experts’ combined attacks, she would still have to pay a bit of a price, right?

Kong Qing was the one present with the highest cultivation. He said seriously, “That is what I have been thinking over all this time. It is a bit strange indeed. After thinking about it, it is probably because most of us excel in spiritual attacks, but that monster seems to be immune to them. That was why our attacks were completely useless against it.”

Only then did Zu An realize that Kong Qing, Paper Bride, and Venom Child all specialized in spiritual attacks. They would definitely use their most powerful skills as soon as they sensed danger. How could they have expected that their opponent would be immune to such attacks? Meanwhile, the dark elf was proficient in physical attacks, but his cultivation was a bit lower. It would have been difficult for him to harm that creature by himself.

He suddenly recalled Yu Bin’s recording and asked, “Did you all hear some strange, terrifying noise before it attacked?”

“Strange, terrifying noise?” Kong Qing replied with a frown. “We didn’t.”

“You didn’t?” Zu An asked in confusion. Wasn’t that different from what Yu Bin had written?

Venom Child said in a sinister tone, “I did hear some strange noise like what you described, but when we were ambushed, everything around us was quiet.”

Zu An nodded. It seemed the monster fell silent when it was hunting for prey, making it even harder to defend against.

Kong Qing asked, “Do you have a map of this mine? We want to return to the surface, but we have been trapped here for the past few days.” His face heated up when he thought of that. He was a master rank cultivator with so many powerful subordinates, and yet he had actually gotten lost in the mine.

It wasn’t his fault, though. The cave paths were convoluted and dimly lit, making it easy to get lost. They had also needed to flee for their lives when they were ambushed by the monster, not knowing where they were going while running away. In addition, they had been surrounded by the black fog, preventing their senses from reaching too far. That was how they had gotten completely lost.

Even though such experts all had spatial storages, which meant the supply of food and normal goods wasn’t a problem, there was a powerful creature in hiding that was ready to prey on them at a moment’s notice. Their mental states were left on the verge of collapse.

Yu Yanluo didn’t respond directly and instead asked, “Did any of you encounter my subordinates along the way?”

Kong Qing's group shook their heads as he replied, "We did not see a single other soul these past few days, or else we would not have gotten lost."

Zu An and Yu Yanluo concluded that made sense as well. If Kong Qing's group had seen Maid Xing and the others, why would they asked for a map?

"Are you all planning to leave just like that? You don't want to get revenge for the Gray Wolf King?" Yu Yanluo asked with a frown.

To her surprise, Kong Qing said, "The weak are prey for the strong; that is the basic law of the world. It was weaker than its opponent, so it is natural that it was eaten. What is more important is to preserve the rest of our strength. If we lose more companions for the sake of revenge, the losses will not make up for the gains."

The others all treated his response as completely natural. They didn't feel that there was anything wrong with what he said.

Yu Yanluo was speechless. She couldn't help but give Zu An a look, saying to him through ki, "I really can't understand how the fiend races think, nor can I accept their actions."

Zu An replied, "That means your way of thinking is still biased in favor of humans, and you acknowledge humans more. That bastard Xu Yu really is insane for treating you as a fiend race individual."

Yu Yanluo replied sadly, "I won't be able to go back to the human world anymore, and I can't stay in the fiend race territories either."

Zu An smiled and said, "You can just stay with me. I'll always welcome you."

Yu Yanluo felt warm inside and couldn't help but smile.

Kong Qing saw the two of them look at each other, but he only assumed they were discussing things with each other. How could he have guessed what the two of them were really talking about?

As the two didn't agree to his request even after a long time, he gritted his teeth and said, "Coming down here without permission is our fault. We will offer Madam Yu compensation for this in the future. Furthermore, if the two of you can offer us a way to leave this place, we will owe you a favor. You will also obtain the friendship of our Peacock race."

Zu An thought about how Yu Yanluo was about to return to the fiend race territories. The Peacocks were kings among the fiend races as well, so having them take care of her would be a good choice.

Either way, there would be no meaning in forcing them to stay and face the monster. These fierce individuals would never agree to that. Considering their naturally malicious tendencies, who knew what kind of things they would do to save their own skins in a real critical situation? Perhaps they might even scheme against Zu An and Yu Yanluo, taking advantage of them to escape...

As such, Zu An nodded and agreed to the request, saying, "Sir Kong is too polite. Having another friend is always better than having another enemy in this world."

Kong Qing was happy to see him agree, but he still wasn't too sure. He quickly looked at Yu Yanluo. She was the true master of the mine, and she hadn't spoken yet.

Yu Yanluo nodded and added, "I agree with what Zu An said as well."

"Thank you!" Kong Qing replied, but he found it a bit strange. Why did Yu Yanluo sound like a wife speaking up in support of her spouse?

But no matter how he racked his brains, he never would have thought that the Madam Yu who kept her distance no matter which individual approached her now shared feelings with this young man.

Yu Yanluo's brush moved through the air quickly, and streaks of light swirled around. A simple map quickly appeared in the air. Naturally, she didn't give them the entire map, instead only drawing out a small portion. She explained, "This is where we are right now. If you head down this direction, you will be able to return to the surface."

"Thank you, Madam Yu!" Kong Qing replied. Those present were all experts; being widely-read and knowledgeable was the bare minimum. They immediately memorized the map in the air, so there was no need for a physical copy.

Kong Qing and the others were about to leave when they heard scratching in the cave. It was extremely uncomfortable, resembling fingernails scraping against a blackboard.

The group's expressions all changed; the noise was very close, almost as if it were completely surrounding them.

Kong Qing and the others became vigilant. Zu An noticed that even though they were in a group, they still kept their distance from each other, clearly not daring to trust their backs to anyone. They had to be on guard against their companions too.

Zu An didn't criticize their behavior. They were all elites from the underground world, after all; blindly trusting their companions would be stupid. However, he and Yu Yanluo didn't have such misgivings. They trusted each other and just warned each other to be careful.

