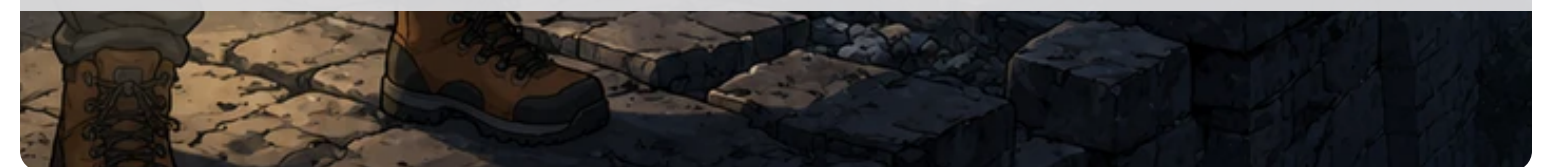
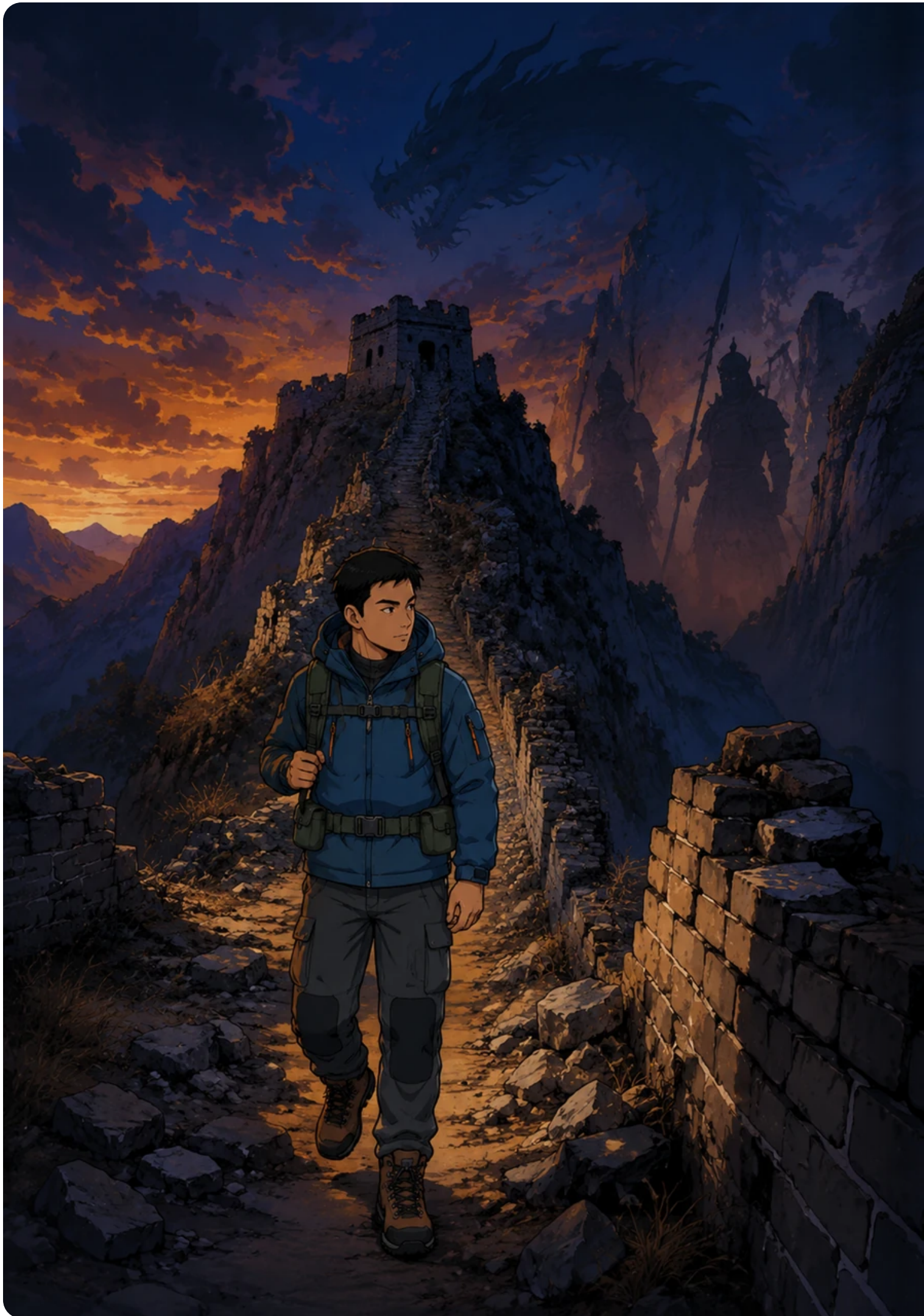




The Whispering Watchtower of the Great Wall

Chidubem Gera





Wei trekked along a wild, un-restored section of the Great Wall of China just as twilight cast long, dark shadows over the craggy peaks. The wind whistled through the ancient bricks like a distant sigh, warning him that night was falling fast. Yet his curiosity drove him deeper into the isolated mountain pass.



A thick, supernatural fog began to rise rapidly from the deep valleys below, swallowing the stone steps and hiding the path back down. The temperature plummeted instantly, wrapping the spine of the stone dragon in an icy, suffocating blanket of white mist.



Seeking refuge from the biting cold, Wei hurried inside a crumbling, stone watchtower that loomed like a silent giant against the night sky. Inside, the air felt unnaturally still, smelling of ancient ash, cold iron, and old secrets forgotten by time.



As Wei shone his lantern around the ruined chamber, the shadows on the wall began to stretch and warp unnaturally. They coalesced into the distinct, looming silhouettes of ancient warriors clad in heavy armor, holding long spears firmly in their hands.



A low, rhythmic drumbeat echoed from deep within the stone walls, vibrating right through the cold floor beneath Wei's boots. Faint spectral whispers dissolved into the chill air, chanting a long-forgotten warning in an archaic tongue.



Wei stepped out onto the high parapet, only to gasp in terror as phantom lanterns ignited one by one along the miles of stone ahead. Translucent guards appeared along the wall, pacing back and forth in a eternal, silent midnight patrol.



Suddenly, a massive draconic shadow composed of dark smoke rolled out from the stone brickwork and reared up into the sky. Its glowing crimson eyes locked onto Wei, exhaling a cloud of chilling mist that froze the very air around him.



Remembering the ancient legends of the guardians who swore to protect the pass forever, Wei held his ground and bowed low in deep respect. He recited an ancient peace blessing, showing honor to the spirits who had fallen centuries ago.



The spectral dragon paused in mid-air, its fiery gaze softening as the ghost soldiers turned and bowed in quiet acknowledgment. Slowly, the terrifying shadows dissipated into fine mist, and the eerie drums quieted into the calm night air.



As the first rays of dawn broke over the majestic, mist-covered mountain ridges, the Great Wall fell entirely silent once more. Wei stood safely under the rising sun, filled with awe and respect for the eternal guardians who kept watch over China's greatest treasure.