

Chapter 1981

Jade Building Strange Scene

Han Sen wanted to sit by himself, but he didn't seem to have that option. People were everywhere on the sixth floor.

Fortunately, Yu Jing did not mention anything about them killing xenogeneics together. He quietly asked, "Brother Han, will you participate in Sky Palace's exam?"

"What exam?" Han Sen asked. This wasn't high school, so what exam could there be?

"The exam is annual. There are no penalties to failing, but if you do well, the elders and the leaders might take notice of you. If you reach the top three, you also earn a prize. If you receive a good score, the elder might take you as a student, even though you are an outsider. But of course, you are already Knife Queen's student, but the top three rewards are still great."

"What are the rewards?" Han Sen asked.

"Treasure is granted to the top three. If you are number one, you will also have permission to enter the Holy House. There, you may select a geno art. Such a thing would be of great benefit," Yu Jing said.

Han Sen, hearing that, was quickly disinterested. He still had his own geno arts to practice with. Even if the Sky Palace geno arts were powerful, he doubted he'd find the time to learn one of them.

Yu Jing noticed Han Sen was not interested, and so he looked around and whispered to Han Sen, "Brother Han, if you have time, I would like to talk to you about the exam. Alone. Perhaps we can cooperate there."

Han Sen looked at Yu Jing, and Yu Jing performed a gesture to be quiet. Han Sen realized that Yu Jing must be asking him to cheat in some way. Of course, no one else could hear that.

And then Yu Jing spoke to Han Sen again. This time, he did not want to discuss the exam. White Jade Jing opened and Jade Air came out of the Jade Wall. When it did, everyone focused on refining it.

Han Sen used Jadeskin to absorb the Jade Air. They both possessed the same jade word, so perhaps they might have some compatibility.

When Han Sen used Jadeskin, the Jade Air moved quickly throughout his body. Jadeskin absorbed the air quickly, much faster than The Story of Genes.

"D*mn! They really are connected!" Han Sen thought.

Han Sen changed to the Dongxuan Sutra, then the Blood-Pulse Sutra, and he noticed that they refined the Jade Air much more slowly than The Story of Genes did. And they were far inferior to Jadeskin.

“It looks like I need to practice Jadeskin first.” Han Sen stopped wasting time and focused on practicing with Jadeskin.

He wanted to evolve with that, first and foremost.

Jade Air was everywhere, but it wasn't dense enough. Han Sen's absorption speed was fast, but Jadeskin's evolution was not going great. He realized that the Galaxy Sand had been far superior.

Before the second Jade Air erupted, Han Sen went up to the seventh floor. His Jadeskin was compatible with the Jade Air, so he knew he could survive on the seventh floor with it.

But when he reached the seventh floor, he did not see Thousand Feather Crane or Yun Sushang. Not even First Day was there.

There was a young, lonely guy there on the seventh floor, though. A jade sword rested on his knees.

The man did not look at Han Sen. He just sat where he was, eyes closed, uncaring for the world around him. Han Sen was not a fan of talking, either, so he found a corner to sit in and waited for the second wave.

The Jade Air on the seventh floor was far purer than the Jade Air on the sixth floor. It was better for his Jadeskin.

No others had come to the seventh floor, so the environment satisfied Han Sen a great deal. It was far better than the over-crowded sixth floor. He thought to himself, “If I had known I could survive it, I would have come here the first time it erupted.”

Han Sen waited for the second eruption, and when it came, he cast Jadeskin and absorbed the Jade Air.

The Jade Air on the seventh floor was far denser than the lower floors. Han Sen felt the Jade Air flow inside him, and it helped refine his Jadeskin and infuse it with his bones. It made Han Sen feel like jade himself.

There were some amazing feelings going on in Han Sen's skeleton. Rather than giving him the chills, the scary Jade Air actually made him feel hot. It felt like he was inside an oven, and his bones were being baked.

Han Sen knew that this was just an illusion, though. And that was because the Jade Air did not suppress him. It made him feel more alive.

Han Sen practiced Jadeskin, and not long after, his Jadeskin began to feel strange. It became purer.

This was exactly what Han Sen had hoped for. Without thinking, Han Sen cast Jadeskin.

But on the seventh floor, an odd image appeared on the smooth Jade Wall. The sun and the moon appeared in the image, and white bones as well. Sword air cut through them.

It was like a god appearing in the sky.

Buildings rose up, like steps into the sky.

Between the clouds was a mysterious city. It was very well hidden, and you could not see much.

All those images appeared across the Jade Walls, and they made the Jade Air purer.

The arrogant young Sky man opened his eyes. His eyes shone as he looked upon the Jade Wall. He looked shocked.

The Jade Wall's image started to change, and the city there grew closer. There was a king obeying the city.

He took a step, then knelt. Ten steps, then he prostrated himself. It was like a believer, walking to a holy place.

When the arrogant young man saw that the Jade Wall was showing the city, and the city was revealed from behind the clouds, his face changed.

"Five cities?" The arrogant young man's eyes looked bright. He stared at the five cities the wall displayed.

Many kings bowed before the cities, but none dared to step in. It was not clear what happened after that, though. The kings that were nearest to the city were dying, and they soon disappeared.

The gates of the five mysterious cities remained closed. It was like they had been closed since ancient times.

1982 Under the Sky

Han Sen felt that the Jade Air had become very pure. It allowed his Jadeskin to ascend in level very quickly. But the Jade Air's time of eruption was far too short for satisfaction. When the Jade Air dispersed, Han Sen wanted more.

"What is your name?" Han Sen opened his eyes and saw the arrogant man looking at him. His voice sounded cold.

"Han Sen. What is your name? And do you want something?" Han Sen asked.

"Are you taking part in the exam this year?" The man did not answer Han Sen's question, and just asked his own again. Han Sen thought the man was quite strange, so he willingly answered. "I don't know. Maybe. Maybe not."

"Oh." The man looked at Han Sen and then left, headed downstairs.

“Is he crazy?” Han Sen shrugged his shoulders, then went downstairs as well.

When Han Sen reached the sixth floor, the man had vanished. He saw Yu Jing looking around, however. Yu Jing approached Han Sen as soon as his eyes found him.

“Han Sen, are you free? Can we talk?” Yu Jing said.

“I don’t think so; I have something to do. Come over to my place tonight,” Han Sen said, recalling that he was supposed to meet up with Yun Suyi.

“Okay,” Yu Jing agreed, then walked downstairs with Han Sen.

When they reached the fourth floor, Yun Suyi was waiting there for Han Sen. She smiled at him.

“Brother Han is meeting up with a woman? It is best that I leave!” Yu Jing saw Yun Suyi, smiled back, and then said goodbye.

“Why are you with him?” Yun Suyi asked, frowning.

“Why? Is there a problem?” Han Sen asked with confusion. She looked as if matters with Yu Jing weren’t so simple.

“That guy is greedy. He plays tricks, and he cheats. He does not have a very good reputation in Sky Palace. I recommend staying away from him, if you can.” Yun Suyi told Han Sen some stories about things he had done.

Yun Suyi then brought Han Sen over to her island. Her island was far bigger than his. She had a pavilion, and even a garden with a fountain. It was quite a comfy place, really.

“Here, then. Help me examine this skill. Which part of it is incorrect? I always feel as if there is something amiss with it.” Yun Suyi brought Han Sen into a pavilion in the garden. She invited Han Sen to sit down and drink some tea.

Han Sen answered, “Show me the kniveskill, and I’ll see if I can identify the issue.”

Yun Suyi nodded. Her beautiful body walked to the fields. She pulled out a knife and began her performance.

Han Sen watched her and frowned. Yun Suyi hadn’t been practicing the skill for very long, so she wasn’t experienced at all. If there was a problem, it would be because of her lack of practice. She could not even be considered a beginner with the skill.

Han Sen realized that she had not used a knife before, so she did not have much in the way of kniveskills. It was clear to him that she had only started practicing this as a way to talk to Han Sen. It was an excuse.

Yun Suyi had not just selected a random skill to trick Han Sen, though. It’d have been too obvious if she had done that.

The knifeskill she had selected was called “Under the Sky.” It was created by a Sky Palace swordsman. He wanted to create a knifeskill for Sky Palace, but in the end, there were seven problems he was unable to solve. That was why he called the knifeskill Under the Sky, because it was not on the level expected of the Sky.

Many people wanted to modify Under the Sky. The seven little issues had been fixed over the years by a series of genius students, but there was still one problem no one could overcome. Because of that, they were unable to make it a Sky Palace skill.

Yun Suyi selected this skill in the hope that Han Sen could identify the issue that was thus far unfixable. If she did that, it’d work as an icebreaker, allowing her to get closer to him. If she had to keep looking him up all the time, with no real reason, her feelings would be revealed.

Han Sen could tell Suyi had just started practicing with a knife, but he was still fascinated by the knifeskill. It was amazing in its own right, and it was vastly different from Teeth Knife.

Han Sen thought the knifeskill had the same potential as Teeth Knife, but when Suyi performed it, there was clearly a problem with it. And also, the power in the example was quite weak.

It was just one little problem, but it detracted so much from the technique. The resolution of a battle between two elites rested on the smallest details, so the slightest edge could make the difference between life and death.

“Han Sen, can you tell that there is a problem with this skill? I feel as if something is wrong.” After Yun Suyi practiced, she returned to the pavilion and consulted Han Sen.

Because Under the Sky was still not perfect, Sky Palace did not really allow its students to practice it. Only a select few had knowledge of the skill’s existence. She knew Han Sen had never seen the skill before, and so that was why she chose to use it.

But even if the skill was perfected, it wouldn’t be made available to all students. Most people would only hear the name.

Han Sen didn’t think much about it. He just believed Yun Suyi had yet to practice it right, and that was why there was an issue. He didn’t think there was an issue with the knifeskill itself.

This technique is very complicated, so I don’t understand it yet. Could you perform it again for me?” Han Sen did not ask to see the scroll.

The skill was Teeth Knife’s equal, so it was unlikely many students had what it took to practice with it. He was just an outsider, so asking to read the actual geno art could have been very rude.

Yun Suyi merrily agreed to perform Under the Sky again.

“There are some problems, certainly, but I don’t really understand them. I’ll think it over when I head back.” Han Sen did not focus on the use of knives, so he wasn’t a knife master. He could not promise that he would fix the problem.

But there were some common aspects threading every skill, and Han Sen had a great deal of knowledge and experience. So, he planned on trying to solve it. Tackling the problem would be good for his own knife practice, regardless of whether he succeeded or failed.

After all, Han Sen used knives more than any other weapon these days. And he had Ghost Teeth Knife, which was a King weapon. He wanted more knife skills.

Yes, please.” Yun Suyi smiled and took Han Sen back. She planned to use this excuse to talk to Han Sen about knifeskills again. She wanted to get closer to him.

When Yun Suyi returned home from taking Han Sen back to his island, Yun Sushang appeared in her garden.

“Suyi, what have you done?”

“Nothing. I had a problem with a skill, so I asked Han Sen for help. I took him home right after.” Yun Suyi acted as if she did not care.

Yun Sushang looked at Yun Suyi and said, “The problem with Under the Sky cannot be fixed through simple observation. If he can do that, then the elders wasted their lives in what they have done.”

Yun Suyi blushed, and she said, “Sister, why are you spying on our conversations?”

“Suyi, do not forget your identity. You should know what you can do and what you cannot. There is a line. Han Sen is not of the Sky. Wanting something impossible will just get someone hurt.” Yun Sushang sighed.

1983 Misunderstanding

After Han Sen returned to the island, he saw his legless crane resting beneath the tree. He put some meat in its bowl, then went into the house to practice Under the Sky.

Under the Sky was very delicate. The technique did not have much flair, and it wasn’t overbearing, like Teeth Knife. But when you used the skill, it was like a rippling ribbon that could not be cut. The knifeskills looked random, but they were all connected.

It could trap an enemy without them noticing. With it, Han Sen might even be able to control the enemy as if they were a puppet. Under the Sky was not too dissimilar to Heavenly Go or the Dongxuan Sutra. It was still quite unique, of course.

Heavenly Go focused on one’s formation. The Dongxuan Sutra was excellent when it came to prediction. Under the Sky focused on direct control.

Under the Sky made one a queen amongst ants, allowing the user to rule the battlefield. Whoever made that knifeskill, to have given it a name like that, must have been thinking of this.

But there was a problem with the knifeskill which reduced its effectiveness significantly. In order to properly control the enemy, the skill had to view them as nothing. And that was where the problem began.

When Han Sen watched Yun Suyi make use of it, he could tell where the technique had originated; it had to have stemmed from Sky Palace.

Han Sen had guessed correctly. Sky Palace had Outer Sky powers, and it came from the Textless Book.

The person that created Under the Sky had practiced with the Textless Book. He used that as a basis, and with his knowledge and talent, he formulated the rest of the knifeskill.

Understanding the Textless Book wasn't necessary to practice Under the Sky, though. If it was, then what was the point? Very few could actually practice with the Textless Book, after all.

Because of this, the skill lacked the Textless Book's power as a base, and the control power was quite weak. It wasn't the best.

It created a dual-sided problem: people who couldn't practice the Textless Book also couldn't learn this knifeskill to its true potential, but people who could practice the Textless Book didn't need to learn this skill. It was a bit of a shame.

Under the Sky had been abandoned because no one had found a way to overcome this problem. The modifications of a number of geniuses weren't even enough.

Han Sen wasn't very good at knifeskills, but it just so happened that Under the Sky's problem was something Han Sen was very familiar with.

He had allowed the Outer Sky powers to enter his body on the Road to the Sky. The forces that he felt impressed him greatly. Added to that, he was proficient with the Dongxuan Sutra and Heavenly Go. Thus, fixing the issue would not be too difficult for him.

But Han Sen had only observed the knifeskill. He didn't have the scroll, so he couldn't learn it properly and apply his solution to the matter. After thinking it through, Han Sen decided to give Yun Suyi a call. He asked if outsiders were allowed to learn Under the Sky, but she said no.

It was a flawed knifeskill, but it was connected to the Textless Book. Therefore, not just anyone could come and learn it. Yun Suyi was allowed to learn it because the skill was originally created by the Yun family. She could study it herself, but she could not pass it on to others.

Han Sen was disappointed. He had agreed to help her because he thought the skill would suit him. He wanted to learn it himself.

Han Sen was disappointed he was not able to learn the skill. He apologized to Yun Suyi and told her he could not fix it by merely watching.

That night, Yu Jing came to meet with Han Sen.

“Brother Yu, speak your mind.” Han Sen had learned quite a bit about Yu Jing from Yun Suyi. He did not harbor any prejudice against the man, though, so he treated him like a normal person.