Suddenly, strange noises filled the air. Zu An broke out into goosebumps. It sounded just like the background tracks from his previous world's horror movies.

He tried to pinpoint where the sounds were coming from, but because of the mine's special terrain, there were cavities everywhere. Every single opening seemed like a horn, resonating and amplifying the noise. It was impossible to identify where they came from. He then tried to sense the surroundings with his soul, but he discovered that there were several clouds of black mist in the surroundings, cutting off his soul's senses.

Powerful cultivators were used to scanning their surroundings first, but at that moment, it felt as if they had become blind and deaf, so all those present felt extremely uncomfortable.

Suddenly, the terrifying sounds ceased, and an eerie calm fell on the area.

Zu An thought back to Kong Qing's description. It seemed that the monster was already preparing to attack!

Chapter 1156: Emergence

“Yanluo, be careful,” Zu An said, gently touching the beauty behind him. At the same time, he maintained the utmost vigilance.

Yu Yanluo replied, “We have to be especially careful of the ground, walls, and the like.”

They had learned that from the experiences Yu Bin left behind with his blood as the price.

As she spoke, Yu Yanluo took out the World Painting to protect them. At the same time, she drew some diagrams on the ground. That way, if some creature actually tunneled through the ground, it might be slowed down for a moment, at least buying them some time.

Zu An thought to himself that he and Yu Yanluo didn’t specialize in spiritual attacks, so they were less likely to be countered as badly by the monster as the others.

...

Meanwhile, the fiend race group was absolutely horrified. They had already gone through this once, so the fear they felt was magnified.

They were all thinking the same thing: It’s fine if one of the others die, as long as I survive. They each hoped that it would go after one of their companions so they could take the chance to run. Either way, they all knew the way out now. They would never come back to this blasted place again.

Still, they all looked worried. The spiritual attacks they were most proficient in were ineffective against the monster. They weren’t sure if their abilities would be enough to help them survive its attack.

The dark elf would normally have been much better off, as he excelled at physical attacks and his movement technique was fast and tricky, making him much safer than the others. But because he had been wounded by Zu An, he was now in the greatest danger instead. He gave Zu An a resentful look. If he had a chance, he would definitely personally send Zu An into the monster’s mouth.

Suddenly, the sound of a rattle echoed through the cave. The others all thought, Venom Child, are you an idiot? Are you worried that the monster doesn’t know where you are and want to help it out?

They all looked toward him. However, Venom Child rushed forth like a streak of lightning. As he passed by Zu An and Yu Yanluo, he waved his hand. The rattle flew over to the two of them and continued to shake, releasing an ear-splitting noise.

Zu An instantly realized what Venom Child was trying to do. He was deliberately leading the trouble over to the two of them, to have that monster attack him and Yu Yanluo. Meanwhile, he would take the chance to run. It was obvious that he still had a grudge against the two of them from what had happened last time. Even now, he remembered to take his revenge.

Zu An was speechless. This fella really is going all out here! That rattle was Venom Child’s magic weapon, something he had refined personally for who knew how many years; and yet now, he was just abandoning it.

Zu An and Yu Yanluo were shocked and furious. They wanted to destroy the rattle to silence it, but the rattle flew in a strange pattern. Venom Child was definitely still controlling it from the shadows. The two of them couldn’t even spare the effort to curse him at that point; as such, they endured the annoying rattling while being on guard against a possible attack.

The dark elf's eyes flickered. A malicious smile appeared at the corners of his lips; he clearly also harbored bad intentions.

Paper Bride gave the two of them a sympathetic look. But with how things were, her own safety was the most important.

Kong Qing looked hesitant. This man was the one the clan lord cared about. Should he save them if they were endangered?

At that instant, Venom Child appeared near the entrance. He made a 'bye-bye' gesture toward Zu An, and was about to turn around and continue flying. Suddenly, however, the wall next to him closed in on itself, swallowing him up completely.

It happened so quickly that even with Zu An's cultivation, he couldn't see what exactly had happened.

Two sharp, sickle-like teeth emerged from the walls. They instantly enveloped Venom Child, clamping down on him. But what kind of vicious beast had such long canines, and ones that grew at such a wide angle?

Venom Child screamed miserably and struggled frantically. Still, he was a well-known criminal with decent cultivation. He grabbed the wall surface, trying to pull himself free. Unfortunately, he had already been seriously injured in that instant. His vitals were being squeezed from both sides, so he couldn't even gather any strength. He remained stuck in the wall no matter how he struggled.

He coughed out a mouthful of black blood. His internal organs were clearly seriously injured. However, with a wave of his hand, a large cloud of glistening blue powder flew toward the wall.

Venom Child was known for his poisons, so he definitely had some extremely formidable ones in his arsenal. Yu Yanluo had personally experienced that before. He was in a desperate situation, so there was no reason for him to hold back. As such, he used his most dangerous poison.

Unfortunately, when the toxins entered the wall, they seemed to vanish into nothing. The monster inside didn't seem to be affected at all.

Instead, Venom Child's arms grew more and more powerless. His bloody coughs had even begun to include pieces of his internal organs. He reached out his hand toward Kong Qing and the others in despair, his voice growing weaker and weaker as he begged, "Save...Save me..."

The others gulped, but no one did a thing. They had only been together because their interests aligned to begin with. In such a situation, why would they put themselves in danger for another?

Zu An and Yu Yanluo were even more indifferent. This fellow had gotten what he deserved.

Venom Child's expression grew weaker and weaker. Eventually, the creature inside tugged backward, and his body disappeared into the wall.

Zu An asked the others with ki, "Did you all see what that thing looked like?"

"No. I only saw two large clamp-like things." Paper Bride replied.

