

Super Power

Chapter 901: Arrow Beast Soul

Flaming Porcupine: Arrow Beast Soul.

Han Sen looked at its type and became extremely happy at the result. He was incredibly dexterous with a bow, so he thought it was incredibly fortunate for his first beast soul in this realm to be an arrow.

Of course, Han Sen still needed a bow to use it with. If he could return to the Alliance, he could have produced an alloy bow for use in the Third God's Sanctuary, but alas, he could not.

Qu Lanxi was a little dazed, following the spectacle of the battle she had just witnessed. An ordinary creature that had opened three of its gene locks had just been brutally, and quite easily, beaten. Han Sen and the wind wolf made a remarkable duo. Their synergy and cooperation was tremendous, and it was difficult to believe they had only known each other for two months.

Han Sen was used to cooperating with Little Silver, and his time with the fox had made him proficient at working alongside other creatures. Furthermore, he was excellent at using Dongxuan Sutra's formations. Teaming up with the wind wolf was easy. It had taken a while for Little Wind to start listening to Han Sen's commands, and it still had a fair amount of training left to go if Han Sen wanted their teamwork be comparable to his relationship with the silver fox in the Second God's Sanctuary, but it was getting there.

"Should we return home?" Qu Lanxi asked. She thought that hunting a sole ordinary creature made for a fine day's work.

"How about we proceed deeper? There is no rush." Han Sen didn't want to go back just yet. The Flaming Porcupine was too big, and he couldn't earn many ordinary geno points since its meat would have to be shared.

Little Wind, however, leapt towards the porcupine's body to eat its fill.

Han Sen barked at it to stay away. He collected as much meat as he wanted and left most of it for the wolf.

Although a lot of the meat was given to the wolf, he couldn't become lax in his assertions of dominance. Han Sen was the alpha in their partnership, and he had to make sure it stayed that way, lest Little Wind thought of challenging him. Beasts were like that, unfortunately.

Qu Lanxi saw that he had left most of the flesh for the wolf, and while it was strange for her to see such waste, she knew they couldn't carry that much meat with them, if they truly chose to proceed.

Seeing Little Wind continue to gobble up the meat that he had been given, Han Sen said, "Could you mask or get rid of this blood smell? I'd hate to attract more creatures."

Many creatures in the Third God's Sanctuary had to eat food to survive, and all creatures had to eat to open their gene locks.

"I'm way ahead of you; it has already been erased," Qu Lanxi said.

Han Sen nodded. Qu Lanxi's powers were extremely useful, and he had made the correct choice in allowing her to come. Far more trouble would come their way, had she not accompanied Han Sen.

After Little Wind finished eating, they continued their trek. But after a while, the wolf stopped moving and refused to proceed.

"Is there danger up ahead?" Han Sen started walking in another direction, and Little Wind followed.

Han Sen brought Little Wind with him for precisely this reason, and thus far, he was satisfied with the wolf's performance.

"Wait! My senses are in chaos here. I can detect numerous creatures inhabiting the area ahead." Qu Lanxi stopped dead in her tracks as she stated her discovery.

"Can you tell what they are?" Han Sen said.

"Some scents were left behind by the forest crabs; of those, there are a dozen distinct sets. But there are also around twenty iron bug traces, too." Qu Lanxi analyzed the area for a while longer, and then said, "Fourteen of the iron bugs are normal creatures, whereas seven are ordinary class. The tree crabs are all ordinary."

"You can detect their strength, too?" Han Sen looked at Qu Lanxi with shock.

"Different tiers possess different smells, but I need comparisons with others to tell. If I had never smelled a creature before, then I couldn't tell you," Qu Lanxi explained.

They slowed down their trudge through the forest, and before long, they caught sight of a crab that was around the size of an average household plate. Their shells were blue and their pincers looked frightening. The creature's pincers were currently holding a fruit, and it nibbled the fruit as it perched in a tree.

"The shell of a tree crab is not to be taken lightly; it is incredibly tough. The tree crab's mouth is what you should target, for that is its only weakness," Qu Lanxi said.

Han Sen nodded in acknowledgement. He didn't want Little Wind to go in and brutishly kill it, so he decided to summon his porcupine arrow which he would wield in his hand.

Han Sen would use it like a javelin. He stared at the tree crab for some time, and when the timing was right, he launched the arrow towards it with a mighty chuck. The arrow's course was true, but the crab saw it coming. It raised its pincers in an attempt to stop the incoming projectile.