Yu Jing checked to see if they were truly alone, and he said, “Brother Han, if you do not care for the rewards of the exam, how about you help me out? With your power, you can surely win first place. If you can help me, I can provide you a reward that is worth even more.”

“Are you saying you want me to cheat?” Han Sen understood what he was getting at.

“Haha! I’m only talking about helping each other get what we both want.” Yu Jing laughed.

Han Sen suddenly thought of something, and so he told Yu Jing, “I am afraid I am unable to help you. I will be taking part in the exam.”

“That’s okay. But if you change your mind, you can always call me.” Yu Jing was visibly disappointed, but he did not say anything about it.

After he left, Han Sen called Yun Suyi and asked, “Suyi, is Under the Sky in the Holy House?”

There is a copy in there, yes. Why? What do you want?” Yun Suyi asked with surprise.

“If I get first place in the exam, I can ask for Under the Sky as a reward, yes?” Han Sen asked.

“That is correct.” After saying that, Yun Suyi thought of something and blushed.

“I see. Okay, then!” Han Sen hung up. Yun Suyi had confirmed his guess, so he was going to join the exam and see if he could nab first place. If he was able to, he’d pick Under the Sky.

Yun Suyi was still holding the phone, deep in thought. Her cheeks were red, and she smiled and thought to herself, “Is he going to the exam because of me? All to get Under the Sky?”

There were still two weeks to go before the exam. White Jade Jing opened again the following week, and Han Sen had plans to slay a few more Earl xenogeneics to level up his gene tally. He still wanted to learn the truth about mutant genes.

Han Sen did not plan to go to Xuanyuan Cave this time, as that place was far too complicated. There were too many Xuan Jade Spirits around, and they were tough to kill.

Han Sen got his hands on a Sky Palace map, and he looked over places he could go to hunt xenogeneics. After a time of deliberation, he decided on going to Old Night Island.

Old Night Island’s xenogeneics were fast, and most of them could fly. Earls did not like going there, as it was difficult to slay the inhabitants of that island.

Han Sen, however, was not afraid. No matter what happened, his rabbit shoes and his dragon wings could give him the speed he needed. Catching an Earl would not be difficult, either.

After Yu Jing confirmed Han Sen’s participation in the exam, a new thought came to him.

“There aren’t many special people in this year’s exam. With Han Sen’s power, he can get into the top five with ease. I can take advantage of that. His reputation is weak, and so people don’t know his true strength. I can earn money through this.” Yu Jing concocted a long scheme.

1984 Xenogeneic Geno Ar

Old Night Island was very big. There were mountains, forests, and even oceans. Han Sen went there and chased a flying bird. He caught up with it and cut its head off.

“Xenogeneic Earl hunted. Forest Bird: xenogeneic gene found.”

Han Sen collected the xenogeneic gene from the corpse, then started a fire. He immediately got to eating.

The legless crane flapped its wings, having brought over a few branches. Bubble was hopping all over Han Sen. It was weak, so it couldn’t help much.

“With this Forest Bird, that marks the eighth Earl in four days. This is no faster than going into the Xuanyuan Cave.” Han Sen felt terrible.

Old Night Island was not as good as Han Sen thought it would be, and the xenogeneics he managed to find were fast. The place was so large that it took a long time just to find a single Earl. Han Sen felt as if his plan had completely failed.

Han Sen gave the bird’s body to the legless crane, and he cooked the xenogeneic gene. It was a liver this time. It tasted lovely, and it had a pleasant aroma, too.

“Earl Gene +1”

After eating the whole liver, Han Sen’s Earl gene tally reached twenty-five.

Han Sen brought out the ant queen’s mutant gene. He was used to hearing the announcement saying he did not have enough genes yet.

But this time, Han Sen did not hear that wretched announcement.

“Do I have enough Earl genes now?” Han Sen grinned widely. He quickly started trying to cook the ant queen’s gene in the pot.

Han Sen hadn't been able to cook the ant queen's meat before, but now it was boiling. It made Han Sen very happy. After a while, the ant queen's meat was cooked. Han Sen ate it, and he felt a power course through him.

After Han Sen ate all the meat, he did not hear any of his genes increase. He looked at his stats, and it still said he had twenty-five Earl genes in total. Eating the ant queen did not seem to have increased anything.

But the power of the ant queen's meat was now inside Han Sen. It wasn't refined, and it was coursing through Han Sen's vessels. The power kept traveling through him, until eventually it waned and disappeared.

In Han Sen's head, a shocking announcement played.

"Earl class xenogenic geno art obtained: Ant Queen Mark"

"Mutant genes don't actually increase genes? They give geno arts instead?" Han Sen thought to himself. And then, he followed the path the powers had taken through his body. It was then that he discovered a gold symbol on his body.

Han Sen had seen this gold shape on the ant queen's body. When this spell began to glow, the creature's power increased. Han Sen tested it out. Lo and behold, the ant queen's mark was very effective. It made Earls as strong as Marquises.

That meant the ant queen's geno art did not need to be practiced, and despite that, Han Sen could be as strong as the creature had been.

Han Sen was so happy. If he found any more mutant genes, he could get the geno arts from the mutant xenogenics he defeated in battle. He wouldn't even have to practice with them to become as proficient as possible.

The strongest thing about this new option was that the geno arts came from creatures of a different species. Ordinary people could not learn xenogenic geno arts. That was what was so special about them.

Even though Han Sen could simulate power with his Dongxuan Sutra, he could only replicate a fraction of their abilities. That was because their bodies were different, so fully accurate simulation was impossible.

It was just like Consume; if Han Sen hadn't turned into an ant, he wouldn't have been able to learn the ability.

And Han Sen had still needed to practice Consume. Now he only needed a mutant gene to learn the geno art of a xenogenic. And because he did not need to practice with it, that made things even better.

"If I can kill a King class or deified mutant xenogenic, does that mean I can learn the skills right away?" Han Sen thought this could be tremendously powerful.

But the Xuanyuan mutant dragon's xenogeneic genes were Marquise class. He needed to refine Marquise genes before he could do anything with that one. For the time being, he could not make use of it.

There was still a while to go before White Jade Jing opened. Han Sen planned to keep killing xenogeneics to earn Earl genes. If he met a mutant xenogeneic, he might learn another xenogeneic gene art.

"Yu Jing, you really won't regret this?" A group of Sky men surrounded him, and they looked surprised.

"I won't," Yu Jing said with certainty.

"Good. If you wish to give us your money, we won't refuse. According to our struck deal just now: if Han Sen can win ten times in a row in the exam, we lose. If he loses just once, then we get all your money." A Sky man laughed.

Many students of Sky Palace struck this deal with Yu Jing. One of them laughed and said, "Yu Jing, you are bringing this upon yourself. Do not take it out on us if you lose everything."

"That Han Sen had to be carried up the Road to the Sky. If he can win ten times, that means all our Earl brothers are rubbish."

Someone patted Yu Jing on the shoulder and smiled. "Thanks. If you have any more great deals to strike, you should seek me out."

Yu Jing coldly laughed in his heart. "It's only ten rounds. Unless Han Sen is unlucky enough to face-off against a strong enemy in the beginning, he should be able to reach the top five with ease. Especially with his power. Getting into the top hundred will be nothing."

But Yu Jing still felt nervous in his heart. This was a very big bet to make. While it was a high risk, there was also a high reward. Winning the gambit meant he would end up with ten times his total wealth.

If he lost, though, he'd go bankrupt.

Yu Jing knew Han Sen was strong, but he was still nervous. When the exam matchups were settled, he took a look at Han Sen's schedule to see who he'd go up against.

When he looked at the schedule, Yu Jing froze. His face grew pale. There was no color in him, at all, and he almost passed out.

The few Sky that had made a bet with him approached. They looked rather cocky. The leader smiled, touched him on the shoulder, and said, "Yu Jing, you are unlucky. That monster Bamboo is taking part in the exam. And he is Han Sen's sixth enemy. You are very unlucky. I don't think God can save you now. Pack up your stuff, we'll be reposing everything you own soon enough."

The group of Sky smiled before taking their leave. Yu Jing was still standing there, pale as a ghost. He wanted to die.

1985 Lone Bamboo

“Why would this happen? Why would Lone Bamboo take part in the exam? He doesn’t need to.” Yu Jing did not understand how he could be so unlucky. If it was any other Earl student, he believed Han Sen stood a firm chance. He would have had a high probability of winning.

But Lone Bamboo made Yu Jing feel powerless and hopeless.

Lone Bamboo was a student of the seventh elder, but he had broken a rule. It was a very bad one to break, too. He was stripped of his title as a student and imprisoned. There, he was tortured.

His imprisonment was not a death sentence, but it might as well have been on one.

Lone Bamboo was put in a sad dream. That dream kept repeating his sad life for ten thousand years. Once that time passed, he was allowed to wake up.

Ordinary creatures wouldn’t live long enough to wake up and have the dreams end. Even if they did, having the same heartbreaking dream repeat for ten millennia would be too much. They’d be driven insane by the repetition.

Lone Bamboo slept in jail for ten years before waking up. After he woke up, he went up to Sky Palace and knelt before it. Then, the doors opened. The leader had not accepted a student for one thousand years, but he decided to accept Lone Bamboo. Then, his cheating life started. He practiced with the Textless Book, and he was able to go to the five cities and twelve buildings. No one was as good as him.

Even Thousand Feather Crane, who received the holy gourd’s blessing, still lost against him. And he lost even after using his best sword skills.

After that, no one fought against Lone Bamboo. Marquises and Dukes would not underestimate him, either. No one could imagine how he had managed to wake up after only ten years. But even so, it was difficult to imagine what he might have been through.

The leader of Sky Palace said Lone Bamboo could become deified. He did not express any doubt about the possibility, and so he obviously had faith in him.

If the word strong was used to describe a student of Sky Palace, people would not think of the elders. Instead, they’d think of Lone Bamboo.

Lone Bamboo still wasn’t a Marquise yet, but he never took part in the exams. Even the Marquise class students could not interest him. He had no interest in fighting them.

Yu Jing looked shocked and bitter. He felt unlucky. He thought he could get rich, but now he was going to be bankrupt. The students had not seen Lone Bamboo fight for the past few years, so no one had expected him to suddenly join the exam.

Han Sen stayed on Old Night Island for six days. He killed eleven Earl xenogeneics. But White Jade Jing was almost ready to open, so he left the island and went there. When he arrived on the island, Han Sen took a good look at the White Jade Building. After doing so, he was shocked.

He thought he'd only be able to see the one White Jade Building, but now, there were twelve such constructs on the island. At the end of the buildings, between the clouds, were cities. He could not see what resided in them, but he could most certainly see the five cities.

Han Sen was not as clueless as he had been when he first arrived there. He understood much about the White Jade Jing now.

Normal Sky Palace students could see seven White Jade Buildings—assuming they understood a bit about it all. If they could see ten, they'd be regarded as geniuses.

If they could see twelve, they'd be the smartest of the entire generation. If they could see all the buildings, that was something that only occurred once every ten thousand years.

Sky Palace had existed for a billion years, and fewer than one hundred had seen all five cities. That was how profound this was.

Han Sen didn't feel anything, though. He did not know how he could see twelve buildings and five cities. He was quite confused. But when he practiced in the White Jade Building's seventh floor, he understood something when the Jade Air turned pure.

Although he could see twelve buildings, he was still planning on going to the first building to absorb the Jade Air. That place was perfect for an Earl, he believed. He planned to bring Jadeskin up to Earl before exploring the buildings beyond.

When Han Sen reached the fourth floor, Yun Suyi came straight to him to talk. She looked worried.

"Han Sen! My sister and Uncle Crane are waiting for you on the seventh floor. They wanted me to tell you that, if you came, you should go and see them. Even if you aren't planning on practicing on the seventh floor, go and see them."

"What is it?" Han Sen asked with confusion.

"The Jade Air is going to start, so go to the seventh floor! When it ends, Brother Crane will tell you the details," Yun Suyi said.

"Okay." Han Sen nodded and went straight up to the seventh floor.

When Han Sen disappeared up the stairs, Yun Suyi sighed and thought to herself, "God is being unfair. Why would you have to meet Lone Bamboo? What is Lone Bamboo thinking? What is the point of him joining the exam?"

But quickly, Yun Suyi thought, "But maybe that's okay! It's the thought that counts. It does not matter if you don't reach first place to get Under the Sky. I won't think any less of you."

Han Sen reached the seventh floor, and there, he saw Thousand Feather Crane, Yun Sushang, and First Day. The arrogant young man was not there on this day, though.

Seeing Han Sen there, Thousand Feather Crane invited him over. He asked, "Are you joining the exam?"

Han Sen nodded and said, "I signed up. I'm planning on joining."

Thousand Feather Crane had a wry smile, and he said, "I'm afraid you will have a tough fight ahead of you."

"What is it? Is someone big joining?" Han Sen asked with a smile.

Thousand Feather Crane told him that Lone Bamboo was taking part, and then he explained Lone Bamboo's story. He also told Han Sen about the time he was beaten by Lone Bamboo. He didn't hide anything.

But the way he said it was different than the way you would describe an ordinary student. Thousand Feather Crane talked about Lone Bamboo as if his strength was already legendary.

"Perhaps you won't believe all this, but when I fought Lone Bamboo, I felt as if I was going to lose by just standing in front of him. When I fought him for a while, it felt as if he was teaching me something. After that fight, my sword skills improved. And I was able to achieve what I have up to this point," Thousand Feather Crane said.

1986 Red Coral

Thousand Feather Crane started to say something more, but the Jade Air erupted. The four of them focused on absorbing the Jade Air, which had become unusually strong around Han Sen. The Jade Air eventually turned back to normal, and there was no more pure Jade Air to take in. Han Sen was more sure about his line of thinking now.

When the first Jade Air ended, Yun Suyi came up to the seventh floor. There, they all discussed the exam and the unexpected entrance of Lone Bamboo.

"On your sixth fight, you will encounter Lone Bamboo. That will be a hard fight. I am worried for you, but I will admit I am looking forward to witnessing it. If you are going to fight, I am going to watch."

Thousand Feather Crane smiled.

"I agree with what Brother Crane says," First Day said, while clasping his hands together.

Han Sen curiously asked, "What did Lone Bamboo do to suffer the nightmarish trial of torture?"

Han Sen knew that torture like that was worse than being killed. It was a miracle that Lone Bamboo was able to wake up in ten years. That was something that had never happened in Sky Palace before.

Nightmare was a deified xenogeneic dream beast power. Ordinary people could not resist it, especially after they had experienced the nightmares for a while.

"The elders do not talk about it. They avoid the subject. We can't say for sure what happened. We only know that he broke the rules," Yun Sushang said.