The dark elf gripped his sword even more tightly. He had initially wanted to seize the opportunity to leave while Venom Child was trapped, but the path was too narrow. He had been worried that he might alert the monster and that he would be attacked instead. It was necessary to go through the opening to leave this place, so he felt conflicted.

Kong Qing exclaimed in confusion, "Hm? That terrifying pressure seems to be gone now."

Zu An was about to ask something when he was alerted by something. He grabbed Yu Yanluo and leaped aside.

A massive, sinister mouth ferociously closed over the spot where they had just been. The two sharp teeth flickered like a pair of shears. Yu Yanluo's defensive preparations had been instantly crushed.

The monster clearly realized that the attack it thought would definitely succeed had failed. It moved forward slightly, then shot at the two of them like a bolt of lightning.

When he saw the monster attack Zu An, the dark elf wasn't alarmed; instead, he was happy. He quickly rushed toward the direction Venom Child had escaped in. He wanted to take the chance to get out of here.

Zu An didn't have time to pay attention to the other group at all. However, he finally saw what the monster looked like after it lunged at him.

It was like a giant centipede, its entire body flickering with a metallic luster. It was hard to tell where its brain was. It had two pincer-like teeth in front of its jaws, and its mouth was wide open, revealing countless rows of saw-like teeth inside. It looked like a bobbit worm from Zu An's previous world, but it was countless times larger.

Being bitten by that kind of mouth might really be a new kind of suffering... Zu An even began thinking about how much pain Venom Child must have been in when he was bitten.

A blast of black fog flooded out of the strange bug's mouth. It clearly wanted to use the fog to poison the two of them.

Yu Yanluo opened up the World Painting and sucked all of the black fog inside. She had initially planned to try to capture the bug, but it wasn't affected at all. She couldn't suck it in.

Her eyes shone as she began to use the Medusa's Eye. After the short period of rest she'd had and the medicines she had taken, she had recovered a bit of ki. That at least allowed her to muster a bit of strength.

The strange bug's body rapidly stiffened when it was caught in her gaze, but it wasn't petrified and quickly recovered.

However, that moment was already enough. Zu An's longsword left its scabbard as he stabbed it into the monster's 'head'. Green liquid spurted out. The centipede struggled frantically, seemingly wanting to shrink back into the ground.

The tremendous recoil running along his sword made Zu An stagger, and he was almost dragged into the dirt. However, he quickly stamped downward with his feet, carving two deep grooves into the ground.

Yu Yanluo quickly pulled him backward when she saw that. Even with the two of them working together, it still hadn't been enough.

Just then, Paper Bride made a move. Countless strips of paper shot toward the monster's body. Unfortunately, they only left sparks across the monster's outer shell and were unable to harm it at all.

Kong Qing's eyes narrowed. A three-colored divine light flashed, and with a loud spurt, green liquid gushed out of the worm's body.

Chapter 1157: Real Body

When it was wounded, the centipede-like monster fully revealed its vicious nature. Its body jerked around intensely, causing the ground to undulate like ocean waves. The cave opening also began to rock back and forth, cracks appearing all over the ceiling. Sandy soil crumbled downward, making it seem as if the place might cave in at any time.

Because of the centipede's strange, frenzied movements, Yu Yanluo couldn't even hold on anymore and was flung away. However, Zu An seized the opportunity to summon the Poisonous Prick, stabbing it into the monster.

The shell surrounding the strange bug seemed as tough as armor. The fact that Paper Bride's attacks had only produced some sparks proved that. But even the toughest shell couldn't stop the sharp edge of the Poisonous Prick, which sliced through it like tofu.

The centipede had been unleashing world-shaking movements mere moments before, but a second later, it twitched and its entire body went limp, falling to the ground.

Kong Qing was shocked. He knew that even though his attack had been able to wound the monster, it hadn't done enough to seriously injure the creature, let alone take its life. Just how had that kid Zu An accomplished such a feat?

Suddenly, a miserable scream rang out. Those present turned their heads and saw that the dark elf had tried to use the opportunity to run. However, after he reached the entrance, another strange bug had suddenly come out of the walls and bitten down on him.

Even though that all took a long time to describe, in reality, from the moment the first bug had attacked Zu An and Yu Yanluo to the moment Zu An had killed it with his Poisonous Prick, only a few breaths of time had passed. Meanwhile, the dark elf had been running carefully toward the entrance, just happening to reach it at the same time.

"There's another one?" Zu An exclaimed, greatly shaken. He quickly ran over to Yu Yanluo's side to prevent her from being attacked again. Meanwhile, Yu Yanluo's face paled. She looked at the dark elf nervously.

Compared to Venom Child, who had been bitten without being able to put up a bit of resistance, the dark elf had always been vigilant, even dodging to the side at the last second. Unfortunately, he had been seriously injured, making him a bit slower than usual.

Still, because the dark elf had evaded, the bug was only able to bite his right arm instead of engulfing his torso. He struggled frantically. However, because of the enemy's clamp-like mandibles, his right arm was torn off completely.

The strange bug's body squirmed as it devoured his arm in one gulp. But with a body that large, a single arm couldn't satisfy its appetite at all. It moved forward to bite down on the dark elf's entire body. It moved as fast as lightning, not giving him any time to escape.

The others wondered whether, if they had been in that situation, they would be able to escape that quickly.

However, the strange bug missed its target. Its terrifying mandibles smashed into each other fiercely with a metallic clang.

Meanwhile, the dark elf quickly entered the shadows. A split second later, he reappeared inside the cave. He didn't dare to try escaping on his own anymore; the path ahead was full of unknown dangers. He could only feel safe next to the other cultivators.

He quickly sealed the acupoint of his right arm to stop the bleeding. Compared to losing his life, losing a single arm wasn't much at all. Then, he looked up toward where the strange bug had been. He wanted to see just what the thing that had almost ended his life was. However, the bug was already nowhere to be seen.

"Be careful!" Zu An suddenly called out in alarm.