But the arrow, as if it had a mind of its own, moved in the air. It wove around the pincer and drove itself directly through the crab's mouth.

"Tzzii!" The crab fell down from the tree it was perched in and died.

"Ordinary Creature Tree Crab killed. No beast soul gained. Consume its flesh to gain zero to ten ordinary geno points randomly."

Han Sen picked up the crab as Qu Lanxi looked on in shock and exclaimed, "Are you sure you're a new surpasser? You are very powerful!"

"My fitness is better than most surpassers, I'll tell you that much." Han Sen, without explaining too much, called for Little Wind to rejoin him. Then he carried on walking.

There were many tree crabs in the area, and after two miles of walking, Han Sen was able to kill eight of them. He placed them all in a sack he had brought with him.

What was most strange, however, was the lack of geno plants. They hadn't seen any in an awfully long time.

"Have all the wild plants been eaten by the creatures that inhabit this place?" Han Sen's heart sunk to the sudden realization.

"Well, that's not right." Qu Lanxi frowned.

"What's wrong?" Han Sen jumped, thinking Qu Lanxi had uncovered his ability to absorb plants and realized it was the reason he had actually ventured into the forest.

"I can smell many iron bugs in the vicinity, yet we haven't seen a single one. Something is wrong," Qu Lanxi said.

"When were they last here?" Han Sen asked.

"There were countless creatures as early as yesterday," Qu Lanxi said, as she continued sniffing the air.

Chapter 902: Creepy Valley

Han Sen and Qu Lanxi continued their journey, and after a dozen miles of walking, they hadn't managed to find a single iron bug. From his slaying of the tree crabs, Han Sen was able to obtain three beast soul armor sets.

They didn't slay any tree crabs they encountered after that, but snuck around them instead. The sack they had brought with them was already stuffed, so killing more would be pointless.

Han Sen walked past a bunch of Blood-Scale Snakes, too. The groups were too large, however. Fighting them was a dodgy prospect Han Sen was keener to avoid at his current strength.

"That's strange. We really can't find any iron bugs, can we?" Once Qu Lanxi told Han Sen about the large host of iron bugs that supposedly occupied that area of Thorn Forest, Han Sen made doubly sure to scan the environment. It was all to no avail, however.

They had now walked thirty miles in total. By all accounts, they were still considered to be at the outskirts of Thorn Forest, but still, they should have encountered the bugs by now.

“Iron bug?” As Han Sen was walking, he turned to see Little Wind growling in a certain direction. They approached the area the wolf was indicating, and they finally found the insects. There were many iron bugs, all gathered in one place.

The iron bugs were fist-sized, and they had black shells. They skittered across the ground, all in unison, like a river of black oil. They seemed to be vacating the area.

“What are they doing?” Han Sen asked.

Qu Lanxi said, “I knew there were a lot of iron bugs, and they are supposedly social and tend to stick together, but this behavior is unheard of. I’ve never heard of it, at least.”

“Well, let’s take a look.” Han Sen was very interested in seeing what they were doing. If there was one thing he had learnt during his time in the sanctuaries, it was that if creatures were behaving strangely or abnormally, it was a sign there was treasure lying in wait.

Han Sen followed the bugs, and before long, they came to a valley that was shaped like a gourd.

The bugs were like a tide, flowing into the valley.

Because the bugs were everywhere, their presence veiled and marred the entire area. Han Sen could not see what lay beneath them.

“You and Little Wind wait here. I’m going to advance and take a closer look.” Han Sen pointed at the valley.

“Again, just be careful,” Qu Lanxi said.

Han Sen cast Aero to fly up the side of the valley, away from the bugs. Han Sen wanted to see what the bugs were doing in the valley all by themselves.

“Are there any high level geno fruits maturing, perhaps?” As Han Sen thought, he pushed his head forward and squinted his eyes to get a better look.

Han Sen caught sight of a meadow of rose-like plants. They were deep red in color, and they were beautiful. The bugs were all headed for them.

But outside the field of flowers, there were many cracks in the earth and dead bodies lay scattered and strewn across the area. It was like a river of dead bugs.

Still, the bugs seemed determined to head there. It was unclear what was damaging the bugs, but they unceasingly marched forward to their demise. The bugs that had died leaked a strange water.