After talking for a while, Han Sen only heard the words strong and very strong. He also heard the words extremely strong. But that wasn't very useful.

So, Han Sen did not keep any of that in mind. He did not think he was invincible, but weak or strong, he'd have to engage the man in battle if he was to find out. There was no point wasting any more time thinking about it.

When the second Jade Air came, Yun Suyi went back to the fourth floor. On the seventh floor, Han Sen absorbed the second deluge of Jade Air. He thought his Jadeskin was coming along quickly. After ten more rounds of Jade Air, he imagined he could bring it up to Earl class.

It was a shame that the Jade Air only happened twice a week. It wasn't a process he could rush.

After counting the time, he realized it would take two or three months. Going from Viscount to Earl that fast would be something of a miracle for most people.

After leaving White Jade Jing, Han Sen went to Old Night Island to resume hunting. He didn't care about anything else right now. Getting more genes and leveling up was better than anything else he could do.

There was only a week left before the exam, though. There was not much time, and Han Sen wanted to max out his Earl genes before attending the exams.

Just as Han Sen was preparing to take the legless crane to the island, Yun Suyi jogged over to him.

"Han Sen, are you going back to Little Jade Island?"

"I am going to Old Night Island to hunt xenogeneics," Han Sen answered.

"Can you take me there? It doesn't sound as dangerous as Xuanyuan Cave, and I am sure I can protect myself. I won't take the loot, but I would certainly like to accompany you," Yun Suyi said.

Han Sen agreed. Old Night Island wasn't too dangerous, and if she wasn't going to take any loot, bringing her along would do no harm.

Seeing Han Sen agree, she looked visibly delighted. She smiled and said, "Old Night Island does not permit Earl class mounts, so I won't be riding Jade Wing Tiger. Can I ride atop your Jade Night Crane?"

"He is strong. Two people can sit on him, sure. He is just a little slow." Han Sen smiled.

"It is okay to be slow." Yun Suyi blinked.

When the legless crane took off, Han Sen hopped onto its back. Yun Suyi followed.

The legless crane had limited space atop its back. They sat together, shoulders touching shoulders. It made Yun Suyi blush.

One crane and two people disappeared into the clouds.

The legless crane flew a few hundred miles inland once they reached the island. And despite all the time it took, they were unable to locate an Earl xenogeneic. Han Sen missed Little Uncle at times like this. If he was there, they wouldn't have to go out in search of the xenogeneics. The xenogeneics would come out in search of them.

While they were looking for xenogeneics, something shone atop a mountain. Han Sen quickly went there with Yun Suyi. The mountain was like a sword, raised eight hundred meters into the sky. There were some red coral plants growing across it.

The light they saw was the glittering of those plants.

When Yun Suyi saw the plants, she looked to be in shock. She said, "This is an Earl class xenogeneic plant. It is called Blood Coral. Xenogeneics love to eat this, as it is great for their evolution. They are eaten when they grow to the size of a hand. This one on the peak is three meters tall, and yet it hasn't been eaten by a xenogeneic. That is strange."

Han Sen looked at the red coral and said, "Ah. That's why it hasn't been eaten. There is a strong xenogeneic that owns it, and so all the other xenogeneics don't dare come close."

"I don't see any xenogeneics around." Yun Suyi looked around to confirm, but she still saw nothing. It was so quiet around, and there were no weak xenogeneics, either.

Han Sen pointed at the red coral and said, "Look at the red coral. It is there."

Yun Suyi followed Han Sen's finger. She looked, and then saw a stick. It was not really a stick, though. It was a red bug that blended into the red coral. It was similar to a mantis, and it was munching on the red coral.

"It is an Earl class Blood God Mantis. It is one foot long, so it isn't physically large. But it is very strong for an Earl class foe." As she spoke, Yun Suyi's face changed. "I know! This mantis is guarding this red coral because he wants to use its power to evolve. He doesn't want to be a Marquis; he wants to be a mutant. Kill it before it eats the red coral!"

Han Sen was very pleased to hear that, so he smiled and said, "If it wants to evolve, then let it."

Yun Suyi wished to say something, but seeing Han Sen smile was comforting. She felt safe. She couldn't bring herself to say anything. If Han Sen said things were okay, then she couldn't keep herself from believing him.

The Blood God Mantis ate the red coral slowly. They waited for one hour, and after all that time, the mantis had only eaten a small part of the plant. But its body was glowing like a polished ruby.

"Han Sen, you are a crystallizer. But you are also Knife Queen's student. Will you marry a crystallizer or a Rebate?" Yun Suyi asked jokingly.

"I have a wife. She is the same race as me," Han Sen answered lackadaisically, as he looked at the mantis.

Yun Suyi's face fell. She looked extremely disappointed. "Why didn't you bring your wife?"

"My kids are young. She needed to take care of them, so she stayed at home," Han Sen answered.

"You have kids?" Yun Suyi's eyes opened wide.

Yes. I have two that are biological, and others that are... adopted," Han Sen answered.

Yun Suyi's heart was broken. She found herself struggling to breathe. She looked at Han Sen and sighed. She didn't say another word for a long time.

1987 Blood God Mantis

The body of the Blood God Mantis was only a tenth of the size of the plant it was munching. It ate slowly, but when it ate a bit of the coral, its belly did not swell. Its body did glow strangely, however.

Before it finished eating the red coral, another aspect of its body changed. The shadow of a red reaper appeared on it. Its hands held a scythe, like a tool to harvest souls.

The mist on the shadow was getting stronger, and it looked as if it was set to become solid.

"It's evolving. Will it become a Marquise or a mutant?" Han Sen asked as he looked upon the Blood God Mantis.

"Spirits are just substances formed of light, smoke, and air. They aren't really solid. When they become Marquise, they won't grow any more solid than they were originally. They will only gain power. Look at the Red God Mantis. It's not becoming a Marquise; it's mutating," Yun Suyi said.

"It is good to be a mutant. I love mutants." Han Sen smiled.

The Blood God Mantis' red smoke was getting heavier. The red smoke reaper could be seen clearly now. At this point, it was hard to distinguish from an actual creature.

The next second, Han Sen saw the red reaper wave its scythe towards the red coral. It broke the rest of the red coral, and then the red smoke on its body became a vortex. It sucked all the scattered pieces into it.

When the red coral entered the whirl, the red reaper's smoke became thicker. That was particularly true of the scythe in its hands. Its smoke form began to solidify, and before long, it had turned into a crystal blade.

The Blood God Mantis' body was shining. The light glowed through the red reaper.

Han Sen was staring into Blood God Mantis' body, focusing on the blood air that swirled inside.

"It is going to finish mutating. Now is the best chance," Yun Suyi said.

"There's no rush; let's keep watching." Han Sen wanted to see what the Blood God Mantis' geno art might be. He wanted to see how strong it was.

After two hours, the Blood God Mantis finished the mutation process. The red reaper became smoke, then drew back into its body. It vanished from sight.

Blood God Mantis' body did not grow large from ingesting the coral. It was still one foot long, and its body still looked like ruby.

Then, all of a sudden, it flapped its wings and squealed. It suddenly came for Han Sen, fast as a red shadow.

Perhaps it had noticed Han Sen and Yun Suyi a while ago. It might have refrained from attacking then due to the fact that it was undergoing the evolution process. Once it was done, it now fancied killing them.

"Spell," Han Sen said quietly. Then, Spell appeared before him in her ladylike form. She wielded two pistols, and she fired at the Blood God Mantis with both.

Pang! Pang!

Two bullets hit the Blood God Mantis, but they didn't break its shell. They only left two spell markings on it.

Blood God Mantis squealed with anger. Its body turned into a red shadow, and it leaped at Spell. The arms of the Mantis swung like scythes, and they were going to cut her.

Spell moved quickly, evading Blood God Mantis' attack. She held her hands together and summoned a rocket launcher. Then, she fired a shot at the Blood God Mantis.

Han Sen frowned. He didn't know why Spell was using a rocket launcher right now. The rocket launcher was stronger than the pistols, yes, but it was too slow. With the speed of the Blood God Mantis, the creature could easily dodge.

And yes, Blood God Mantis did indeed flap its wings to dodge upwards. It got well clear of the rocket. It then resumed its approach to Spell.

Spell retreated, still clutching the rocket launcher. The Blood God Mantis continued to advance, but the rocket that had gone by suddenly swung around like a heat-seeking missile. It hit the mantis in the back.

Boom!

There was an explosion, and Blood God Mantis' body was sent flying away. Its shell was covered in a number of small wounds. The rocket must have damaged its shell when it detonated.

But those wounds were nothing to the mantis. They only made it angry. It squealed, then jumped back at Spell.

"D*mn! The round that leaves a mark can track an enemy's movement. It alters the course of the rocket. I wonder if the bullets can have a similar function?" Han Sen thought to himself.

Swiftly, Han Sen's question was answered. Spell turned the rocket launcher into a pair of pistols again. Her legs were crossed as she dodged Blood God Mantis' attack. It was like she was performing a beautiful and elegant dance.

In that elegant dance, Spell's pistols fired continuously. It did not look like she was aiming at the Blood God Mantis, but the bullets drew a curve in the sky. And then, they all landed on the mantis. The rounds did not miss a single mark across the mantis' body.

"So the pistol bullets can track too, huh?" Han Sen was so happy.

Yun Suyi looked at the scene strangely. Spell was just a geno armament, yet she was capable of fighting a mutant Earl without any directions from her master. Normal geno armaments were not capable of something like that. In fact, most Earl geno armaments could not fight at all. They didn't have a will of their own. They did not have intelligence like Spell did.

The pistols were a little weak. They hit the same spots on Blood God Mantis, but they failed to heavily damage it.

Blood God Mantis tried to attack Spell, but it failed. After Spell drew some distance between the two, she summoned her sniper rifle. She wanted to get rough. But before Spell could fire the sniper rifle, a strange red smoke suddenly appeared behind her back. A crystal scythe was sweeping down towards her neck.

Han Sen used his mind to make Spell quickly dodge, but it was too late. The crystal scythe slashed across her back. Her white armor was cut into by an inch, and it sliced open the muscles in her back deep enough to reveal bone.

Fortunately, Spell was not a living creature. She had no blood to lose.

After Spell was attacked, she moved forward. The Blood God Mantis screamed, and it jumped forward. The red reaper followed her from behind, and they attacked her together.

“Now that the Blood God Mantis has mutated, it can create a spirit that works like a fellow xenogenic? This is similar to a summon skill,” Han Sen thought.

Yun Suyi, seeing Spell in danger, quickly said, “What do we do now?”

“Kill it,” Han Sen said coldly. He had already drawn Ghost Teeth Knife from his waist.

1988 My Purpose is Number One

Yun Suyi saw Han Sen stand up, then teleport behind the Blood God Mantis. The purple knifelight slashed, and the Blood God Mantis’ triangle head looked as if it had been chomped on by a demon. The knifelight cut through it, and the body fell from the sky.

The blood reaper instantly shattered and disappeared into thin air.

“Xenogenic Earl mutant hunted. Blood God Mantis: xenogenic gene found.”

“I didn’t get its beast soul?” Han Sen’s thoughts were painted with greed.

Yun Suyi looked at Han Sen strangely. He had one-hit-killed an Earl mutant xenogenic. That was a far stronger feat than Thousand Feather Crane could accomplish.

But seeing Han Sen’s strength, Yun Suyi felt even worse. She thought to herself, “Why is he taken?”

Han Sen dug the mutant gene out of the Blood God Mantis. It was a piece of its shell. There were still some wisps of smoke rising from the bloody piece of crystal. You could tell that it was the face of the red reaper.

“Earl genes insufficient. Cannot refine mutant gene.”

Han Sen was shocked when hearing this. It was an Earl mutant gene. He had been able to refine the ant queen’s gene when his total tally was a few points less. Now, he had two more genes than before, and yet he couldn’t refine the Blood God Mantis’ gene. He pondered how the requirements for Earl genes were determined.

Han Sen put away Blood God Mantis' mutant gene and passed the body to his legless crane. Bringing Yun Suyi along with him, Han Sen proceeded to hunt xenogeneics on Old Night Island. He was only planning on going back when White Jade Jing opened again. After that, the exam was set to start.

Inside Buddha Kingdom, Clear Sea King bowed before Burning Lamp Alpha. "Alpha, Han Sen broke the ant's body curse. He is now practicing in Sky Palace."

Burning Lamp Alpha said casually, "Knife Queen must have asked the leader of Sky Palace to break my looping skill." "We're going to let him get off scot-free?" Clear Sea King asked, looking crushed.

"The Buddha cannot engage in acts that disrupt Sky Palace, for the time being. If he is in Sky Palace, we will have to ignore him." Burning Lamp Alpha looked like he knew this was going to happen, as he didn't show too much concern.

But..." Clear Sea King wished to say something more, but he was interrupted by Burning Lamp Alpha.

"First Day is practicing in Sky Palace. How is he doing?" Burning Lamp Alpha asked.

"He will be a Marquise soon," Clear Sea King answered.

"Good. First Day isn't as talented as Seven Spirit or Speechless, but he can match them in strength. Through his practice in Sky Palace, and a roster of talents that marry the best of two races, he might have a higher chance of becoming deified than Seven Spirit did. We cannot allow this opportunity to escape our grasp," Burning Lamp said.

"Now that Han Sen is in Sky Palace, will he..." Clear Sea King was worried.

Burning Lamp said coldly, "Sky Palace has taken in Han Sen. They have also taken in First Day. There is no need to worry for First Day's safety. Don't do anything until Han Sen leaves Sky Palace. And don't contact First Day. Wait until he is done in Sky Palace, too."

Not long after, the day came again when White Jade Jing would open. Han Sen and Yun Suyi returned from Old Night Island. In that time, Han Sen had managed to hunt eleven Earl xenogeneics. But since Yun Suyi was with him, he hadn't wanted to eat the xenogenic genes in front of her. So, he brought everything back.

When the Jade Air in White Jade Jing came to an end, Han Sen brought the xenogenic genes back to Jade Island.

"Yun Suyi, follow me home," Yun Sushang called to her sister.

Yun Suyi glanced at Yun Sushang, looking all moody, and said, "Don't worry, sis. I'm going home."

Yun Sushang was shocked. She noticed there was something amiss with Yu Suyi's attitude. With worry, she asked, "What's going on? Has Han Sen been mistreating you?"

Yun Suyi shook her head and sighed. They were not real sisters, but their relationship was just as close as two blood relatives. They talked about everything, so she told Yun Sushang the things she had learned about Han Sen.