The dark elf immediately felt his fine hairs stand on end. Even though they were enemies, he didn't dare to doubt the warning at all. He quickly tried to enter the shadows again, but he was still half a step too late.

The dark elf screamed miserably as the bug's mandibles clamped down on his waist, almost instantly biting him in half. His lower body remained inside the bug's mouth, while his upper body fell to the ground. However, he still frantically clawed at the ground, doing his best to crawl away from the bug.

The scene was just way too cruel. Even Kong Qing and Paper Bride subconsciously took a few steps back.

Zu An moved just then. However, he worried that Yu Yanluo would be attacked after he rushed forth, so he decided to take her with him. He wasn't trying to save the dark elf because he was Mother Teresa or anything, though; he was just worried that if the bug went back underground, it would be hard to find it again.

Judging from the monster's brief battle against the dark elf, he could tell that it seemed to be able to move through the earth almost instantly. Between that and the way it spent most of its time in the earth, it was really much too difficult to defend against the bug's unpredictable appearances. Rather than passively defending when the time came, it would be better to take the chance to defeat it while it was attacking.

When Zu An moved, Kong Qing acted as well. It was clear that he planned to cooperate. With someone taking the lead, Paper Bride also joined in, as did Yu Yanluo. Several attacks rushed toward the strange bug at the same time.

They were all powerful experts. After being so terrified and alarmed for so long, why would they hold back? They beat the strange bug until green liquid splattered everywhere. It staggered around gradually before eventually crashing to the ground, clearly having lost its life force.

“Huh?” Kong Qing and the others’ expressions grew strange. They hadn’t expected they would kill it so quickly.

The dark elf called out weakly, “Boss Kong, save... Save...” He died before he could finish his sentence. His eyes were wide as he perished with many remaining grievances.

Kong Qing squatted down to inspect the corpse. He saw pitch-black blood seeping out of the dark elf’s waist, and that even his internal organs were black. He said seriously, “With his cultivation, he should still have been able to keep his life even if he were bisected at the waist. But that strange bug had poison in its mouth, so he could not be saved.”

Zu An thought to himself, No wonder Venom Child seemed to have lasted a bit longer. Apart from his cultivation, Venom Child specialized in poison himself, and had a certain amount of resistance to poison.

Zu An walked over to the strange bug’s side. Only then did he see its full appearance. It had two mandibles that were several meters long, and its mouth contained helical rings of saw-teeth. However, it didn’t have any visible eyes. He didn’t even know whether it had a head.

Apart from the sharp mandibles, the bug had seven long feelers. They were likely used to detect any nearby scents and movements, and even scan the surroundings the way a master rank cultivator would.

The strange bug’s body had been left in chunks. Every single segment seemed to be covered in hard, armor-like scales. That was likely why the sound of scraping preceded its appearance; Its scales produced sound when they rubbed against the sand and dirt. What was striking was that the bug’s scales were brightly colored and rather pretty. It was hard to associate them with the vicious beast they had just faced.

Zu An reached out his hand, but Yu Yanluo jumped in alarm and quickly pulled him back. He patted her small hand and said reassuringly, “Don’t worry, it’s already dead. I’ll be careful too.”

Kong Qing had a strange expression, having noticed their intimate actions. Madam Yu really does seem to have a different kind of relationship with him. The clan lord might not be able to win against her...

Zu An grabbed one scale and slowly tore it off the strange bug. In the end, the whole scale was over ten meters long. The rest of the bug’s body was nearly identical to the parts of the first one that had been exposed; both its head and tail were the same. The only major difference was in their sharp mandibles.

Zu An dragged the first one that had attacked him over. It was over twenty meters long, and its body was a third thicker than the second bug. No wonder it had seemed harder to defeat.

“Is this thing a dragon or a snake?” Paper Bride asked in shock as she walked over.

“Either way, it’s definitely not a snake,” Yu Yanluo remarked, feeling a bit unhappy that Paper Bride had called it a snake.

“It’s not a dragon either,” Kong Qing said. After all, he was from the fiend races, and was quite familiar with the Dragon race. He said, “It seems to be some kind of bug.”

“Bobbitt worm!” Zu An blurted out. When he saw the others’ confused expressions, he said with an embarrassed smile, “That’s what we call a strange bug from my hometown, but this thing is tens, no, a hundred times bigger.”

Afterward, he looked at Kong Qing with confusion and said, “Even though this thing is formidable, it shouldn’t have been able to swallow up the Gray Wolf King and even seriously injure all of you, right?”

He recalled the previous encounter. These insects’ biggest advantage lay in their unpredictable attacks that were hard to guard against. Furthermore, their mandibles could instantly rob their target of fighting strength.

But Venom Child and the dark elf were both humanoid, and relatively small at that. It would have been difficult for them to survive if they were bitten by those mandibles. However, the Gray Wolf King hadn’t been much smaller than the strange bugs. How could it have been bitten and swallowed?

Kong Qing’s expression turned somewhat ugly as he said, “Even though they are similar, the one we encountered was probably not these two. The one we faced was a hundred times more terrifying.”

As if to prove his point, strange cries that could shake one’s very soul emerged in the distance. Those present all felt their fine hairs stand on end.

“It is... It is that thing!” Kong Qing exclaimed. His voice was starting to shake a bit.

Zu An’s expression turned grave. Indeed, it was precisely that creature that gave off a pressure even greater than that of a grandmaster. Furthermore, compared to what they had heard before, its cries now seemed to convey extreme anger and hatred.

“Don’t tell me these strange bugs have some way to communicate with each other? Does it know that we killed its subordinates?” Zu An exclaimed in shock.

Kong Qing’s expression was ugly as he replied, “I fear that they were not just its subordinates. Based on the knowledge of the fiend races, they might be its children!”

Chapter 1158: Exposed

Zu An was speechless. If the children alone were already so tough to deal with, just how terrifying was the real deal? His first thought was, Is this like the difference between an alien queen and normal aliens?

