

Chapter 17
1470 words

As Lei-kung descended through the chorten to punish the Demon, Han Chung-li's grunts drew him into one of the many galleries. Han Chung-li's mottled body was twined about the still form of a petite, blue dragon. His breath came in gasps; his tail spasmed in sexual ecstasy around her tiny frame. General Heng-chiang watched and wheezed; his saliva ran frantically and formed a growing, opaque pool beneath his snout.

Lei-kung screamed impatiently, "She's dead, you fools! One after another! Won't you learn! Get rid of it!" He spun away, his great urgency spurning their perversions. He muttered to himself, "Must I keep everyone under my claw. Can't get anything done. Weak fools! Great help, great leaders: a necrophiliac and a voyeur!"

Circumstances refused to let Lei-kung move too quickly this evening. Yolbas caught him just as he was about to descend into the cavern, "Lei-kung, Lei-kung, what happened to Yün-t'ung and those dragonettes? You could see the blast for miles. They're gone. The sand's covered with weird glitter. The dragons are uneasy. There'd be panic if it wasn't for your control. You must do something."

"It's nothing; forget about it. You'll be seeing a lot more. Besides it was only one old maid and a bunch of useless rowdies. I've got important things to do. Go away!"

Despite Lei-kung's glare, Yolbas went on, "But the same thing happened to Ch'ang-o. We must do something."

"We'll do nothing! Thankfully, Ch'ang-o and Feng-po are out of our way. Now, let me be!"

"Not Feng-po. Whatever it was, it only got her. He was seen flying off. Ao Rue was there too."

"Feng-po still alive? Damn that Ao Rue. I'm going to take care of him right now! Get those two perverts, find Feng-po, and kill him! Take that idiot Erh-lang with you too if you can find him. About time he had a better use than those absurd air shows! Now get out of here!"

Yolbas hesitated, "But murder a fellow dragon? How?"

Lei-kung tightened the black threads in his claw; Yolbas stiffened as if a needle had been shoved through him. Han Chung-li howled in the distance. Lei-kung's frustration broke: "YOU HEARD ME. DO IT! I DON'T CARE HOW!" Yolbas reeled away from his power. Lei-kung stormed down into the cavern.

"Where are you, you worthless sack of pus!" Lei-kung's eyes tried to pierce the ever-clotting darkness. His claws fashioned a braided whip from the threads. His magic embedded gleaming spikes in it.

The Demon bubbled out of a crevasse. "Hungry! Feed!" Lei-kung's arm came forward and lashed its oily yellow mass. The spikes caught. He dragged, ripped them back. Rents appeared and simply smoothed over. He might as well have been whipping pond scum. "Hungry! Feed!"

"Mindless beast! Malignant slime!" Lei-kung yelled as he dropped the whip in futility. The creature was completely unaffected. "How can you possibly be hungry? You just gulped down the life forces of Ch'ang-o, Yün-t'ung, and thirty dragonettes."

"Hungry! Feed!"

"You'll feed when and on whom I tell you! You failed. Feng-po's still alive."

"TERROR! BLUE TERROR!" Lei-kung recoiled from the thing's fear. "YOU KILL"

"Blue terror? A silver dragon? Blue eyes? That was Ao Rue."

"SPINNING BLUE, TERROR, BLUE FIRE, DEATH!"

"Yes, that's him. Do you want to help me destroy him for you? If you do, you'll have to stop yelling."

"Kill? Beg kill! Kill!"

Lei-kung smiled as the Demon responded to his control. "You'd like that, Wouldn't you? Rend him limb from limb? Spill his guts on the sand in front of you?" Lei-kung was relishing this.

"Beg kill! Kill!"

"Beg all you want. I won't kill him right away. I'll make an example of him that will guarantee the obedience of generations! Education wasn't the answer. It takes forever anyway. Humiliate him instead. Degrade him in front of everyone. It will be a good object lesson. Devastate him. I can do even better than Chih-nil. Yes! Yes! Brilliant. Oh, Lei-kung, sometimes we astonish even ourself with our cleverness. But you, you bag of filth, I need your help to bind more power from the Northern Lights. I need the ultimate spells! I want it all!"