"I see. This is good, though. You are of the Sky, and you are a daughter of an elder. You cannot be with an outsider. By ending it now, you're only saving yourself from greater suffering in the future." Yun Sushang felt relief when she heard what was troubling Yun Suyi. So, she comforted her and said, "Han Sen is smart, but he is not the only one out there for you. There are other geniuses like him, amongst the Sky. I will find you someone, and you can decide."

Yun Suyi wasn't in the mood for jokes, and she was feeling very sad. She forced a smile and went home.

Because the next day was the exam, and Han Sen was in a rush, he didn't have the time to eat slowly. After he cooked all his stuff in one pot, he used Consume to digest every xenogeneic material as fast as he could.

His body felt hot, cold, and sore, all at the same time. He felt as if he had been electrified, and some power flowed through his body. It made him feel stronger.

The gene increase announcement played in his head, over and over. He had an extra eleven Earl genes, now. Counting the two from before, he now had forty in total.

But when Han Sen picked up the Blood God Mantis' mutant gene, the announcement still declared he did not have a sufficient number of Earl genes.

"Blood God Mantis1 gene has a much higher requirement than the ant queen gene, but now I don't have any more time to hunt xenogeneics." Han Sen put away the Blood God Mantis' mutant gene. He sat on his jade bed to practice Jadeskin.

Although it was not as fast as practicing in the White Jade Building, having a little was better than nothing.

The next morning, when Han Sen was about to set off toward the exam location, Yu Jing came to him. He rode over on a Jade Night Crane.

"Brother Han, there is something I seek to discuss with you." Yu Jing spoke quickly, upon his arrival on the island. "What is it?" Han Sen looked at Yu Jing.

Yu Jing lowered his voice and said, "The first opponent you face today, he hopes he can proceed through the exam. So, he paid a high price, hoping you might let him go on."

Yu Jing didn't say it directly, but he meant that the opponent had paid money for Han Sen to throw the fight.

"Sorry, I can't help him," Han Sen said simply.

Yu Jing quickly said, "Brother Han, you do know that your sixth enemy is Lone Bamboo, yes? It is difficult to determine whether or not you'll win. It would be better to take this benefit now, while you can."

When Yu Jing said that it was difficult to determine who would win, he really meant that Han Sen would most likely lose. And if Han Sen lost, all Yu Jing's money would be lost. Right now, he was only concerned with losing as little as possible.

"My purpose is to get to first place. I don't care about anything else." After Han Sen said that, he mounted the legless crane. He flew straight towards Sky Path Island, where the exams would be held.

Yu Jing was shocked. He was frozen in place for a while.

After a while, he snapped out of his daze. He spoke to himself miserably, saying, "I hope you can reach first place, too. But how are you going to beat Lone Bamboo?"

1989 Who He Came Here For?

On Sky Path Island, four different classes of people awaited their exam: Barons, Viscounts, Earls, and Marquises.

The most popular section today would be the Earl examination. Many Kings and Nobles had gone there, and the stands were very full. It made the other three look so quiet.

Many Barons and Viscount students went there to watch the exam, too. They went there for Lone Bamboo.

Han Sen was not afraid because no one took him seriously, anyway. Aside from Yu Jing and the people that had made a bet with him, no one would be anticipating the fight between Han Sen and Lone Bamboo.

When Lone Bamboo arrived, he was given the spotlight. People kept talking about him, trying to guess why he wished to participate in the exam. No one could guess the true reason why.

Many people looked in Lone Bamboo's direction, which made it easy for Han Sen to get a glimpse of him, too. When he saw the man's face, he looked surprised. He said, "That guy is Lone Bamboo?"

It was the arrogant man Han Sen had seen on the seventh floor of the White Jade Building.

Seeing the match roster, Han Sen found that he was one round behind Lone Bamboo. So, he sat on the sidelines to see what sort of power Lone Bamboo wielded.

Sky Palace students were strong, so it was no wonder that they were a famous high race. There were many strong representatives of the race there, and they all had amazing geno arts.

Han Sen had fun spectating, but not long after, he saw Lone Bamboo approach the arena.

It was not just Han Sen turning to take a look at Lone Bamboo. Everyone else was, as well. One corner of the arena became the center of attention for the entire place.

After a while, an Earl student from Sky Palace came to the arena. He went straight up to Lone Bamboo.

Everyone thought they could watch Lone Bamboo fight, but that Earl student came before the man and just grabbed his hand. With much excitement, he said, "Brother Lone Bamboo, I can finally see you! I have been a fan ever since I was small."

The supposed fight turned into a meet between a fan and their greatest idol. After the Earl finished speaking, he forfeited the fight and left.

"D*mn! He can do that?" Han Sen felt depressed.

The people next to Han Sen were even more depressed. Many of them were angry, even.

"That guy is too obscene! He knew he couldn't compete against Lone Bamboo. He did this just so he didn't have to embarrass himself."

"It won't go on like this, will it? With no one daring to fight him?"

"It is hard to say. Everyone knows Lone Bamboo's strength. It does not matter if they fight or not, but perhaps someone arrogant enough will think they have the chops to challenge him."

"Brother Lone Bamboo is so smart. He does not have to fight, and yet he can still win."

Not much later, it was Han Sen's turn for a reveal. He went towards the arena, but he did not draw much attention. Only a few people who knew Han Sen, or those that knew he got carried to Sky Palace, bothered to take a look.

Han Sen's opponent was called Cool Jade. He was quite good amongst the Earls, but there were many good ones like that all across Sky Palace. Being decidedly average, he wasn't very well-renown.

Yun Suyi could not help but watch Han Sen's fight. Yu Jing had not dared show himself, as he was afraid he'd bump into the guys he had made the gambit with. If he went, he believed he'd be laughed at.

Yun Suyi just sat down, and she heard a few men talking.

"Since I'm so bored, I might as well see how strong this Han Sen is. Yu Jing sure compliments him enough."

"It does not matter how strong he is. He's going to lose to Lone Bamboo, anyway."

"Don't say that just yet. Maybe he will be killed before he even meets Lone Bamboo!"

"That's right, haha."

The few were chatting amongst each other, and it made Yun Suyi frown. When she was about to confront those voices, someone suddenly approached and sat down next to her.

"Brother Lone Bamboo?" After Yun Suyi saw who the person was, she was shocked.

Everyone looked at Lone Bamboo, and they were all shocked, too. Many women looked at him with the most charming faces.

“Why is Lone Bamboo here? Who is he watching?”

“There is nothing worthy of his focus here, right?”

“Of course there isn’t. None of the Earls here are worthy of his spectating.”

“Maybe he is here to watch a friend?”

“That is possible.”

“Would it be for Yun Suyi?”

“That is possible, too. Yun Suyi’s prettiness and talent are unequaled across all of Sky Palace. She wouldn’t be an embarrassment for Lone Bamboo.”

Yun Suyi, hearing that, frowned again. She looked at Lone Bamboo, and he looked down at the arena without any emotion.

Yun Suyi’s heart jumped, and she thought to herself, “Is Lone Bamboo here for Han Sen?”

There were many fights going on in the arena, and they were all going on at the same time. It was difficult to determine who he was watching.

Han Sen felt the stare coming from Lone Bamboo, though. Han Sen turned to take a look, and he saw Lone Bamboo looking at him. He thought to himself, “Why is he watching me?”

Cool Jade pulled out his longsword and swung it at Han Sen. The swordlight possessed a purple mist, and it seemed strong enough to sunder the ceiling.

Han Sen summoned Spell next to him, and he fired his pistols at Cool Jade.

Dong! Dong! Dong!

The munitions were continuously expelled, and Cool Jade’s longsword kept swinging around with its purple mist. It blocked a few bullets, but more hit his body and armor. He flew out of the ring and conceded defeat.

“D*mn! What is that thing? Is that a geno armament?”

“It looks very strong.”

“A geno armament like that is better to watch than the fight itself.”

Han Sen’s victory didn’t draw much attention, ultimately. Some students were interested in Spell, more than Han Sen himself.

Han Sen put Spell away and left the arena.

Everyone looked back to where Lone Bamboo had been, and they noticed he had vanished. Yun Suyi, who had been next to him, was gone, too.

Now people knew they had guessed it right. He had gone there for Yun Suyi.

1990 Fenghou Pills

Outside the exam arena, Yun Suyi was chasing after Lone Bamboo. He left as soon as Han Sen started fighting.

“Brother Lone Bamboo, please wait!” Yun Suyi shouted as she chased after Lone Bamboo.

Lone Bamboo stopped, looked at Yun Suyi, and said, “Sister Suyi, what do you need?”

“Brother Lone Bamboo, who were you watching earlier?” Yun Suyi knew all about Lone Bamboo. There was no reason to beat around the bush.

“Why would this matter concern you?” Lone Bamboo frowned.

Yun Suyi quickly said, “Han Sen is my friend. Were you watching his fight?”

Lone Bamboo nodded. He had no reason to hide the fact. “It is because of him that I joined the exam. I do not want to be number one. I only wish to fight him.”

Yun Suyi had guessed that he had come here for Han Sen, but she didn’t expect this answer. It shocked her.

“Why...” Yun Suyi looked confused.

Han Sen was smart, but Lone Bamboo was even stronger. After seeing Han Sen’s power, she still believed Lone Bamboo was superior. This thought was inside the heads of everyone in Sky Palace. Han Sen could not change everyone’s expectations simply by performing well.

“It is because he activated the twelve buildings and five cities in White Jade Jing,” Lone Bamboo said, before he turned around.

“What?” Yun Suyi was shocked. In the history of Sky Palace, fewer than one hundred people had experienced what Lone Bamboo just claimed. And out of all the Earls in the exam, Lone Bamboo had been the only one to see all the buildings and cities.

Even Thousand Feather Crane and Yun Sushang had only been able to spy the twelve buildings. They hadn’t seen a single one of the five cities.

After Han Sen beat Cool Jade, there were no more fights left for Han Sen that day. He would have to wait until the next day. He didn’t leave, though. He stayed to watch the fights.

There was a difference between the geno arts of the geno universe and the geno arts of the sanctuaries. Somehow, there seemed to be a thread connecting them. Sky Palace's geno arts were very high tier. After watching the fights, Han Sen found himself learning a lot. He compared what he saw to what he had learned in the past.

Han Sen left the place when all the exams were over for the day.

Over the next few days, Han Sen did not encounter any strong enemies. Spell was so powerful that her pistols could beat everything she was put against. In no time at all, five Earl students were brought down.

It was a shame that not many of his enemies had much in the way of fame. As a result of this, his continued success drew little in the way of attention. But when people did pay attention to his fights, they were greatly interested in what sort of geno armament Spell was.

Aside from the first match that Lone Bamboo spectated, he did not return. Perhaps it was because Han Sen's opponents were so inferior, he wouldn't see much of anything regardless. Whatever the reason was, he did not come back.

And Lone Bamboo's fights were fan meet-and-greets.

No one in Sky Palace had the courage to fight Lone Bamboo. There was only one that had the courage to fight him, but when Lone Bamboo pulled out his sword, he could only move a step before the Earl student conceded.

Han Sen watched that match, and he was shocked. Lone Bamboo was stronger than he thought.

"After all, he is the one that survived the nightmare," Han Sen thought to himself.

If he wanted the position of first, to receive Under the Sky, he'd have to beat Lone Bamboo. There was no getting around that.

The next day would be the day when Han Sen was to fight Lone Bamboo. When he returned to Jade Island that evening, he went straight to studying Jadeskin. He didn't worry about the fight the next day.

Han Sen's level would not be affected by emotions. Win or lose, as long as he tried his hardest, that was enough. Worrying over the results was a waste of energy.

"Brother Han, are you here?" Yu Jing had arrived at Han Sen's island.

"What is it?" Han Sen came out the door and saw Yu Jing riding his Jade Night Crane. It circled the sky above.

Seeing Han Sen come out, Yu Jing came down and landed with the bird. He walked before Han Sen with a look of great worry and said, "Brother Han, what are you going to do to prepare for tomorrow?"

"What should I be preparing?" Han Sen looked at him with confusion.

Yu Jing looked depressed hearing that, and he gave a wry smile. "You are going to fight Uncle Lone Bamboo. You know how strong he is! You should be getting prepared."

“How so?” Han Sen asked, laughing.

“Such as taking some pills that can temporarily boost your power. Or perhaps even a treasure. The exams allow you to take drugs, and if you don’t have any, I have some very effective pills you might benefit from,” Yu Jing said, bringing out a few bottles. He placed them in front of Han Sen and said, “I can sell them to you for a cheap price.”

“I don’t have money.” Han Sen held his hands out to the sides, showing his empty palms.

“I can take an IOU,” Yu Jing said quickly.

“I don’t want to be in debt,” Han Sen said.

Yu Jing was angered by this, and he asked, “Do you want to win or not?”

“Yeah.” Han Sen nodded.

Yu Jing gritted his teeth and pulled out a bottle. He said, “This bottle belongs to the grandmaster elder in the sixth seat. It contains the fenghou pills he created. After you use them, they can make you as strong as a Marquise for a short time. The effects last one hour, and for the purpose of fighting Lone Bamboo, I can let you borrow them all.”

“Borrow? How? If I eat it, it’ll be gone,” Han Sen asked Yu Jing.

“You use them before the fight. If you win, you reimburse me for the pills,” Yu Jing said.

“What if I lose?” Han Sen smiled at Yu Jing.

“Then that is okay. You can pay me back slowly.” Yu Jing’s jaw was starting to ache.

“I want them, but never mind. I can’t pay you back if I lose.” Han Sen smiled.

“You...” Yu Jing was so angry. Yu Jing had never done anything that put him at a disadvantage before. He had received those pills from the grandmaster, and he treated them like a treasure. He wouldn’t use them willy-nilly. He kept them in a box, and no matter how much money he was offered, he wouldn’t sell them.

Now he wanted to give them to Han Sen, and Han Sen was declining. It made him furious.

If Han Sen lost the next day, he’d also go bankrupt. Thinking of that, Yu Jing had to suppress his anger. He squeezed the bottle into Han Sen’s hand and said, “Fine. You don’t have to pay me back. These are a gift. Use all your strength to fight, and try your best to win tomorrow.”

When Yu Jing spoke, he felt as if his heart was bleeding. His eyes were all red when he put the pills into Han Sen’s hand.

He knew that even if Han Sen did use the fenghou pills, there was a fine chance he wouldn’t win. But any chance was better than no chance. Yu Jing had to try everything he could to hold onto his money.

“If you really want to help, get me some Earl xenogeneic genes. I’ll pay you back for those,” Han Sen said, after a moment of thought.

“Sure. Which element do you need, and how many?” Yu Jing said quickly. If they’d give Han Sen a higher chance of winning, he’d do it. If he was going to go bankrupt anyway, he might as well risk it.