How had they ended up killing the children of such a terrifying monster? It seemed they really were unlucky today...

Kong Qing said, his voice trembling, “We cannot stay here. It has probably sensed what happened and will rush over.” He didn’t dare to delay. He cupped his hands, then ran toward the cave entrance.

After Venom Child and the dark elf’s experiences, there were no more strange bugs left nearby. Furthermore, as long as they didn’t run into the terrifying mother creature, Kong Qing was confident he could deal with the regular bugs anyway.

Even though the bugs were strong, that was mainly because their long bodies moved through the dirt. They relied on the power of the earth to draw out their full strength. As long as he could guard against their sudden attacks, dealing with them wouldn’t be as difficult as it had seemed at first.

Paper Bride also gave Zu An an apologetic smile and quickly followed behind Kong Qing.

After the two left fearfully, Yu Yanluo said gently, "Ah Zu, you should hurry and go back too. You shouldn't get involved in this matter."

There were still many Yu clan disciples and people from her race in the mine. Her clan's doctrine had always been that they wouldn't abandon or give up on anyone. Even though she was scared, she wouldn't cower in such a situation. But Zu An was different; he wasn't from the Yu clan. She didn't want to drag him down with her.

Zu An couldn't help but laugh. He gently held her arm and said, "Our relationship is already like this; why are you still acting so polite? How can I leave you alone in this kind of situation? Besides, I was the one who sent Maid Xing and the others here, so I have a responsibility to ensure their safety."

Yu Yanluo knew that he was saying those things for her sake. Even though she was moved, she said worriedly, "But it's too dangerous right now... If we run into that mother worm, we might end up losing our lives here."

"Don't worry. This cave is so large. It won't be that easy to run into it as long as we're careful," Zu An said, but he almost slapped himself in the mouth. Why the hell did I set up that flag? I've watched so many characters die in all those TV shows; did I not learn a thing?

Yu Yanluo hesitated, but in the end, she said, "Alright. Then, let's leave this place as quickly as possible. Who knows if more of those things will rush over by following the two bugs' auras."

"One sec!" Zu An exclaimed before running over to the two bug corpses. They were so strange, their bodies might have some kind of use as materials.

Yu Yanluo knew what he was thinking. She frowned and remarked, "These two bugs are too large. We can only bring some scales and see if we can gather some blood..." She looked for some bottles as she spoke.

Zu An said with a smile, "There's no need to go through that trouble. I want everything." He used the Brilliant Glass Bead to suck up the two bug corpses afterward. The Brilliant Glass Bead really was an amazing thing; the interior kept its contents in stasis, so he didn't have to worry about rotting and other such problems.

Yu Yanluo exclaimed in shock, "A storage treasure? How is yours that large?"

It was completely beyond her understanding. Normally speaking, spatial artifacts were extremely precious, and their space was limited too. Having one or two cubic meters of space would already be incredible. Just how much space would one need to store the two strange bugs that were at least twenty meters long?

Zu An almost choked. He could only say with a strange expression, "Your man has a lot of secrets. You'll find out as you get to know him better in the future."

Yu Yanluo's face turned red when Zu An referred to himself as her man. She shot back, "You're clearly just a little boy, and yet you're trying to show off your maturity in front of me! Twenty years ago, you were still in swaddling clothes, drinking milk."

“Right, I’ve always been curious. Just how old are you?” Zu An couldn't help but ask.

“I’m not telling you,” Yu Yanluo replied. She raised her head, then turned around and walked away. Inwardly, however, she was panicking, thinking, Ah... Why did I have to talk about age with him? Will he find me too old...

Suddenly, however, Zu An grabbed her and pushed her down. He reached out his hand and covered her mouth, even covering the luminescent pearl with his hands.

Yu Yanluo jumped in fright. Don’t tell me he wants to...

But they had just experienced a great battle of life and death. The terrifying mother worm might rush over at any time, too. Wouldn’t doing it on the spot be a bit too rushed... But I’ve heard that after some people experience life and death situations, they end up in a state of extreme stimulation. They need a woman to vent their...

Her face turned red. What in the world am I thinking? She knew that Zu An definitely wasn’t that kind of person. There had to be a reason for his actions.

Sure enough, she immediately sensed something that made her blood run cold. She heard an extremely strange noise, and thick black fog covered the entire cave. That black fog was stronger than any of the fog they had encountered along the way.

Then, the ground suddenly bulged. After that, a strange bug that was several times thicker than the ones they had seen previously emerged. Its long mandibles almost made it seem like a massive dragon that could cleave anything in half. Its scales weren’t multicolored, but rather pitch-black like ink. Black fog surrounded its entire body, and it emanated a terrifying power.

Yu Yanluo’s eyes widened. The pressure she felt from it was even greater than Yan Xuehen’s. It wasn’t that the creature was far stronger than Yan Xuehen, per se, but rather that its massive size and monstrous appearance felt overwhelming.

A small part of the bug’s body emerged from the ground. It moved around, then stopped near that pool of green blood. Its mouth opened wide and its rows of saw-teeth moved around, flickering with a vicious glint. Even though it didn’t have a head or a face, the two could sense its absolute fury permeating the very atmosphere.

You have successfully trolled the Scaled Deathworm for +444 +444 +444...

Zu An jumped in fright when he received the string of Rage points. So this thing was called the Scaled Deathworm! The fact that he could receive its Rage points proved that it wasn’t a simple beast, but rather had intelligence. From the looks of things, its intelligence wasn’t low either.

The Scaled Deathworm looked around but didn’t find its offspring’s corpses. It had a confused ‘expression’, and began to look through the cave.

Zu An and Yu Yanluo didn’t even dare to breathe too hard. Zu An used Mirror Mirage to completely hide his aura. Meanwhile, as a clan leader, Yu Yanluo had her own methods. She took out several talismans and stuck them onto her body, and her aura completely vanished.