"Like Lights. Yes. Help kill blue terror!"

"We'll kill him only when I say so! You understand?" Lei-kung cringed from the blast of hate, but reveled in the begrudging yes that oozed from the creature. "All right, then, we understand each other. Now get to the top of the chorten and help me with the Lights!"

Lei-kung made his way up through the empty galleries. This time no one was foolish enough to slow his rage as he moved through the murky galleries. The Demon moved by some route known only to it. It was waiting for him at the top.

"All right, get the power down here. You know I can't do it by myself."

The Demon stretched; it became a giant sail, ragged at the edges. The swirling black patterns within it knotted and squirmed. They became more obvious as it thinned. It slowly rotated to the north to face the Lights and cupped itself to catch a great drought of poison. When it was at full expansion, it called. It was the only noise the creature had ever made. Lei-kung had heard it before, during the terraforming and when he had first discovered it, but it never failed to grate in the marrow of his bones. Each time, it stung deeper, each time more painfully. It was a shrill, thin cry of some heinously-alive stillbirth for its dead mother. It was the mindless babblings of a monstrosity that clawed its way free from her womb. The Demon was death in life!

If Lei-kung had thought to look over his shoulder, he would have seen thousands of smaller Demons mirroring the larger. They stained the night sky, blotted out the stars. Yet, they were no danger to Lei-kung. They were indifferent to his empty husk. As their cry increased in intensity, the Northern Lights began to lose their horizontal symmetry. They wavered and bellied toward the calling Demons.

Lei-kung waited in anticipation for the onrush of the dark magic. The Lights bulged like a pregnant dragon's belly. He spread his wings wide to receive the egg of death. Suddenly, the stress broke. The universe burst into his eyes. The blackness of the force made the night seem blindingly bright. He reeled and fell. It thundered over him. He felt his insides mutate. He cried in agony as his very cells fed upon each other. The Demon humped over him and absorbed the few, small gems that popped free of his altering body. Quickly, it snapped back as Lei-kung regained his senses. Some primal cunning made it pretend to cower. Lei-kung cried out in exultation, "Ahhhh, so good! So strong!" From where he had fallen, a demented, twisted shape uncoiled itself. A new bane stood at the point of the chorten. In absolute contempt, Lei-kung turned to face the Demon. "You've done well. Go feed. But carefully. Don't let anyone see you and live. Our mystery is our hidden strength."

He wanted no one near while he explored his new self. *Never have I felt so whole, so powerful!* He looked down. The remains of his scales were a fine, inky powder at his feet. Already the harsh Breath of Fury had begun to scatter it. He'd turned almost completely black. It was as if the bulging globules of his eyes had burst and drenched him. He ran his claws over his oily chest, down toward his sagging belly. He traced the protruding angles of his bones. *No scales! I'm a mollusk,* he giggled in spite of himself. *Like the inside of a clam.* His claws crawled further. His touch slid without interruption. *No penis! No gonads! I am beyond the flesh!* His wings had been drained to nubs. Their pinions were bone-yellow, as brittle and as bleached of life as his talons. He tried his fire; not even a puff escaped his nostrils. *I have evolved beyond dragonkind! Mine is the superior form! Mine is the superior intellect!*

He raised his claws. A small, undulating, yellow ulcer weighed in each palm. Elaborate black webs crawled inside them. They sloshed and writhed in anticipation. The globes were connected to his wrists by pulsating veins. Power surged from them. *THE ULTIMATE SPELLS!* He gazed lovingly upon them, *Oh, my beauties! Give them their couplings, their flights, their fires. I have you! You are all I live for; all I'll ever need! Come, Ao Rue, come. I'll take your genitals in one claw, your brain in the other. If only you could watch me mash them together. Watch me eat them. Nectar of the gods! What a lovely show it will be for the succulent Nü-kua!*