It does not matter. The more the merrier, but they do have to be Earl.” Han Sen smiled.

1991 Picked Up One

Not long after, Yu Jing was driving a flying beast car to Han Sen’s Jade Island. He hauled a whole bunch of xenogeneic genes out of the car. There were twenty-three of them.

“Brother Han, what do you need this many xenogeneic genes for? Will they help in the fight against Lone Bamboo tomorrow?” Yu Jing asked Han Sen.

“Yes, they will be quite useful. We can sign a contract, and I’ll reimburse you after the exam.” Han Sen moved the xenogeneic genes into his room.

Some of those xenogeneic genes were as small as one’s fingertip. Others were as big as a mortar and pestle. All-in-all, they took up half of his entire room space.

Fortunately, Han Sen had the technique called Consume. If he hadn’t, eating all of that in one night would have been impossible.

After Yu Jing left, he went back to the stone house and began cooking the smallest genes.

Han Sen swallowed a small bone. After he did, a weird power went into his own bones, and he heard an announcement: “Earl Gene +1”

After proceeding to eat more and more, Han Sen tried the Blood God Mantis mutant gene. He had eaten seventeen pieces, and when his Earl gene tally reached fifty-seven, the mutant gene did not play him the announcement he feared.

“I can finally eat it!” Han Sen put the ruby-looking bit into his mouth. He swallowed it, using Consume to digest it.

Quickly, a hot flush rushed through Han Sen’s body. Just like the ant queen gene, it circulated on a path through Han Sen’s veins. The mutant gene’s power took a long time to get absorbed. But after a while, he heard an announcement.

“Earl class xenogeneic geno art obtained: Red Reaper”

Han Sen tracked the energy flow, and suddenly, a reaper of red smoke appeared. It clutched a red scythe. It was just like the reaper that appeared on the mantis before.

The Red Reaper did not have a mind of its own. It was just a form of energy wrapped with a master’s control. Han Sen had to control it with his own will, but even so, it was very strong. It was far stronger than the Blood Good Mantis had been.

Han Sen checked, and he could see that the body was filled with red mist. When a portion of the body was broken, it could regenerate. It wouldn’t be damaged.

“This xenogeneic geno art is interesting.” Han Sen could do two things at the same time, so controlling the Red Reaper would not be difficult. Also, the power it wielded was stronger than Spell. That being said, it could only be used in close-quarters. The Red Reaper’s existence also consumed Han Sen’s own power. Every second it was around cost Han Sen energy, so he couldn’t use it for a very long time. Han Sen was strong, but even he would end up tired after using it for a while.

The Earl xenogeneic genes were so big, and Han Sen did not even have the time to eat them. He’d give them back to Yu Jing after the fight the next day.

The exam’s popularity was still as hot as it was a few days prior. Many people continued coming, all with the desire to watch Lone Bamboo. No one thought it was extra special today, though.

Yu Jing hid himself in a corner and did not show up. He didn’t want to be found by the men he was avoiding.

Thousand Feather Crane, Yun Sushang, Yun Suyi, and First Day had come to watch. Yun Suyi’s mind was wracked with conflicted thoughts.

Lone Bamboo had come to the exam place. When it was his turn to do battle, he walked forward.

Han Sen didn’t do anything particularly eye-catching, and he just walked before Lone Bamboo.

Everything seemed to be developing fairly ordinarily. This was what had occurred before every other fight with Lone Bamboo.

Seeing Han Sen walk over towards Lone Bamboo, Yu Jing—in the corner—felt beads of sweat form on his forehead and hands. He was more nervous than he would be if he was the one to fight.

“The Fenghou pills! Eat them!” Yu Jing, not seeing Han Sen eat the pills, wanted to scream.

But Han Sen did not do anything of the sort. He just walked over to Lone Bamboo, and at a distance of ten steps away, he started swinging.

Ghost Teeth Knife had purple sword air. It was like a beast that could sunder the air, and it roared as it came before Lone Bamboo.

Lone Bamboo had a jade sword on his waist, but he did not draw it. He used his left hand like a knife. The hand looked like jade, and it was swung at Han Sen like a blade. Its aim was the Teeth Knife knife air.

Pang!

The purple knife air slammed into the invisible knife air in the sky. The power shattered into a number of smaller knives that scattershot the ground.

The rocks were cut open by the knife air, and there were far too many impacts across the ground. The ground could not sustain the pressure, and so it cracked. The rocks arose, and they were cut in the air. They were shattered even more.

Dong!

Amidst the rocks and knife airs, they both started to move. Han Sen had his white Spell armor, while Lone Bamboo wore a jade armorset. Their knife airs kept going against each other quickly.

The knife airs were all over the place, and the ground was broken. Even the lines of the arena were flickering. It looked as if they'd break at any given moment. The audience members that were sitting fairly close, started to fall back a bit.

Everyone was shocked. No one expected a fight of such magnitude could erupt, without any prior indication.

Four Duke class elites landed around the arena. They released power into the ring of battle to stabilize it.

Yisha's student is different. He is almost as impressive as she was." In Sky Palace, a Sky with white hair observed the events of that arena. His eyes squinted.

The eyes of many ordinary students were having difficulty tracking the fight. They saw the power everywhere, but amidst it all, they could not actually see Han Sen or Lone Bamboo.

"D*mn! I thought that Han Sen was weak. He was carried into Sky Palace, wasn't he? How is he so strong?"

"Teeth Knife is powerful. It is too strong."

"It is no wonder he was the student selected by Knife Queen. I knew an elite like her would not accept a weak student."

As everyone discussed this, the knife air in the arena dissipated, then vanished. Han Sen and Lone Bamboo were still standing ten steps away from each other. The entire arena had been destroyed, as if an earthquake had taken place.

"Teeth Knife is powerful," Lone Bamboo said.

Your knife skills aren't too shabby, either," Han Sen answered.

"When I was in my 1964th dream, I was a knifeman. I wanted to be number one, and I attacked everyone. I died during a siege. This knife skill is called Picking Up One. I created this during that life," Lone Bamboo said calmly.

1992 The Knife Figh

“You need a knife?” Han Sen said.

Lone Bamboo nodded and said, “Yes, I need a knife.”

After that, Lone Bamboo bowed towards Sky Palace and said, “To all these people, I am asking if someone would be willing to lend me their knife.”

Then, a green light from Sky Palace traveled towards him like a rainbow. It descended in front of Lone Bamboo, and it was revealed to be a long, green knife. It was adorned with a number of decorative patterns.

That narrow knife was in front of Lone Bamboo, and it hovered there, making noises. The nearby students who were wearing knives felt the knives shaking on their belts.

“Thank you.” Lone Bamboo bowed before the knife before picking it up. When he did this, the knife made a sound.

The moment Lone Bamboo took the knife, it was as if the knife blended into him. You couldn’t tell if they were two separate entities, and it was like they were a part of each other. The knife was like an extension of his arm.

“The knife is called Spring Heart. It is a King class weapon.” Lone Bamboo touched the knife, and spoke to Han Sen with a serious tone.

“Ghost Teeth. It is also a King class weapon,” Han Sen said.

“Brother Lone Bamboo borrowed a weapon from the armory to fight Han Sen. This Han Sen is not as simple as he appears.”

“He is the student of Knife Queen, after all. He has a King class weapon, as well. Of course Lone Bamboo needs a King class weapon to compete. He’d be at a disadvantage, otherwise.”

“It is rare to see Lone Bamboo take things seriously like this.”

Yu Jing was quite excited. Lone Bamboo borrowed a King class weapon to fight Han Sen, and that meant Lone Bamboo was taking his opponent seriously. It also meant Han Sen was powerful, and this little factoid imbued Yu Jing with a glimmer of hope.

They both spoke, but they did not yet attack. They looked at each other, and there was an indescribable atmosphere between them.

Han Sen did not strike, but his presence was scary. He was like a beast on top of a mountain, roaring. And Lone Bamboo was like a sharp weapon, pointing at the sky. It wouldn't fall, even in the midst of a storm.

As their presences grew stronger, the presences touched each other and made an explosion. There were two powers fighting in the air.

"That scary knifemind is practically solid." Someone was in shock.

"These knifeminds are as strong as King class ones. How do they do it?"

"It makes sense for Lone Bamboo, as he has experienced a lot. He became a master of the knife in his dreams. It is understandable. But why does Han Sen have such a knifemind, too? Has he had experience as a knife master?"

Yun Suyi asked Yun Sushang, "Sister, out of Han Sen and Lone Bamboo, whose knifemind is stronger?"

Yun Sushang gave a wry smile. "Their knifeminds are both King class equivalents. I cannot make such a call."

First Day quietly said, "Lone Bamboo has experienced so much. His will can most certainly rival a King class or deified being. I did not expect Han Sen to possess such a strong will, as well. I have no idea how he has done this."

When those knifeminds reached their zenith, both the knives were swung at the same time. No one took a step back, and they both threw all their powers forward.

Only one of them would emerge victorious. There was no other possibility.

Dong!

The knives came against each other. Their souls were colliding. This was a fight about strength.

The striking sounds, and the moaning of their souls, trumpeted between the knives. A single second later, the two knifelights flashed between them. The shattered knife air broke everything around them, but neither of them backed away.

In this moment, the loser would be determined by whoever took a step back.

The knife light was green and purple, in the center. They kept hitting each other, making noise. No one could see anything in the gap between the two.

When the collision reached its max, a stronger power exploded in the middle. It blew them both a dozen meters away. Boom!

The next second, everything between them turned to dust. There was a big crater in the middle.

Lone Bamboo's eyes looked as if they were on fire. His left hand gripped the bottom of the handle, and he lifted it back up with two hands. Then, he slashed towards Han Sen like an executioner.

The green knifelight suddenly formed a line that split heaven and hell. It was coming for Han Sen, and it came at him like it was going to cut the world in half. Black and white. Sky and earth. Yin and Yang. They were not supposed to merge.

Han Sen looked heavy. He drew a circle with his Ghost Teeth Knife, and when that knifelight struck the circle, it ricocheted off in a different direction.

And then Han Sen shouted. The knife circle sent the knifelight back to Lone Bamboo.

"Great!" Lone Bamboo shouted. He went forward with the Spring Heart knife. He slashed towards the knife circle. The knifelight broke the knife circle, and the knifelight that came back was following the subsequent hit back to Han Sen.

Han Sen was not backing down. He held Ghost Teeth Knife above his head and slashed in Lone Bamboo's direction. The knife air was like a beast going after Lone Bamboo's knifelight.

They hit each other in the air, like water being thrown against each other. They blended into each other and disappeared.

It was just a few slashes, and people were confused. They did not know what was happening.

"Seeing that knife skill, I realize my own knife skills are rubbish," said a Marquise that practiced with knives.

"These two are too scary. I would rather fight a Marquise than fight someone like that, who is at my same level," murmured an Earl that looked pale.

He imagined himself being down in that fight and knew that he would be killed, either by the hands of Han Sen or Lone Bamboo.

An Earl felt the same way and said, "Their levels are not like their official tier. They might be Earls, but even if they were to challenge Marquises, I find the former more likely to win."

"It is no wonder Knife Queen wanted to take an outsider student. For him to be able to fight with Lone Bamboo like that, Han Sen must be a monster."

The battle was harder than Han Sen thought it would be. He pushed Teeth Knife and his knifemind to the max, but he still could not suppress Lone Bamboo. He was in a bad situation, and the slightest mistake would mean he'd lose.

The people watching were enjoying the spectacle. Every attack that was performed was something phenomenal. Sometimes, after seeing a move, the audience would just think about it. And while they thought, Han Sen and Lone Bamboo would exchange a hundred more moves. People wished they could replay it all, so they could examine every detail.

Eventually, many elites from across Sky Palace came over to the arena. Kings gathered to witness the fight.

1993 Competing Skills

"Sister, can Han Sen win?" Yun Suyi's hands were drenched in sweat. She grabbed Yun Sushang's shoulder as she felt her body go soft. She feared she'd faint if she didn't stabilize herself.

"I really don't know," Yun Sushang said, but she felt bad about it.

"He can't win." A man's voice sounded next to the two sisters.

"Dad?" Yun Sushang and Yun Suyi shouted upon seeing the man.

Thousand Feather Crane bowed and addressed him as master. That middle-aged man, with gray clothes, was Yun Suyi's father. He was the tenth elder called Yun Changkong.

"Dad, are you saying Han Sen will lose?" Yun Suyi couldn't help but ask.

Yun Changkong shook his head and said, "I said he wouldn't win. I did not say he will lose."

"Then what does that mean?" The three of them were frozen. What Yun Changkong said was too strange.

"Both of them have kniveskills and knifeminds that have reached a pinnacle that ordinary people cannot reach. There is a minor difference between winning and losing. Anyone can win. Anyone can lose. If this was a deathmatch, one would be a winner. But this is not a deathmatch; if this is for the comparing of skills, neither can truly win," Yun Changkong explained.

"Then how do we determine who will win?" Yun Suyi asked.

"Who knows? Why do you want to know the result so bad? Isn't it better not to focus on a winner and a loser, right now?" Yun Changkong smiled.

Yun Suyi wished to say something, but she noticed Han Sen and Lone Bamboo were separated. Neither of them were striking, and she nervously looked their way. She wanted to see what was happening.

"It looks like knives can't determine a winner." Han Sen sighed. He then put Ghost Teeth Knife back to his waist. He thought Teeth Knife was close to deified, given the extent of his knifemind. He wanted to suppress Lone Bamboo, but his tactic hadn't worked at all.

Lone Bamboo lifted the Spring Heart Knife in front of himself on a flat palm. He bowed, and then the knife became a green light and disappeared. It returned to the main island.

“What else are you good at?” Lone Bamboo asked as he looked at Han Sen.

If this sentence had come from someone else, it would have sounded like pure arrogance. But this was coming from Lone Bamboo, so it felt like something ordinary.

He had experienced so much. He was not only good with knives; he was probably talented with everything. That’s why he had the guts to say something like that.

Han Sen went silent and said, “Whichever weapon we use, the result will likely be the same. If we are not fighting for our lives, determining a winner might be impossible. This is pointless.”

“What are you thinking?” Lone Bamboo asked.

“If we can’t fight, then this match is dull. How about we stand here, and we use our techniques to compete? We can see who can crack the skills of the other,” Han Sen said quietly.

“Sure. You can go first,” Lone Bamboo said.

Han Sen did not hesitate. He cast a jade light that landed on Lone Bamboo’s chest.

When the Sky Palace students saw the jade light land on Lone Bamboo, they became so nervous that they wanted to scream.

But when the jade light landed on him, nothing really happened. It turned into a strange symbol, and it became attached to his chest.

Everyone looked at the symbol strangely; they were unsure what it was supposed to do.