“I wonder what level those plants are? They seem to be drawing all those bugs there to die.” Han Sen was shocked, watching the roses on their murder-spree.

Han Sen then saw a human-like shadow inside the rose bushes, but he could not discern many details. He wasn't quite sure who that person was.

Han Sen didn't want to remain out of the know, however, and he was curious who the person was and what they were doing. To discover this, he changed his position.

But there were too many roses, and they obscured the figure from every angle Han Sen could look from. Regardless of how he shifted his position, all Han Sen could make out was the faint outline of the person just sitting there.

There was one further detail Han Sen noticed, however. It wasn't the roses themselves that compelled the bugs to go there and die.

Han Sen saw that there were many candles placed around the roses. They were scented candles, and they seemed to be what was attracting the bugs, like a pheromone.

And Han Sen noticed that the cracks in the ground, many of which were filled with the corpses of the bugs, were half man-made and half-natural.

Han Sen thought this was the tricky work of someone: a person devoted to slaying those bugs.

“Is that a human or a spirit? Or maybe even a humanoid creature?” Han Sen was eager to find out who or what that shadowy figure was.

But from his current position, Han Sen could not tell. He'd have to get closer; and dongxuan aura and his eighth sense did not have a sufficient range to clarify things for him, either.

“I should have practiced the second tier of the Dongxuan Sutra and Jadeskin,” Han Sen said to himself, depressed.

Still, he was very happy. And it looked as if the candles were going to burn out very soon. If the man inside used candles to attract and kill the bugs, he'd have no choice but to unveil himself when he came out to change them.

Patiently, Han Sen waited until the candles burnt out.

One hour later, the candles were on the precipice of going out. Yet even so, the shadowy figure maintained its position. It remained sitting down in the meadow of flowers, not moving an inch.

When the light of the candles went out, and the smell they released began to fade, the iron bugs snapped out from their daze and stopped pressing into the valley that had killed so many of them. Many of them began to leave, returning to Thorn Forest.

“I don't think this person is going to reveal himself.” Han Sen frowned. If the person did not come out, then Han Sen wasn't going to go in, either.

Whoever was in there had to be very powerful, to gather the resources to attract so many creatures there to die. Han Sen did not want to make his presence known to that person, so he remained in hiding.

The iron bugs were almost all gone from the valley, and still there was no movement. But just as Han Sen prepared to return to Qu Lanxi, that changed.

Quickly, Han Sen scrambled back down to peer at the roses. He watched a person emerge from them, and when he saw the person's face, his jaw hit the deck. His mind was suddenly a mess.

Chapter 903: Bug Fight

A blonde, purple-eyed woman emerged from beneath the green bushes that cradled the red roses.

She didn't quite look human, and an emerald was embedded in her forehead.

It was a beautiful female spirit.

Her face was stunning to behold. It was cold, but that just amplified her mystique. Regardless of where she was, people would be taken aback by her beauty.

Han Sen was not surprised, but something in particular made him almost leap backwards in shock.

The woman was not wearing any clothes. When she stood up, the fine curve of her booty, and how it led all the way down her long legs, was a sudden, tantalizing sight. It was all on full display.

Han Sen's nose was getting hot with a coming nosebleed. Her big breasts and slim waist made her look as if she was straight out of a waifu manga. Humans could not possess such a body shape.

Although the image described might sound ridiculous, she looked natural.

When she emerged from the bushes, she looked cold. And the moment she stepped out, the flowers writhed their way around her to form an armor.

She was like a queen of gardens. She approached the cracks in the earth and removed a rose from her garment of flowers. She snapped the stalk in two and set them alight.

After this, Han Sen realized that it was the stalks of the flowers that were serving as candles.

The stalks caught on fire quickly, and as they burned, a strange fragrance began to emanate. Han Sen thought the bugs would end up returning, but they did not.

Han Sen thought it was odd, and he pondered why the iron bugs did not follow the fragrance as they had previously.

The spirit merely watched the stalk of the flower burn, facing the valley's entrance.

Not long after, Han Sen heard a weird noise from someplace else in the valley. Something was flying towards them quickly, and it went for the candle like an arrow.

It was an iron bug. It was a little smaller, but it was darker than the rest. Its shell was black like obsidian.

This bug had grown wings, and it flew extraordinarily fast, completely unlike the others.

This iron bug landed on the stalk and bit into it, with a look of exuberant joy on its face.