The Scaled Deathworm moved around the cave. Whenever its massive body slid across the ground, it was accompanied by scalp-numbingly loud grinding. Its body only continued to emerge from the ground, almost as if it were endlessly long.

Should I use this chance to strike it with the Poisonous Prick? Zu An thought briefly, but he quickly dismissed the idea. The monster gave off pressure even greater than a grandmaster's. He probably wouldn't even be able to approach its body.

The Scaled Deathworm didn't notice anything, so it slowly left through a tunnel. Its massive body seemed to fill the entire mine tunnel. Zu An and Yu Yanluo both sighed in relief when they saw that they had escaped a calamity.

Suddenly, however, Yu Yanluo's Medusa blood began to surge. As it was a top-ranked beast lineage in its own right, and of one of the most intelligent fiend races at that, the pride of her bloodline reacted to the pressure of the Scaled Deathworm.

Yu Yanluo cried out 'not good' inwardly and quickly tried to quell her surging blood. But it was already too late. The Scaled Deathworm immediately returned, raising its head and looking around.

Then, Zu An felt an incredibly cold sensation, as if he had touched something ice-cold and sticky. Herealized that the Scaled Deathworm was using its own method of searching the surroundings, the same way a grandmaster would scan their surroundings with their soul.

"Run!" he cried. He knew that their current state could only fool a grandmaster's ordinary senses. If they knew there was someone there, finding that person wouldn't be difficult at all. That was true for humans, so how could they escape something with senses as sharp as the Scaled Deathworm's?!

He didn't hesitate for even a moment, quickly grabbing Yu Yanluo and charging in the opposite direction. However, he could hear a loud rumbling behind him. The Scaled Deathworm was already chasing after them!

Chapter 1159: Silverflame Flowertree

Zu An continuously summoned Grandgale to quickly move around. Yu Yanluo used her paintbrush to draw a ring of light around the two of them. They rushed through the cave more quickly than ever before

But unfortunately, no matter how fast they ran, they couldn't throw off the Scaled Deathworm. Instead, it drew closer and closer. Judging from the way the walls behind them were quickly warping, it was obvious that the worm was moving through the earth quickly.

The two of them were already going as fast as they could, but the creature was far too nimble inside the earth. Furthermore, it could cut straight through the earth instead of taking winding paths, unlike the two of them. It would catch up in under three breaths of time.

"Ah Zu, I'm dragging you down. You should go first." A decisive look flashed through Yu Yanluo's eyes.

She intended to stay behind to hold it off, to try to buy Zu An a chance at life. Otherwise, both of them would die together. After all, no matter how she thought about it, there was no way the two of them would be a match for the terrifying worm.

Her eyes flickered with a red light as she decided to ignite all of her Medusa blood without holding back at all. Even though it wouldn't be enough to kill the strange bug, it should be able to hold the monster back temporarily.

She was about to push Zu An away, but he instead grabbed her hand firmly. He said, shaking his head, "Stop being foolish."

Yu Yanluo panicked. That meant they would both die! However, she suddenly heard Zu An say, "Drift, drift, drift away if you must... Through the mine paths, silently you go..."

The rhythm of Zu An's words was extremely strange. It was as if he were singing, and yet Yu Yanluo had never heard such a song before even with all of her knowledge. Despite its strangeness, it was extremely moving.

Immediately afterward, they suddenly accelerated, becoming many times faster than before. The mine tunnels were no longer obstacles to overcome, but rather became their shelter. The change made no sense whatsoever. If they had been running through the mines before, now they were drifting.

They lost the Scaled Deathworm in a mere few seconds. Zu An took Yu Yanluo and went into hiding again.

A while later, they heard rustling nearby. The earth nearby began to change rapidly as the Scaled Deathworm passed by. But it didn't stop, instead continuing into the distance.

When she sensed that the terrifying aura had gradually disappeared, only then did Yu Yanluo sigh in relief. She couldn't help but ask Zu An, "Ah Zu, what kind of skill was that just now? It sounded a bit like the beastmen's war songs... Huh? Ah Zu, what's wrong?"

Zu An was drenched in sweat, his entire body incredibly pale. Even his aura was somewhat unsteady. He forced a smile as he said, "It's nothing, just a slight side effect."

They had been in a crisis just then, so he had decisively used Keyboard Come. After using it a few times, he knew that he had to be moderate with its usage, however. He absolutely couldn't boast too crazily, or he would immediately die before he even achieved his objective.

His first instinct had been to use Fei Yuqing's song/ 'Thousand Miles Distant'/ to send the strange bug away, but he had quickly realized he wouldn't be able to handle the consequences of that. As such, he had changed it to Jay Chou's song/ 'Drifting'/ to see if he could handle the rebound of the skill.

He didn't know why he had decided to sing, however. Perhaps moving through the mines was a feeling similar to drifting to him?

"What side effects? How can you say you're fine even after sweating that much?" Yu Yanluo replied, helping him wipe his sweat while suddenly realizing what had happened. She asked, "Did you use the Dragon race's Soulspeak?"

"Something like that," Zu An said with a nod. In the past, assuming he didn't faint on the spot, he usually felt incredibly nauseated and wanted to throw up after using Keyboard Come. Now that his soul had condensed, he could use a bit of his spiritual force to endure the recoil. His condition was much better than it would have been previously. At the very least, he could still fight.

Yu Yanluo said worriedly, “The Dragon Race’s Soulspeak has always been a forbidden technique! Even though it has great power, it comes at a cost, often burning up the target’s very lifespan! Only the Dragon Race can play with something like that, while you’re a human... The lifespan of a human...”

She couldn't help but shed tears toward the end. This man hadn't even hesitated to burn up his own lifespan for her...

Zu An couldn't help but chuckle, saying, “I didn’t have any choice just now. If you feel guilty, give me a kiss. A kiss from you should allow me to live a day later...”