Lone Bamboo moved his body and said, “This skill can reduce speed. It is very unique. This is the best geno art I have seen that is associated with such an effect. It is not much worse than a King class geno art, but...”

“But what?” Han Sen asked the question the entire audience wished to.

Lone Bamboo said coldly, “If I am not mistaken, your geno art uses the Outer Sky powers from Sky Palace.”

After he said that, everyone in Sky Palace was shocked. Han Sen was an outsider, and he had only walked the Road to the Sky once. And yet already, he could use the fabled words to synthesize a new geno art. It was unbelievable.

Everyone looked at Han Sen, awaiting his answer.

“Not bad.” Han Sen nodded, in admittance.

All the Kings, hearing Han Sen admit this, were shocked. It was hard to believe.

“He wasn’t carried because he could not walk to Sky Palace. It is because he was learning the two words Sky Palace from the Road to the Sky. He was successful. This guy is scary!”

The students in Sky Palace discussed. Even the powerful Kings all looked surprised.

If Outer Sky feelings were that easy to grasp, Sky Palace would have elites everywhere.

Lone Bamboo quietly said, “I practiced the Textless Book. Outer Sky powers come from there, so it won’t work on me.”

After that, Lone Bamboo’s body trembled. The turtle shell was then shattered. It hadn’t even left a mark on him.

“It is your turn.” Han Sen shrugged his shoulder. He knew it would be difficult to trap Lone Bamboo with the Turtle skill.

Lone Bamboo did not move, but his eyes did. And when they did, a light went into Han Sen.

Han Sen did not evade it, and he let the light enter him.

“What is this power? It feels so familiar.” Yun Sushang frowned in thought.

Yun Changkong said grimly, “It is a dream skill from the Dream Beast. Lone Bamboo was only there for ten years, and yet he learned Dream. Although it is not as good as a thousand dreams, it is enough to trap Han Sen in there for his whole life.”

When Yun Suyi heard that, she was shocked. A lifetime could be long, and so he might enter a sleep from which he would never wake.

But when that light landed on Han Sen, his eyes were so clear. It didn’t look as if he was going to dream.

The light on Han Sen slowly disappeared. And eventually, he smiled and said, “It is my turn again.”

“Please,” Lone Bamboo said simply.

First Day was confused, and so he said, “Weird. Why is Han Sen not in a dream? Does he have a skill that can remove dreams?”

Yun Changkong shook his head and said, “He didn’t need to remove the dream. Snaring someone in a dream requires a stronger will than your opponent, and for that foe to stumble into the dream. Han Sen didn’t fall into a dream, and that meant his will is as strong as Lone Bamboo’s. That is why it did not work on him. The nightmare that Lone Bamboo experienced was something that should have taken him ten thousand years to wake up from. But Lone Bamboo’s will continued to grow, even inside that dream. It reached a scary level, and the dreams after did not affect him. That is how he was able to wake up in only ten years.”

“Does that mean Han Sen’s will is as good as Brother Lone Bamboo, who experienced the dream? How did he manage that?” First Day asked with wonder.

“That is something you will have to ask him.” Yun Changking shook his head. He looked at Han Sen with admiration.

1994 You Come, I Go

Han Sen sighed as he tried to think of which skill he might need in order to defeat Lone Bamboo. Han Sen had mastered many techniques, but when compared to Lone Bamboo, he only excelled in a meager few.

Lone Bamboo could spend a lifetime learning proficiency with a skill in the space of one dream. Han Sen, however, was just a human. A life was only a few decades long. He wasn't even a hundred years old, and so he couldn't compete with Lone Bamboo.

If they were going to continue competing like this, Han Sen would run out of skills to use. So, he had to end the fight. This could not go on much longer.

"But how do I stop Lone Bamboo?" Han Sen wondered. But then, the light of an idea popped up.

Han Sen moved his Ghost Teeth Knife, but it wasn't headed for Lone Bamboo. He struck a rock on the ground and cut out a ten-meter-long, rectangular stone. He placed it on the ground.

People were curious and unsure what he was doing.

Han Sen punched the rock's side. Then he smiled at Lone Bamboo and said, "Can you do that?"

Everyone thought this was weird, because when Han Sen punched the rock, there was no mark left on it at all. They didn't know what he meant by this.

Lone Bamboo's hand became a knife, and he slashed the rock and cut it in half.

And then, people realized that no mark had been left on the side of the stone Han Sen had punched, but on the inside, there was the mark of a fist. The stone around that fist-shape had become dust. It appeared after Lone Bamboo cut the rock open. There was a fist-shaped hole. It fit Han Sen's fist.

"Very powerful Yin force. He can punch a ten-meter-long rock and not break it. With this Yin force, armor would be useless against him. Any defense would find itself obliterated," said someone in the audience, surprised.

Lone Bamboo did not speak, and just punched the rock that had been cut in half. It was still the same, and the rock did not look damaged.

Han Sen used a knife to cut that rock in half. The side that was closer to him had a fist mark, even though the location was the same.

“Good,” Han Sen complimented. He had practiced with Yin Yang forces. He had spent much effort to become talented with it, but Lone Bamboo was not much worse.

The students of Sky Palace were so happy. They were complimenting Lone Bamboo’s punch. Han Sen was the one who posed the question, so it was obvious he’d be good at it. It was more surprising that Lone Bamboo was able to do the same.

Lone Bamboo said emotionlessly, “When I was in my 731st life, I was a weak woman. But I was born in a boxing family. I was bullied, but I was still able to create a Yin force fist skill. It was not powerful, but it hurt others on the inside. I killed all those who bullied me, and I became an infamous villain. But then alas, I was poisoned. It took three long years for my organs to rot, and for me to finally die.”

Lone Bamboo spoke of this calmly, as if it was nothing. Even so, people were shocked to hear all this.

Your turn,” Han Sen said quietly. He was saddened to hear about Lone Bamboo’s dream.

Lone Bamboo picked up another piece of rock. He stabbed it into the ground like a tablet, leaving seven or eight meters of it sticking out.

Han Sen looked at Lone Bamboo, unsure what he was going to do. If they were going to write and compete with their wills, Han Sen could use Teeth Knife knifemind. He wouldn’t lose.

But Lone Bamboo knew this, and so Han Sen could guess that this wouldn’t boil down to simple writing.

Lone Bamboo looked at the rock, but he didn’t pull out his sword. He walked back ten meters and said, “My sword will break through nine tiers. Can yours?”

The students that watched were confused. They didn’t know what that meant. Furthermore, he only spoke and did not perform anything.

Yun Suyi was confused, too. Just as she was going to ask Yun Changkong, there was an explosion. The surface of the rock was blown up, and there was a crack. And then, there was writing on it. “I want to break through nine tiers.” The words were carved into the stone, as if by a weapon. It felt like a mad bull. It felt as if those words were going to come out of the stone and leap into the skies.

“Sonic blade is not too rare. It can break rocks one hundred meters away, but Lone Bamboo can write with it so powerfully. Not one else who has practiced with sonic powers could do such a thing. This isn’t a matter of control. It’s just that no one else can make a sound like that.” A Sky Palace Duke found himself in shock.

“Because Lone Bamboo has experienced a lot, he has collected so many skills and feelings. Normal people are glad to just have one. Han Sen has practiced with knives and Yin, which is rare for someone of his age. There is no way he has sonic powers, as well.”

“I am afraid Han Sen cannot compete with Lone Bamboo now.”

“There are no others that can equal Lone Bamboo. Even though Han Sen is strong, to compete with Lone Bamboo like that is impossible.”

Many students were shocked. Han Sen smiled and asked, “Which life did you learn this skill in?”

Lone Bamboo’s face did not change, and he calmly said, “It was in my 3754th life. In it, I was a musician that killed others with my music. I was trapped in an echoing valley, and eventually killed by my own musical powers.”

Han Sen shook his head and did not say anything. He walked to the other side of the rock, just as Lone Bamboo had done. He stopped ten meters away and took a deep breath.

“Can Han Sen do it?” Yun Suyi was worried, and so she grabbed Yun Sushang’s arm. She knew they could not be romantically involved, but that did not mean she wished to see Han Sen fail.

Yun Sushang had a wry smile. “How am I supposed to know? But not many people practice with sonic powers, and especially to the degree of Lone Bamboo. They are a rare talent, and we haven’t seen Han Sen use a technique that is in any way similar to it. This is bad.”

Yun Suyi was even more worried now. She wanted to say something, but before she did, Han Sen was speaking again.

“Sitting in the clouds, lonely and cold,” Han Sen said. He didn’t think too much about it, but he wanted to comfort Lone Bamboo. He wanted to understand him.

Lone Bamboo had suffered ten thousand nightmares. Although he had become a genius as a result, Han Sen knew he must have been sad and lonely. No one knew how difficult it was to be that powerful. No one could understand the pain.

After Han Sen wrote those words down, the rock shattered like powder. The seven words appeared, and they hit the onlookers like a physical weight. People’s hearts sank in their chests.

1995 One Sword Wakes the Heart Demon

“D*mn! This guy has a powerful sonic skill?” The audience at Sky Palace had their mouths wide open.

Yun Suyi looked very happy. She looked at Yun Changkong and asked, “Dad, does that mean that Han Sen passed the test?”

“I guess so.” Yun Changkong saw Han Sen’s sword convey a portion of his strong mind, but since Yun Changkong wasn’t proficient with sonic powers, he couldn’t judge too accurately.

“It is your turn.” Lone Bamboo saw the words Han Sen had written, and after a glimmer of surprise, he returned to his normal state. He spoke to Han Sen calmly.

Han Sen was delighted. He had learned from Six Paths Emperor the Six Paths swordskills. Amongst them was Sonic Sword, which he also took the time to learn. It was fortunate he had learned it, too. If he hadn’t, he’d have lost right then and there.

Six Paths swordskills were so strong. They couldn’t have been any worse than the swordskills practiced in the geno universe. If he had been born here, Six Paths would have been a famous swordsman for sure.

Thinking about Six Paths swordskills, Han Sen thought to himself, “The spirit sword of Six Paths can trigger depression and break the will of enemies. It can make them fall to depression. Lone Bamboo has experienced so much, so he must be quite depressed already. The more depressed a person is, the more effective this is. Perhaps there is a chance I can win, after all.”

Han Sen looked at Lone Bamboo and smiled. “I have a sword. You can take a look at it, if you want.”

“Yes, please,” Lone Bamboo responded.

Han Sen ran a skill. When he learned Six Paths’ swordskills, he learned Heart Sword first. He hadn’t practiced much of the other five, but he had used this a great deal. The others weren’t comparable to his proficiency with this.

He put his right finger and middle finger together. It looked like a sword, and with it, he pointed at Lone Bamboo’s forehead.

Lone Bamboo did not dodge. Calmly, he watched Han Sen’s performance. But when Han Sen’s sword air came to his forehead, Lone Bamboo’s face changed.

The Kings in Sky Palace noticed Lone Bamboo’s face change. And what they saw shocked them. They couldn’t see what was so special about that sword, to make his face change like so.

Ordinary people, and even the Kings themselves, thought it was an average strike. There was nothing special about it, or so it seemed. It really looked like a normal strike.

“What is this? Is it something different? I can’t see the power inside it.” “If you could see it, you would become Lone Bamboo.”

“Oh, no! Han Sen is a top enemy to shake Lone Bamboo so much.”

A second later, Han Sen’s finger was on Lone Bamboo’s forehead. Then, he pulled it away. He returned to his position.

Lone Bamboo's cold face was contorting in a bad way. His eyes were full of red vessels. He was trying to control something. But the scary power on him was getting heavier. The power in his body was like an angry beast raging around inside of him. He had only spilled some of its presence, but it was visibly scary.

"Oh, no! Han Sen's strike has triggered Lone Bamboo's demons." Yun Changkong's face lost a little color.

"Dad, what is going on?" Yun Suyi and the others did not understand, either. They all turned to look at him.

Yun Changkong looked complicated, and he explained, "Lone Bamboo's mental torture was excruciating, and he persevered through the ten thousand nightmares by his sheer force of will. Even though he endured it, he has never come to feel at peace. It is like when a flood comes, and you raise a dam to stop the flow of the water. It's a reservoir.

All the water is stopped where it is, but it does not disappear. It is still there. The more he stops these thoughts, the greater the depression he feels. Imagine how scary it must be to have the struggles of ten thousand lives in your mind."

"But the ten thousand nightmares were endured, and he survived despite his depression. Without interruption, keeping it at bay with a dam might work. But Han Sen's sword seems to have triggered the depression to act out. The suppressed emotions, that were built up for ten thousand years, have been let loose in an explosion. Lone Bamboo's mental fortitude had been broken. His ten-thousand-year depression has come. It is scarier than whatever he felt in any particular one of the lives he experienced. That depression might very well break him now, and it probably would do the same even if he was a King. Lone Bamboo..." Yun Changkong stopped talking. He looked worried.

Lone Bamboo was breathing like a beast, with green veins pulsating. His presence was losing its composure. He was looking more like a demon, almost freed from its cage. Many students that were watching look terrified at the mere sight.

Roar! Lone Bamboo roared to the sky. The energy inside him broke free, and it burst out.

The whole place filled up with scary feelings that were hard to describe. Han Sen was in the arena. Even the students outside the ring could feel Lone Bamboo, even if they had a weak will. Their eyes started to cry. They felt hopeless, and they wished to die.

Some Baron students could not control themselves. They pulled out their swords and put them to their necks. It felt as if there was no more hope, and only sadness would prevail. They felt as if there was nothing left to live for, and death was all they could want.

"Hmph." A sigh came from the palace. Some weird strength re-imbued the arena, separating it from Lone Bamboo and his power.

The students that were going to cut themselves, snapped out of their daze. They were so scared by what happened, many of them had p*ssed themselves.

In the arena, Lone Bamboo stared at Han Sen with a scary presence. His face looked terrifying.

Han Sen did not expect Lone Bamboo's depression to be this heavy. It exceeded all his expectations, and he rather regretted doing what he had done. If Lone Bamboo could not withstand the pressure and tried to kill himself, even if the elites of Sky Palace saved him, he would continue living with a broken mind.

Han Sen wanted to win, yes. But he did not want to destroy Lone Bamboo.

But now, it was too late to stop. He had triggered Lone Bamboo's depression, and not even Han Sen could suppress it. "Dad, what is going on?" This time, even Yun Sushang sounded shaky.

Yun Changkong looked dim, and he slowly said, "Han Sen's talents are too scary. He has completely triggered the volume of Lone Bamboo's depression. Lone Bamboo's demons have awoken. This now leads to two possibilities. Either he beats the demon and reverts to his previous self, or he succumbs to it. If that happens, he might try to commit suicide or even kill people."