The spirit took a step back and merely observed the creature nibbling at the stalk. It didn't seem as if she wanted to fight it

"If the spirit wants to claim that bug, then why doesn't she? Is the stalk poisonous, maybe?" Han Sen thought it queer.

Right then would have been a perfect time to strike, but the spirit withheld any such action. She merely continued to watch the bug merrily munch on its meal.

As Han Sen pondered this, he heard something else come from further down the valley. It was a centipede, one that was entirely red. It ran past the cracks and came for one of the stalks.

The spirit had placed down many stalks prior to this, and thus, there was no conflict. The creatures each had their own.

Not long after, many more bugs arrived. They were of varying shapes and colors; some were black, some were red, and some were green.

The other bugs had come to feed on the stalks, as well. But before long, there were no stalks left, and a fight amongst the bugs started to erupt.

The red centipede was wreathed in flame, and it started to fight a bug with a green shell and eight legs.

The red centipede had the ability to spit fire, but it did not deter the green spider. Without fear, it skittered towards its many-footed foe.

Within seconds, chaos reigned. All the bugs were fighting between each other, none willing to leave the area.

The spirit continued to watch the fight, devoid of all emotion.

"Are those stalks stimulants?" Han Sen froze, seeing this. The powers the bugs were unleashing against each other were horrible, something he figured only mutant class monsters could do.

The spirit had played all those mutant class bugs like a fiddle. Han Sen knew he had to treat that spirit with great caution.

The bugs were out of control. Severed limbs and dead bodies lay scattered and strewn across the area, as they attacked each other with wild ferocity.

Watching so many insects die in such a fashion was a terrible sight.

When the battle was over, only the initial iron bug remained alive. A few of its claws had been broken, but that did not prevent it from dining on the leftovers of the battlefield.

As the bug dined on the bodies, its own body began to undergo a change. Its lost limbs recovered.

Colored dots peppered its all-black shell, and it seemed to have even obtained the centipede's flame and spider's green light.

Han Sen saw the bug claim all those powers for itself and was taken aback.

Katcha!

The iron bug's shell cracked, and something seem to emerge from inside its body. Following this, only an empty shell remained.

The newborn iron bug was white. Its body shone like jade. Its eyes were red and its wings were translucent.

"Tchzi Tchzi!" The newborn iron bug made a couple of sharp noises.

"So, after all that, the bug evolves?" The spirit frowned, as she thought to herself. The results were beyond her expectations. The iron bug was the weakest mutant bug, and yet it had somehow survived.

The spirit looked over the iron bug, which now seemed to resemble white jade. Then, she presented a box to the bug, one that had been crafted from vines. A bug emerged from the box.

Chapter 904: Surprising Evolution

A baby silkworm wriggled its way out of the vine-constructed box. It was blue and semi-transparent, and looked quite pretty.

"This is the tenth berserk mutant. Eat this berserk iron bug before you; if you do, you, my blue crystal bug, will be able to become a sacred-blood creature," the spirit said to the bug as she let it out of the box. Then, blue crystal bug crawled over to the iron bug.

Wherever the blue crystal bug writhed, a vibrant scorch mark was left in its wake. It looked poisonous.

When Han Sen heard the spirit speak, he thought to himself, "This spirit must have done a lot to ensure the evolution of this creature of hers. She used mutant bugs to create a berserk mutant bug, so she could then feed it to the blue crystal bug? Wow. Perhaps she will succeed."

The blue crystal bug reached the iron bug that had just finished evolving. Due to the tiring process of evolution, it was now weak. It acknowledged what was happening, as well; it trembled at the approach of the blue crystal bug.

The blue crystal bug climbed atop the iron bug, as it had done many times before. Without reprieve or delay, it attempted to eat the iron bug from the front.

But the moment the blue crystal bug tried to eat the iron bug, the iron bug opened its mouth wide. Exceeding all expectations, its insectoid mouth became a gaping maw decorated with countless serrated teeth.

Katcha!

The iron bug was actually the one that ate the blue crystal bug. In one quick munch, the bug was gruesomely devoured. Where it once feigned fear and a look of apparent weakness, the iron bug now looked like a greedy devil.

The poisonous blue crystal bug was defenseless, it seemed. It had no chance to react to the sudden snap of the iron bug's jaws, and this surprised Han Sen and the spirit both.