Yu Yanluo’s lips were already pressed up against his before he even finished, leaving Zu An stunned. It made him feel warm inside. Ever since they had first met, Yu Yanluo had always been gentle and refined; he had never seen her lose her composure like this. Yu Yanluo was full of knowledge and experience, so of course she would know that the kiss wouldn’t increase his lifespan at all. However, she had still ignored all of that and believed...

Zu An suddenly felt his actions just then really were a bit trashy. He quickly held her and explained, “Actually, I didn’t need to use up my lifespan...”

Because of how they were pressing up against each other, he subconsciously leaned back against the wall behind him. Suddenly, it collapsed.

Zu An was horrified. His first thought was that a Scaled Deathworm had suddenly attacked from behind him. However, he quickly realized that it was only because there was a secret passage of some sort behind the wall. The two tumbled down into the opening.

The Scaled Deathworm that had been heading off into the distance suddenly stopped. It turned around to look toward where the two had been. It was about to rush back when it sensed an intense ripple of energy surging in the distance. It was as if two powerful existences were carrying out a final clash of life and death.

Compared to those two ants, such powerful energy was far more attractive to the worm. As such, it moved quickly, its body disappearing into the earth. It hurried toward the direction from which the energy had erupted.

...

Meanwhile, Zu An held Yu Yanluo tightly as they made their way through the narrow tunnel.

“Are you alright?” Zu An asked while vigilantly examining his new surroundings.

Unlike the artificial mine tunnels, they seemed to be in naturally formed caves. In theory, this place should have been even darker due to its depth; and yet there was some faint red light diffused throughout the area, as if there were torches around them.

“How could anything have happened to me with how well you protected me?” Yu Yanluo replied, patting off the dirt from his body with care. Suddenly, however, she noticed that Zu An wasn’t saying anything. She inadvertently looked up, and was instantly stupefied.

Before them was something that resembled a tree, but also a flower. It was entirely red, and almost seemed as if flames covered its surface. It was completely surrounded by glittering ki stone ore, and near the tree itself, a special kind of jade flickered with a sparkling and translucent luster.

“Wuyang Jade!” Zu An exclaimed excitedly. He had previously gotten a few pieces from Yu Yanluo. He wanted to upgrade Daji’s skill, but he lacked the materials to do so.

“This is a Silverflame Flowertree!” Yu Yanluo said in surprise. She explained, “We only discovered a few in the mines. I didn’t expect there to actually be one here.”

“We even managed to profit from this disaster,” Zu An said.

He was about to go and pick them, but Yu Yanluo stopped him, calling out, “Be careful!”

Chapter 1160: A Deal

“What’s wrong?” Zu An asked, confused.

Yu Yanluo explained, “The Silverflame Flowertree normally lives in places abundant in ki, gathering the essence of the world. Even though it isn’t a vicious beast, it still has a certain degree of fighting strength. It’s extremely territorial. If you get close, it will attack. In the past, some of our miners were injured by trees just like this one.”

“It’s that strong?” Zu An asked, giving the red tree a look. He could feel the heat coming from it. This thing should be fire-elemental, right?

“I don’t know about that. The strength of each tree varies greatly depending on its age and size,” Yu Yanluo said. “The tree in front of us looks thick and sturdy, I don’t think it’s weak.”

“But there’s no way it’s as strong as those Scaled Deathworms, right?” Zu An replied with a chuckle. Either way, he had to obtain the Wuyang Jade, so there was no way he would cower now.

“Scaled Deathworm?” Yu Yanluo asked in surprise. “How do you know the name of those strange bugs?”

“I just randomly came up with a name based on its appearance,” Zu An said. He couldn’t really explain it, so he came up with an excuse.

Yu Yanluo recalled the strange bug’s characteristics and said, “It is pretty fitting.”

Zu An let go of her hand and slowly walked toward the tree. Despite being called a tree, however, it was more like a large flowering shrub. Ruby-like patterns ran along its body, making its surface flow with sparkling luster. It was as if flames rushed along its surface.

There were many fine silvery-white flowers on the branches. However, upon closer inspection, they weren’t white flowers, but rather flames! Their temperature was so high that they had become pure white!

Zu An thought to himself, No wonder I’ve felt a bit lightheaded ever since I came here. All the oxygen here has been nearly burned up.

He finally understood why Wuyang Jade was so rare. First of all, the Silverflame Flowertrees were hard to find; second of all, even if they were discovered, forget about mining the jade, an ordinary person would suffocate just by getting close.

The space wasn't that large, however, and there were no air vents leading outside. How did the flames continue burning without going out? Additionally, wasn't there a rule that no one could light any fires in the mine? Shouldn't the tree have blown up the entire mine?

Seemingly sensing his approach, the Silverflame Flowertree reacted. Its branches rustled as it moved, the cluster of flowers rising high into the air. It became several meters taller, but narrower at the base. It had become a tree with thick roots! No wonder it was called both a tree and a flower.

A giant red flower suddenly appeared at the very top of the tree, somewhat resembling a sunflower. For some reason, Zu An got the impression that the flower was the tree's brain. He thought, What kind of creature is this?!

Still, this was a world of cultivation, and so he was used to seeing all sorts of strange things. Seeing as it seemed to be waiting for him, he tiptoed forward carefully. He cupped his hands and said somewhat awkwardly, "Brother tree, this humble one wants to borrow the Wuyang Jade around you. I won't hurt you, so I'm hoping you can be generous."

Yu Yanluo giggled, thinking, This guy really is interesting. He's actually talking to a tree.

But her eyes soon widened, because the tree began speaking. Even though its voice was somewhat obscured, they could make out the words, "I won't lend it to you!"

Yu Yanluo was stunned, thinking, Even trees can talk? Even though she had heard of ents before, they were just creatures of legend. Just how many years had it been since they last appeared?