"Can Brother Lone Bamboo make it?" Thousand Feather Crane asked.

"Hard!" Yun Changkong spoke only one word.

1996 Fight Me

"Living is hard, and life is grey."

This time, Han Sen had to acknowledge the fact that he had done something to harm another person that would not benefit himself. He had broken a dam that restrained the turmoil and pain of a thousand lifetimes. It had unleashed a demon.

The students beyond the arena were protected by the elites, so Lone Bamboo's emotions were trapped inside the arena. And in that arena, only Lone Bamboo and Han Sen stood against that tide of pain. The wretched emotions stemming from Lone Bamboo were all bearing down on Han Sen.

Han Sen felt as if his life was grey, desperate, painful, sad, and full of regret. All these emotions were striking him at once. No matter how strong his will was, he could not fend them all off.

A pretty young bride stepped out of a red carriage. She was to marry a handsome man, but during the ceremony, a group of thieves stormed in. The knifelights flashed, and blood was everywhere. Obscene laughs cackled in the air. The pretty bride-to-be was raped to death in front of her husband.

In this life, Lone Bamboo died without closing his eyes.

In a forest, a mother tiger was playing with two cubs. But suddenly, there was a gunshot. The mother tiger was hit by a tranquilizer and immobilized. She watched as her two children were skinned and cooked. The hunters ate them, until the last scraps of them were gone. The tiger's eyes shed blood tears.

In this life, Lone Bamboo would have rather died.

In the sky, a swordsman was fighting a number of enemies. He killed many, but he was injured. He was left powerless, and he would soon die from his wounds.

A middle-aged man, holding a young woman, looked at the swordsman with disdain. He laughed. "Lone Bamboo, just die. I will play with your woman and tend to your home. Perhaps I might kill your son, though."

The swordsman roared in fury, but death was not something he could escape. He died beneath the man's feet, without the strength to even grasp at his clothes.

Every dream was a loop of despair. Every life had lived, rich or poor, important or menial, ended sadly.

Lone Bamboo's despair was driving Han Sen crazy. The depression lay heavily on Han Sen as he saw the strife Lone Bamboo had been through.

Although he didn't have to experience all of Lone Bamboo's nightmares, he saw the saddest scenes in Lone Bamboo's memory. They were sent directly into Han Sen's mind, and they made Han Sen feel as if he was right there.

Han Sen wanted to use his will to defeat the encroaching depression, but it was too scary. He could not hold it off. He was forced to experience all those sad stories, and they hurt him. He wanted to die.

Han Sen quickly focused on trying to fight against the depression with Lone Bamboo.

In that arena, Lone Bamboo and Han Sen were standing in front of each other. Lone Bamboo looked like a demon, and Han Sen had his eyes shut, with all color drained from his face.

The quiet now was scarier than if they were having a swordfight. Lone Bamboo's terrifying presence was growing in magnitude. It was like a broken dam that could not hold back the flood.

Lone Bamboo looked hopeless, as if he wanted to bring ruin to everything. His hand moved to the jade sword on his waist.

"Oh, no! Lone Bamboo can't restrain it anymore," Yun Changkong said, looking sick.

The elders of Sky Palace arrived at the arena. They all stared down at Lone Bamboo seriously.

The sadness and loneliness of thousands of years was something that not even a King could withstand. Even the leader of Sky Palace himself could not fix something such as this. All they could do was watch, for they could not help him.

If you were sick in your heart, you had to help yourself. If Lone Bamboo could not do this, not even God could save him.

Han Sen was not any better than Lone Bamboo, and now he was fighting against that depression. His will was being consumed by the hollowness spreading through him.

No matter how strong a human was, everyone had some measure of empathy. The lives Han Sen was seeing would make even a god cry. And Han Sen was just a human.

Han Sen's eyes were starting to become dull, and his body felt like death.

"Oh, no! Han Sen has been invaded by Lone Bamboo's demon." Thousand Feather Crane could see something was amiss. He spoke to Yun Changkong, "Master, should we take Han Sen out of there?"

"Han Sen cannot be moved now. He is the one that triggered Lone Bamboo's depression. His presence is helping Lone Bamboo. He still wants to win. If Han Sen was taken away, then Lone Bamboo would lose his purpose. He would break completely, and then there'd be no hope left," Yun Changkong said while shaking his head.

Lone Bamboo's eyes looked murderous, and his face looked demonic. His breathing was hoarse. The green veins in his hand were bulging, stretching the skin. He pulled out his jade sword slowly. The jade sword was like a mountain.

In Sky Palace, a woman frowned.

"Leader, Lone Bamboo cannot control his demon. Are you not going to help?"

The Sky Palace leader shook his head. "If we strike now, we will only save a corpse. He has to save himself."

"The demon is in his heart. How is he going to save himself?" the lady said.

"If his will is there, he still has a chance to get through this alive," the Sky Palace leader said quietly.

"Where will he find the faith he needs?" the lady asked.

The Sky Palace leader did not answer. He looked at the arena, where Han Sen and Lone Bamboo were.

Lone Bamboo had drawn a jade sword. It was a clean blade, without a single mark or speck of dust on its surface. But the jade sword had a terrifying aura, as if it was carrying all the fires of hell.

Then, under the weight of the depression, Lone Bamboo's whole body became wreathed in black fire. The fire was disturbing to look at.

Lone Bamboo lifted the jade sword towards Han Sen. He walked slowly, his lips moving as he went. He was speaking too quietly for anyone to hear what he was saying, though.

"Has Lone Bamboo fallen fully under the control of the demon?" Thousand Feather Crane asked.

Many of the elites and elders thought Lone Bamboo was being controlled by the heart demon. It wanted to unleash its anger and kill Han Sen. Their expressions looked horrified.

The Sky Palace students saw Lone Bamboo reach Han Sen. He was like a man-eating demon. It was a sight that shocked them.

Han Sen stood motionless, his eyes still closed. It was like he didn't know Lone Bamboo was coming. His face turned grey, and his presence was fading fast.

All the nightmares kept flashing through his head. He had been infected by them. Although they were not as real to him as they were for Lone Bamboo, they were deep in his heart.

Lone Bamboo stepped over to Han Sen with red eyes. He raised his sword and swung it at Han Sen.

Yun Suyi screamed.

Yun Changkong and the elders were now wondering if they should save Han Sen.

But Lone Bamboo's sword did not reach Han Sen. He pointed it at Han Sen's nose, and then he roared like a monster. "Fight me!"

"He is not lost!" the crowd realized, thrilled.

Han Sen's eyes opened, and he grabbed his Ghost Teeth Knife.

1997 Knife and Sword Battle

The knife and the sword made a crackling noise when they clashed. The knife and sword airs broke at the same time.

Slashing. Thrusting. Swiping. Han Sen and Lone Bamboo's techniques were very simple, but they were also very deadly.

The battles before had been stunning enough, but this was a genuine fight. They had only been comparing skills before this. Now that they were fighting, their movements were simple and direct, without any added flair or style. But even so, every single attack was incredibly scary. Life and death were one misstep apart.

Dong! Dong! Dong!

The knife and the sword kept attacking. The sword airs and the knife airs were running at maximum power, and the swordmind and knifemind of the fighters swirled around the arena.

Their minds were growing in strength as the terrifying fight progressed, and suddenly, they were breaking into a King class tier of battle. They were like wild horses that couldn't stop running.

"Their minds are still increasing. This is cheating! Are they going to become deified? They are just Earls!"

“They have ascended so high because the depression is driving them forward. They cannot escape the effect it is having on them.”

“If they are Earls, why are they fighting so far out of their league?”

“It is a shame that if they keep fighting, there won’t be a winner. It will be a tragedy no matter who comes out on top.”

“It’d be a tragedy if they did not fight, as well. For now, Brother Bamboo has faith. If they stop fighting, his perseverance will be consumed by the depression.”

“It would be useless to continue the exams after this fight. No one else could stand up to either of those two.”

Yun Suyi was so scared. She grabbed Yun Sushang’s shoulder. Her heart was thumping with every knife and sword flash. She looked pale.

Yun Sushang held her hand and comforted her.

“Master, if they keep fighting, the depression will affect them more and more. Should we stop them?” Thousand Feather Crane could see that their situation was a poor one.

Yun Changkong shook his head. “It is too late for them to retreat. If they do that, they will die. For now, they can only proceed. They are going through hell, so they have to keep going. They need to survive in death. If they do this, they might have a chance.”

“Survive in death?” Yun Suyi quickly asked.

Yun Changkong sighed and said, “The depression will only increase as they fight. But this is also a release of that energy. Lone Bamboo kept it suppressed for the longest time. If he is able to unleash it all now, there is a hope he will end up fine. It’ll be difficult, but there is nothing else he can do.”

“What about Han Sen? Does he need to release energy?” Yun Suyi asked.

Yun Changkong shook his head. “It is the opposite for him. He does not need to release anything. He is being affected by Lone Bamboo’s depression. The demon resides inside Lone Bamboo, so Han Sen is fighting to keep his emotions from destroying himself. He is fighting for his life right now; he won’t want himself to die.”

“How this fight ends will depend on Han Sen. If he gives in to the demon and ends up wanting to die, Lone Bamboo will lose his purpose and give in to the demon, too. Even if Han Sen can withstand that demon, if he stops fighting with Lone Bamboo and allowing him to release his depression, things will end up the same. So, Han Sen cannot afford to lose to himself nor Lone Bamboo.”

Hearing Yun Changkong, Yun Suyi grew more nervous than ever.

The minds of the two were strong. Under a King class shield, there was still a leak. Many of the Sky Palace students were affected, and their hearts were beating savagely in their chests. They wanted to die or destroy things.

There was a cloud in the sky, above the arena. The white cloud had a beast inside it. The cloud spread like water, covering the entire arena. It smothered the scary feelings permeating the arena, so the audience could not be affected.

“It is Dream Beast. Dream Beast removed their feelings. If their feelings reach a level a King class cannot handle...”

The students of Sky Palace felt better, but the beast in the cloud was quivering.

The King class elites could not withstand the feelings given off by Han Sen and Lone Bamboo. Their feelings were exceeding the range of a King class being. That was why the Dream Beast had to emerge and lend a hand in suppressing the emotions. It had to ensure the feelings and depression wouldn't affect the students enough to permanently harm them. Not many people could carry such depression and keep on going, as Lone Bamboo had done.

Han Sen's knife was moving like crazy, and his knifemind was going wild. His body was like a beast that could shred space.

Han Sen had received his deified knifemind from the scabbard, but he was just carrying it. It didn't belong to him, so he could not use every ounce of its strength when he used it.

But now, underneath the rage of that depression, Han Sen had to exert all his power and knifemind to retaliate against his foe. His knifemind was drawing closer to him beneath that pressure.

And Han Sen was able to understand the Teeth Knife knifemind more, as well. It was assimilating with Han Sen. The knifemind had just been a tool, but now it was becoming one with his instincts.

Teeth Knife knifemind destroyed everything, and that destructive madness spurred Han Sen with the desire to live- even in the face of all that depression.

When Han Sen merged with the Teeth Knife knifemind, Ghost Teeth Knife became stronger.

Ghost Teeth Knife followed Han Sen because of the deified knifemind he possessed. It was not following Han Sen explicitly. So, with Han Sen limited ability to use the deified knifemind, he still hadn't been able to unlock Ghost Teeth Knife's true power.

But when Han Sen combined with the deified knifemind, Ghost Teeth Knife's true power was triggered through Han Sen.

Boom!

Han Sen felt the scary power of Ghost Teeth Knife flow out of the knife. If he hadn't awakened it, the demon would have lost control. A mark on Lone Bamboo's forehead cracked. An eye opened there, and it began to bleed.

Han Sen had seen Thousand Feather Crane's eye, which was perfectly clear. Lone Bamboo's was different.

Lone Bamboo's Sky eye was full of a murderous feeling. The mere sight of it could shake someone's soul. When the Sky eye opened, Lone Bamboo's power increased. It was unbelievable. With dismaying speed and strength, he teleported in front of Han Sen.

1998 The Demon Blocking the Sky

Han Sen slashed at Lone Bamboo, but Lone Bamboo did not dodge. He reached out his hand and grabbed Ghost Teeth Knife's blade. Blood poured from his hand, but he wasn't planning on letting go.

Han Sen pulled back, but he couldn't pull Ghost Teeth Knife out of Lone Bamboo's grasp. Having opened his Sky eye, Lone Bamboo was now far stronger.

Before Han Sen could react again, Lone Bamboo's Sky eye fired a red light. It was coming toward Han Sen.

Han Sen wanted to block the red light with his left hand, but Lone Bamboo was also swinging a jade sword at him.

There was nothing he could do, so Han Sen had to react quickly. He let his knife go and evade the red light and the jade sword. When he swept past Lone Bamboo, Han Sen punched his opponent's wrist, knocking the jade sword out of his hand. He moved to grab it.

The knife and the sword had lost their respective masters. Yun Changkong and the elders said, "Oh, no!"

"What is it?" Yun Suyi asked, suddenly looking nervous.

Yun Changkong frowned and said, "Lone Bamboo is affected by a demon. He will want to destroy everything. And Han Sen's Ghost Teeth Knife is an evil knife that wishes to destroy everything, too. Han Sen's Teeth Knife knifemind was triggered. It has a very destructive element. While it is held by Lone Bamboo, it makes the demon even angrier. And..."

"And what?" Yun Suyi quickly asked.

Yun Changkong had a wry smile. "And Lone Bamboo's jade sword is not a holy weapon. It is just a practice sword made from a Xuan Jade Spirit. Aside from being sturdy, it is practically useless. Han Sen has exchanged his King class weapon that aligned with his Teeth Knife kniveskills for a simple practice

sword. And on top of that, Lone Bamboo has his eye open. I don't think Han Sen can keep up much longer."

"How... Lone Bamboo's jade sword... How can it be a practice sword?" Yun Suyi and the others looked at it in shock. "Hmph." Yun Changkong sighed and did not explain.

After Lone Bamboo gripped Ghost Teeth Knife, the evil presence rose up, stoking the murderous power within him. He looked like a demon that wished destruction on all the world.

Boom!

He slashed towards Han Sen. The knifelight looked like a demon, coming to consume Han Sen. It looked like Teeth Knife, minus its Teeth power. It did have Ghost Teeth Knife powers, though, and the depression powers as well. It was more powerful now than it had been when Han Sen was using it.

"Palace Leader, are you not going to intervene? Han Sen is not going to be able to withstand that strike. They will both be destroyed," said a woman, frowning at Sky Palace leader.

The leader squinted his eyes and said, "There is no rush."