No one had expected this to happen, and even the spirit was caught off guard.

The spirit lashed her rose whip at the iron bug. The bug didn't attempt to evade, however; it merely closed its shell and withstood the entire attack effortlessly.

Han Sen knew how much power was in her whip lash, and it was a terrifying amount. The whip had to be a mutant class, at least, and it was far stronger than what he and Little Wind could deal with.

Yet despite that, the whip could not damage the iron bug at all.

But then, curiously, the iron bug's shell broke again, and it started glowing blue. It was evolving once again.

"D*mn it! It's evolving into a sacred-blood." The spirit's face changed as she spoke aloud. In haste, she quickly hammered the white shell of the bug to break it.

From inside the white shell, a green iron bug came out. It looked like jade.

Without hesitation, the spirit continued to lash it with her whip. She wanted to damage the iron bug before it completed its new process of evolution.

When it finished evolving into a sacred-blood creature, the spirit would not be able to fight it.

Whoo-pa! Whoo-pa!

The whip was like a fearsome snake, lashing out at the iron bug. The monstrously powerful attacks made the evolving creature squeal in pain.

But then, a green flame burst forth from the iron bug and enveloped the whip. It wasn't exactly like fire, though; it was more like a corrosive substance that moved under conscious control. It was like a flame composed of liquid acid. And against this, the whip stood no chance. The spirit's weapon quickly corroded into a toxic-smelling puddle of goop.

The spirit dropped the whip, not wanting the acid to touch her body. Then, she used a stalk's thorn to pierce her skin and allow the rose to absorb her blood.

As the rose absorbed the spirit's blood, the rose suddenly let out a powerful fragrance. It was so strong, it could literally be seen as a mystic haze.

The iron bug smelled the flower and was hypnotized. Without resistance, it began crawling over towards the rose.

The spirit suddenly summoned a red dagger, and when the green iron bug came closer, she stabbed it in its mouth with the power and speed of a sudden flash of lightning.

Boom!

The iron bug snapped out of its daze as the dagger lodged in its mouth. Its anger was unleashed, and it squirted its corrosive liquid all around it. The ground and soil all around were ruined, and when it was done, the iron bug launched itself towards the spirit.

But the spirit was quick to fall back. She tried using her rose bushes to trap the bug and stop its advance.

But the iron bug had become a sacred-blood creature, and the attacks it unleashed were frighteningly powerful.

The rose vines lashed the iron bug by themselves, but it was all to no avail. Against its impenetrable shell, all attacks simply bounced off and at the same time melted into nothing but drops of its wretched liquid.

The roses that sought to trap the bug were all burnt away, and it seemed likely that the bug was going to catch up with the spirit.

The spirit's face changed, but she did not look scared. Instead of a weapon, she summoned a shield this time. With it, she tried to deflect the charging bug.

Katcha!

She propped the heavy greatshield up against the frenzied bug. The force of the bug was so strong, it knocked the spirit a good distance back and smashed her into a wall. So much was the power in that hit, there was a gaping hole left in the side of the cliff she was thrown into.

"Whoa! That is so powerful. Sacred-blood creatures in the Third God's Sanctuary are terrifying. That little thing hasn't even completed its evolution, and yet it has so much power." Han Sen watched the iron bug with greed in his eyes.

Although the bug was strong, the dagger was still lodged in its mouth. Strangely, it hadn't been melted—it looked special.

The iron bug's mouth had bled slowly ever since the oral strike. Han Sen was able to watch its life force slowly drain around the knife in its mouth. Still, that did not allay the bug's desire to chase after the spirit that had inflicted such damage upon it. But the spirit knew she had injured it, and she knew victory would only be a matter of time because of it.

As the two continued to fight, Han Sen decided to sneak into the valley. He wanted to steal the kill from the spirit, as it was a sacred-blood creature. He believed this was an opportunity from God, as God only knew how long it would take for him to reliably be able to take down sacred-blood creatures on his own.

Chapter 905: Killing Iron Bug King

Severed roses danced through the air as the spirit continued trying to deal with the enraged iron bug. But whatever came into contact with the green liquid-fire, geno weapons included, would be corroded and ruined immediately.

Han Sen was terrified, even as he watched from a distance.

When he ventured closer, he cast his dongxuan aura for a better inspection of the situation he was preparing to waltz into.