Zu An jumped in fright. He wanted to say something else, but the Silverflame Flowertree was already growing impatient. Its long and slender branches lashed out at him. There were fine silver flames running along their surface, making them resemble whips of flame. Being hit by them definitely wouldn't feel very good. As such, Zu An dodged to one side.

When the Silverflame Flowertree saw him move, all of its branches began to thrash around, forming a densely woven net of fire. Zu An raised the Tai'e Sword to protect himself, quickly cutting down several branches.

The Silverflame Flowertree recoiled in pain, quickly pulling its branches back. It was scared of Zu An's divine weapon and didn't dare to attack head-on with its branches anymore. Instead, it shook its body and the silver flowers detached from it, flying at Zu An. At first, they were just small embers; but as they moved along with the wind, they turned into blazing fireballs.

The raging flames' extreme temperature was something not even high-level cultivators could face directly. Even Yu Yanluo couldn't help but take a few steps back even though she was farther away. She cried out to warn Zu An, "Ah Zu, be careful!"

Zu An found it a bit strange, because he only felt a hint of warmth. To him, the fireballs weren't as threatening as they looked at all.

Suddenly, however, he felt the pendant around his neck turn somewhat warm. He realized it was the flame-shaped pendant Big Manman had given him in the past because she was worried that he would be hurt by her special black flames. It seemed the pendant not only provided him immunity to Big Manman's flames, but also granted some resistance to other flames.

Sigh, I left in too much of a hurry this time. I didn't even have time to bid her goodbye. I wonder if she's worried.

Even though his mind wandered, his hands didn't. He used the Snowflake Sword, making the surrounding temperature plummet. Snowflakes fluttered through the air, wrapping around the fireballs. The ferocious flames all sizzled into nothing.

Ice was usually at a disadvantage against fire, but in the end, the result would depend on power. The Snow Phoenix' ability made Zu An's ice different from normal ice, which was why it had such a powerful effect.

Yu Yanluo's beautiful eyes were sparkling as she watched the scene. When she saw the carefree and confident figure before her, she thought to herself, Ah Zu really is handsome.

Zu An quickly found an opening. He broke through the barrage of flames and thrust his sword at the other party's trunk.

"Stop, stop, stop! I'll lend it to you! Is that not enough?" The Silverflame Flowertree no longer sounded as valiant as before, and immediately shrank back.

Its trunk shriveled up and softened, then fell forward as if it were prostrating on its knees. It placed its two thickest branches in front of its head like arms, looking as if it were begging for mercy.

Zu An and Yu Yanluo were speechless.

It would be one thing for a tree to be able to talk, but this one could even beg for mercy? The worst part was that it made absolutely no sense. They didn't know who it could even have learned the gesture from.

Zu An asked calmly, "Why are you willing to lend it to me now?"

The Silverflame Flowertree replied, "I can't beat you, of course, so there's no point even if we keep fighting."

Zu An replied seriously, "If my cultivation were a bit weaker, I might already have been burned to nothing. You still have the nerve to beg for mercy?"

The Silverflame Flowertree said in a strange tone, "The strong prey on the weak, so you should acknowledge your fate if you lose. Isn't that the most natural law of the world?"

Zu An was speechless. This fella really did make some sense.

Yu Yanluo asked, "Why are you able to speak?"

"Why wouldn't I be able to speak?" the Silverflame Flowertree asked matter-of-factly.

Yu Yanluo was speechless.

Zu An laughed out of annoyance, saying, "You don't seem to have any awareness of your current situation." He raised his Tai'e Sword and gestured with it.

"No, stop, stop! Your sword is really strong! It hurts every time you cut me." The Silverflame Flowertree immediately backed up, as if trying to avoid the blade. Then, it quickly explained, "I couldn't speak at first either, but after staying here for a long time, I often heard those miners chatting with each other, so I learned how to."

"How long have you been here?" Zu An asked curiously.

"Five hundred years... Or is it a thousand... It's been a really long time. I don't even know how long it's been anymore. Time doesn't have much meaning for me," the Silverflame Flowertree said.

Zu An and Yu Yanluo exchanged a look. This fella really had gained sentience!

Yu Yanluo put on an expression of displeasure and asked, "Since you know that the strong prey on the weak, then why should we let you go?"

The Silverflame Flowertree replied, "I'll allow you to take the stuff over here! These things are very precious for you humans."

Zu An sneered. "I could take them even without your permission. Why should I spare your life?"

Yu Yanluo felt sweet warmth inside. Ah Zu and I really are compatible. It's almost as if we're husband and wife...

"Ah, that makes things a lot more troublesome..." The Silverflame Flowertree scratched its head with its branches. It continued, "Right, if you let me go, I can continue to produce this jade for you. It has to grow beside me to become like this."

Zu An thought to himself that he still needed Wuyang Jade whenever Daji broke through, and the requirements would only increase. There were only a dozen or so pieces of Wuyang Jade present, which was definitely not enough.

"How long does it take to make this Wuyang Jade?" Yu Yanluo asked, quickly getting to a critical point.

"Around a hundred years, I reckon." the Silverflame Flowertree replied.

"A hundred years?" Zu An sneered. "Are you messing with me?"

Even though the lives of humans in this world were longer than in his previous world, a hundred years was still too long. It would already be way too late by then.

"If you prepare some top-quality jade around me and I work hard, it should be ten years..." The Silverflame Flowertree seemed to be observing his reaction as it spoke. When it noticed his frown, it immediately changed its answer. "No, one year, one year! But I really can't go any faster! I should be able to succeed in one year."

Zu An thought to himself that one year was still acceptable. However, he wanted to take the chance to scare it one more time. "Do you have any hidden in storage? Hand it all over."

“I’m just a tree! Why would I hide anything?” The Silverflame Flowertree turned its large corolla, looking as if it were giving Zu An a sidelong glance. It almost seemed to be remarking, ‘Why would you ask such a stupid question?’