The lady felt saddened by this, and she said, "Lone Bamboo is your student, and Han Sen is one of Yisha's people. If anything happens, you can be the one to inform Yisha herself. You can do anything you wish, since you aren't afraid of her."

In the arena, Han Sen was wielding the jade sword. His swordmind exploded. He attacked the scary knifemind. The sword skills were those Lone Bamboo had just used.

The weapons had swapped owners, and the skills had been swapped now, too. The fight continued, with no winner seeming likely to emerge.

"Sh*t! Brother Lone Bamboo can use knives? And Han Sen can use swords, as well? This is strange! He can't be like Lone Bamboo, having experienced lifetimes of nightmares, right?"

"He's the only one who can fight Lone Bamboo like this."

Even King class sorts like Yun Changkong were surprised. They hadn't expected that Han Sen would be able to use the practice sword effectively against Lone Bamboo. His swordskills were very scary, and they appeared even stronger than when he used kniveskills. Unfortunately, his powers were a little suppressed by Lone Bamboo. He was still at a disadvantage.

Lone Bamboo, with his Sky eye open and an activated Ghost Teeth Knife, made Han Sen's Earl body look meager.

Han Sen was being careful. He knew he could not use super king spirit here, and he could not use his own swordskills. That was why he had to use Lone Bamboo's swordskills to fight.

Han Sen summoned the ant queen's mark, then he summoned the rabbit shoes and red mink glove. Now, Han Sen's situation was not as dire.

Han Sen stabilized the fight, then turned his mind back to the battle.

The battle was so breath-taking that the students were forgetting to breathe. Everyone just stared at Han Sen and Lone Bamboo. They did not want to miss a single moment.

Lone Bamboo's body was becoming stronger. Ghost Teeth Knife was triggered by his depression, and his full powers were showing.

Every slash was fueled with enough power to break space.

Han Sen wasn't wielding as much power, but his swordskills were flawless. When he moved, the jade sword was like a lotus flower. He was not at a disadvantage.

But Lone Bamboo's depression was getting stronger, and it was rising quickly. The presence surrounding him was becoming scarier. Han Sen had to fight back Lone Bamboo and the depression at the same time. He was feeling the pressure.

Suddenly, Lone Bamboo fell back across the arena floor. He kept his distance, and he just stared at Han Sen. His three eyes were red, and they looked like those of a demon.

Han Sen looked at Lone Bamboo, but he did not feel happy. He felt heavier.

Lone Bamboo was holding Ghost Teeth Knife. His presence seemed like it was on fire. He suddenly generated a real fire and blew it up into the sky.

"Leveled up?" Yun Changkong and the others were shocked.

Many students in Sky Palace understood what was going on, as well. Lone Bamboo, amidst all that was happening, was becoming a Marquise.

The Sky eye was red, like a bloodied sea. When Lone Bamboo changed, the Sky eye's red sea began to deepen. A horrifying power was swelling out of that eye, and it made Lone Bamboo's body stronger and stronger.

Ghost Teeth Knife was becoming stronger, too. The knife was wreathed in fire, like a demon roaring.

Lone Bamboo leveled up to the rank of Marquise and broke the equilibrium of the battlefield. An endless surge of power went into Ghost Teeth Knife, making it stronger. The knife's flames were like a demon's, and it covered the entire arena.

Han Sen thought he could fight Lone Bamboo with his presence and mind, but now he was under such suppression that he couldn't even release his powers.

The whole place was quiet. Only the flickering knife made a sound, roaring like a bonfire.

1999 Dongxuan Breakthrough

Ghost Teeth Knife's fire was getting scary. The power kept building, and Lone Bamboo was on the verge of losing all control. He was going to generate the strongest strike he could to end the fight and kill Han Sen.

The frightening knife flames lay seemed to exert incredible force on the broken arena, and the floor had already dropped a few feet. Han Sen's knifemind and depression were harming him. He could not unleash the power or the sensations inside his body.

But suppression like that made Han Sen feel energized. When people like Han Sen were put under greater pressure, they could perform much better.

Facing Lone Bamboo, who had just become a Marquise, heightened Han Sen's desire to win. The negativity he was under now affected him far less.

Spell's armor was flashing white. Her skin and bones turned a jade color. The blood in Han Sen's body was boiling and roaring.

Han Sen raised the jade sword in his hand. That jade sword lacked special powers, but it had not so much as cracked in the intense fighting. It was a testament to the quality of its craft.

Han Sen looked at Lone Bamboo, and then he stroked the blade of the jade sword. He poured power into it, but the power was very tame. It rested inside the sword, waiting to be unleashed.

Seeing Han Sen's behavior, Yun Suyi grabbed Yun Sushang and asked, "Is Han Sen hoping to accept this next attack?"

"It seems that way." Yun Sushang did not understand, either. If both fighters were Marquise, then Han Sen might have stood a chance. With an entire tier between them, however, there was no way Han Sen could withstand such an attack.

"He has no choice but to accept this strike," Yun Changkong said.

"Why?" Yun Suyi asked, confused.

"The arena is too small. Lone Bamboo's demon has locked down the entire arena. If Han Sen is still in that arena, he won't be able to evade it. So, he has to muster what he has to take it," Yun Changkong said.

"Can he defend against it? There is a whole level of difference between Earls and Marquises." Yun Suyi's voice sounded shaky. She looked disturbed.

Yes, he can endure it." Before Yun Changkong answered, someone else walked in and answered the question for him.

Yun Suyi looked over towards the voice, and she saw a man staring down on the arena. His eyes were red. He looked more nervous than the fighters on the field.

“Yu Jing, how do you know Han Sen can endure this attack?” Thousand Feather Crane asked Yu Jing.

“Fenghou Pills. I gave him a Fenghou Pill. If he takes it, he can temporarily wield the power of a Marquise. So, yes; he can take this attack, and he will win.” Yu Jing sounded like he was talking to himself, trying to make himself feel better.

“Fenghou Pills?” Yun Sushang and the others were shocked. “Why did you give him Fenghou Pills?”

“I bet every penny I had that he would win ten times in a row. He has to win; it’s either that or bankruptcy.” Yu Jing sounded like his words had been squeezed out through his teeth. His fists were clenched so hard, his nails were digging into the flesh.

If Han Sen’s opponent hadn’t been Lone Bamboo, Yu Jing would not have been so desperate. But the match was on now, and all was on the line. If Han Sen lost, Yu Jing would be dealt a devastating blow.

“It is good for him to have the Fenghou Pills. In that case, Han Sen can win.” Yun Suyi was very happy to hear Han Sen still had a chance.

Yun Changkong sighed and said, “He would have a chance if he had eaten it at the beginning. Now it is too late.”

“What is too late?” Yu Jing demanded. His sudden fear made him rather impolite.

Yun Changkong did not mind, though. He calmly said, “Lone Bamboo’s knifemind has already locked on to Han Sen. Any mistake on his part will prompt Lone Bamboo to attack. Do you think he has the time to take a pill?”

Yu Jing looked as if he had been electrified. He froze on the spot.

Yun Suyi had just been feeling calmer, but now she was nervous again. She said, “What do we do? Will Lone Bamboo kill Han Sen?”

“It is doubtful that the leader would stand idly by and let Han Sen be murdered. But if he stops this now, then Lone Bamboo will be destroyed,” Yun Changkong said with regret.

In the arena, Ghost Teeth Knife’s power was increasing. Han Sen was holding the jade sword between himself and the knifemind. He was like a mountain, and he wasn’t affected.

An amazing energy was coursing through Han Sen’s body. It was the Dongxuan Sutra. Under the suppression of his opponent, the Dongxuan Sutra was finally having a breakthrough. It was becoming Earl class, and the Dongxuan Aura was imbuing Han Sen with a grander power.

Although it was not enough to fight back Lone Bamboo’s knifemind, the energy release was making Han Sen’s eyes clearer.

The knifemind and the depression were things that Han Sen could see as sequence chains. They looked like a giant spider web, all around Han Sen.

When the Dongxuan Aura got stronger, the sequence chain became easier to discern. A level of detail that he had never previously discerned was now becoming clear.

Boom!

The Dongxuan Sutra's power exploded in Han Sen's body. It was like it was breaking all the cells inside Han Sen's body.

Although the feeling was destructive and strange, it gave Han Sen the sense of chains being severed. Under the suppression of the knifemind and the depression, he felt rather relaxed. He felt as if he was facing a fire and a wind, but they were raging around him rather than against him.

The pressure suddenly disappeared. No matter how powerful it was, in Han Sen's eye, it was just a sequence chain.

Two different powers were rising inside Han Sen's body, and they were pumped into the jade sword. The sword started to shine with a bright light.

Teeth Knife knifemind began to synergize with Han Sen's swordmind. They fit together like two halves of a zipper. Two completely different powers were combining into one inside the jade sword. The light from the jade sword extinguished the knife's fire.

Han Sen stood silently, holding the sword before him. He was like a god, standing amidst the knife's fire. No matter how much Lone Bamboo or Ghost Teeth Knife leveled up, they could not suppress Han Sen's power.

2000 The Battle Ends

The students watched the fight with gaping mouths. Han Sen's power didn't seem as strong as Lone Bamboo's, but it felt as if the contestants were somehow even. The situation almost seemed self-contradictory.

The King class observers noticed Han Sen's energy, and when they saw it, they were shocked. They felt the same thing that the students felt, but they could understand a bit more.

Han Sen wasn't as powerful as Lone Bamboo, who was a Marquise. But it seemed that his energy wasn't being suppressed. He was getting stronger.

Despite the fact that Lone Bamboo's knifemind was continuing to grow, Han Sen wasn't being crushed under the weight.

Both of them were emanating a terrifying intensity, and it was visible in their eyes. The students that watched the fight were not seeing Han Sen and Lone Bamboo anymore. It was just an evil demon fighting a jade-white shadow. When both of them collided, it was like day and night. Neither of them gained the upper hand, and neither of them was put down.

Boom!

Two powers were being pushed to their max. They crossed a threshold, and Dream Beast was unable to hold back the force they were letting off. The power spilled out, and many of the students of Sky Palace felt as if their heads were going to explode.

Lone Bamboo roared. He lifted Ghost Teeth Knife above his head with both hands. He summoned that scary power to strike Han Sen down.

Yun Changkong and the other elders grimaced. They knew this next strike would commit a tragedy. There was no way back now.

The leader of Sky Palace sighed. He stood up from his chair and readied himself to get involved.

Han Sen pointed the jade sword at Lone Bamboo. He was like a mountain. He did not look scared, and neither did it look as if he wanted to take a single step back.

Lone Bamboo looked frightening. His body and knife combined into one. His murderous fire erupted like that of a volcano, spewing into the sky.

Just when everyone thought Lone Bamboo was going to slash, Ghost Teeth Knife remained in the air and unmoving. Lone Bamboo looked at Han Sen, or rather, the sword he wielded. When he did, a complex expression overtook his face.

On a green grassy field, a little girl that was nine years old was holding a jade sword. She had ponytails. She was practicing swordskills, and she was obviously a beginner. She accidentally hit herself on the head and dropped onto the ground. She threw the sword away and wiped the tears from her eyes.

“Wan’er, why are you crying?” a young man asked, smiling. He crouched down next to her and took her head in a gentle hand.

“Big Brother, I am not practicing with a sword anymore. That stupid sword just bullied me!” Wan’er said, wiping her tears.

“How could your sword bully you? He is your most loyal, little guy. If you treat him well, he will be nice to you in return,” the young man said, as he picked up the jade sword.

Wan’er lifted her lips and said, “I am nice to it. I wipe it clean and even make it smell good, but even so, it just won’t listen to me. It’s annoying!”

The young man laughed. He held the jade sword, and as he stood upon the grass, he began to swing it. That jade sword was light in his hand, as spry as a dragon in a dance.

“Wan’er, to treat it nice is to understand it. Wiping it clean is not enough.” The young man stopped practicing, and he handed it back to the girl and rubbed her on the head.

“I don’t care. I hate it. It won’t listen to me. It only listens to you.” Wan’er sounded mad, but even so, she looked happy.

In a garden, a young man lay down beside a pond and repeatedly threw up. He was going to puke his guts out.

“Brother, how can you drink like that?” A lady with a big ponytail walked out of the house. She ran up to the young man and tried to help him up.

“Ignore me. It is fine,” the man mumbled.

“Brother, to fail is nothing. I know you are the best, and I know you have what it takes to win. You have to stay strong,” the lady spoke with sincerity, as she lifted the young man upright.

The young man fell back to the ground and passed out. He was too heavy to lift without any help.

The lady tried to pull him up, but she was unable to. She ran to the house and collected a blanket. With it, she covered him. Then, she sat down near him and prayed to the stars. “If there is a God up there, I hope you can help my brother and show him the way. I will do anything for that.”

Under the moon, the man lay on the ground with tears in his eyes.

“Wan’er.” Lone Bamboo looked at the jade sword and moved his lips. He did not make a noise, but his eyes said he was thinking of many things.

“I can’t fall... I can’t fall... If I am going to die... Even with just a dirty soul left... I have to keep going...” Lone Bamboo’s teeth shook, but his eyes looked adamant.

The knife’s fire was like a demon in the sky. It was just fading, rather than being destroyed.

“Lone Bamboo seems to have woken up a little.” The woman next to the Sky Palace leader sounded surprised.

Yun Changkong and the elders looked happy, but it was only for a second.

The demon’s roots were deep, and not even a King class could suppress it completely. It was remarkable that Lone Bamboo had managed to get his mind back in this condition, but there was no way he could suppress the desire of the demon.

Han Sen watched Lone Bamboo, surprised. Lone Bamboo controlled the demon at the very last second. He did not give in to it.

Lone Bamboo’s body quivered. He had experienced pain that could not be described. That scary depression and knifemind were fading inside him.

Everyone looked so happy. Lone Bamboo pushed the demon back into his body. Now, he was scarier than a ghost. The Nobles were all delighted. They had no clue how he had done that.

Han Sen put away his own powers. He lowered the jade sword and looked at Lone Bamboo. The power was no longer encompassing the arena.

Lone Bamboo threw Ghost Teeth Knife over to Han Sen. He said simply, "I am a Marquise. I should not fight. You win this round."

Han Sen picked up Ghost Teeth Knife and handed over the jade sword.

Lone Bamboo accepted the jade sword, wiped it clean, and resheathed it in his scabbard. That sword was his most precious possession.

Seeing Lone Bamboo leave, Han Sen spoke to himself. "His body contains a demon, but his heart possesses an angel. Strange man."

No one expected the scary spectacle to end this way, but it didn't affect the overall excitement.

A long time after that fight came to an end, people continued to talk about it. Those who watched that fight didn't forget the appearance of the fighters. They would never forget.