The iron bug looked powerful, but in its mouth, the blood-red dagger remained firmly in place. He wasn't sure how the dagger could withstand the corrosive properties of the bug's wrath, and damage the creature at the same time.

Pang!

The spirit used everything in her power but was unable to defeat the sacred-blood class iron bug. Suddenly, the weapon she was bringing down on the iron bug caught on fire. In a flash, the phantom corrosion traveled down her weapon and onto her, setting her body alight.

The spirit's armor could not withstand the brutal fire. The flowers that clothed her were quickly burning away, and she had no choice but to remove herself from the rose-gown. She was naked once again.

"Tzzii!"

The iron bug squealed before it went against its now-unarmored foe.

But the spirit was not done for yet; she summoned another geno weapon and struck the incoming bug. Again, no damage was dealt, and the weapon was destroyed quickly. The bug did not relent.

The spirit's supply of geno weaponry was dwindling fast, and soon, she'd have no armament left to do battle with the bug. As she acknowledged this, the second-long thought was enough for the iron bug to close the gap and strike her body.

The spirit was sent flying away like a cannonball. She struck a craggy cliffside as a fire claimed her chest.

Although the spirit was quickly able to douse the fire, the iron bug was already nearly upon her once again. Its target was her chest once more.

The spirit was unable to do anything, and she was now helpless against the iron bug that was hungry for her heart.

Although the spirit would not truly die, she still looked shocked and surprised, and even fearful, for this misfortune that was to fall upon her.

But just as the spirit's hope of victory was depleted, a white shadow appeared from the nether. A pretty man, with the presence of a god, appeared behind the iron bug.

The spirit's eyes, which were nearing closure in anticipation of a defeat, opened wide with sudden surprise. She looked upon the bright light, not knowing what it was, where it had come from, or why it had appeared.

Boom!

The god-looking man's fist crackled and popped with the charge of electricity, and like a sun, it collided with the back of the iron bug.

The sun was driven directly into the iron bug's body. And as the sound of thunder echoed through the valley, the iron bug had no choice but to involuntarily surrender its body to the crushing force as it was knocked to the ground.

Katcha!

When the bug hit the dirt, Han Sen used his left hand to shove the handle of the dagger deeper and deeper into its mouth. The dagger was pushed through the bug's throat and into its body.

Where two inches of the dagger's blade had been visible, now there remained none. The entire blade and handle had been driven into the body of the iron bug.

The dagger was very sharp. It pierced through the body, and when it appeared again, it was protruding through the bug's posterior.

"Sacred-Blood Creature Iron Bug King killed. Beast soul gained. Consume its flesh to gain zero to ten sacred geno points randomly."

Han Sen was thrilled. He grabbed the iron bug's body and the dagger that was still within, and in the blinding light he had appeared with, he disappeared in a flash without a trace.

From his sudden appearance behind the bug, the subsequent punch, the use of the dagger and the even faster escape, the entire event occurred in the timeframe of about two or three seconds.

Before the spirit could even react, Han Sen had already left the valley. She wouldn't be able to find him.

As he traveled, Han Sen's super king spirit soon ran out and his body returned to normal.

He didn't dare slow down, though. He pushed on and went as far as he could, lest the spirit seek him out.

Han Sen found Qu Lanxi and Little Wind hiding in the midst of some thickets. He led them away from the area, in a direction that would take them out of Thorn Forest. The last thing Han Sen wanted was a disgruntled spirit on his tail.

Han Sen could not be a super king spirit for long, and even if he used it again to defeat the spirit, she wouldn't die. Upon her respawn, she'd only hate him more, and it would be unwise for him to make any more enemies than he had to.

If Han Sen had revealed his true face when he killed the bug, the spirit would have assuredly remembered the face of her savior. And if that had happened, it would have spelled nothing pleasant.

Therefore, Han Sen decided not to attack the spirit. He killed the bug and left, not wanting to reveal his identity.

The reason Han Sen was able to kill the iron bug was not solely due to his super king spirit, however. It was because the iron bug was already weakened and dying, anyway. He took a chance, hoping the damage he dealt would be sufficient to kill the creature. It was the dagger that killed the iron bug, though. If the dagger hadn't been there, and he hadn't been able to manipulate it, not even the super king spirit would have given him enough strength to defeat the crazed bug.

Han Sen was currently much weaker than the iron bug, and so it was difficult for him to demonstrate the true power of his super king spirit mode when going up against a foe that was so much stronger than him.

Han Sen and Qu Lanxi made for the exit of Thorn Forest. They had obtained much in their time there, and it would have been silly for them to remain much longer and not depart with the bounty they had already collected.

He couldn't have allowed the spirit to see his true face. He thought that trying to etch out a living in an area controlled by spirits would be impossible if she had seen who he was.

But Han Sen worried needlessly, because the spirit did not actually intend to chase down the person who had saved her.

Seeing Han Sen disappear as quickly as he appeared, the spirit's face wore a confused expression. She turned to peer in the direction Han Sen fled to.

"Who was that spirit?" The spirit seemed bewildered. She was not angered or annoyed by what had occurred.

She wasn't mad at Han Sen's theft of the iron bug kill, nor his claiming of the body and the dagger she had used. Her face was merely one that masked complicated thoughts.

Han Sen, not knowing this, was still quite worried. His focus now, however, was returning home safely with Qu Lanxi. They arrived back at Qing Ming Shelter without trouble.

But when they returned home, they could not find Chu Ming. The yard was in disarray, and in Han Sen's time away, he had been unable to feed the tree the waterdrops he had been giving it. The tree was now yellow, and it was beginning to look like the dead tree it had been.

When they were unable to find Chu Ming, Qu Lanxi looked terrible. Her thoughts roamed over what might have occurred during her absence.

Unknown to them, Qing Ming Knight had grown furious upon learning of the tree's death. At the gate of the shelter, Chu Ming was strung up. He had been slashed three hundred times to a state near death, and still, he remained hanging.

Chapter 906: Infiltrating the Shelter

Han Sen and Qu Lanxi spared no time in running to Qing Ming Shelter. There, they saw Chu Ming hanging from above the gate. His body was caked in dried blood, and other wounds oozed without healing. He looked to be dying.

Han Sen was quickly brought to anger. Humans were treated as little more than free-range slaves in the Third God's Shelter, and any little mistake was met with wicked, brutal punishments.

If Han Sen had not have revived the tree in the first place, though, Chu Ming would not have suffered this treatment. Chu Ming didn't deserve any of this.

Qu Lanxi was not calm by any means, either. In great anger, she tried to take Chu Ming down from where he hung.

Han Sen, not blinded by the need to save Chu Ming at an ill cost to themselves, quickly stopped Qu Lanxi. He brought her to a place where they would not be immediately spotted.

"Don't be reckless! You can't save Chu Ming if it means getting yourself in trouble," Han Sen told Qu Lanxi, as he held her in his arms.

"I can't watch him slowly succumb to death; not while I can still do something!" Qu Lanxi pleaded, her voice pained.

"I know. I do not plan on letting him die, either." Han Sen paused briefly and then said, "It's just that now is not the time. You both signed a contract, didn't you? Even if you save him now, you are still property of Qing Ming. Your lives are forfeit to him, and it is by his whim you can both be killed. Do not incite his wrath any more than it already has been."

“Then what do we do?” Qu Lanxi asked.

“We slip into the spirit hall and take the spirit stone. It is the only way you can be free from Qing Ming Knight.” Han Sen’s eyes gleamed with a murder as he spoke.

“Are you saying we claim the spirit shelter? Is that something we can do? Is such a thing possible?” Qu Lanxi looked at Han Sen with hopeful eyes, but still doubted the possibility of what he had claimed.

Qing Ming Knight was an elite spirit that had unlocked four of his gene locks. He had many fellow spirits and creatures in his employ, so breaking into the spirit hall would be no small feat.

“Yes, it is. It’s only a knight shelter,” Han Sen said sternly. He continued to speak coldly by saying, “If Thorn Shelter was not nearby, I could take this place down no sweat.”

“I will do as you command. Whatever you desire of me, I will do it.” Qu Lanxi looked at Han Sen. Whatever he was going to suggest would by no means be easy, but she was willing to try no matter what he told her.

“Chu Ming is still alive, so there is no immediate cause for worry. We should go back and prepare for our next move. When we kill Qing Ming Knight and take the spirit stone, we will have to escape to Thorn Forest,” Han Sen said, turning to look at Chu Ming.

While they spoke, a spirit wielding a whip appeared. He walked in front of Chu Ming and struck his naked, battered body.

Crack!

Chu Ming’s skin was dealt another lash, forming another lesion across his bloody body. Although he was on the precipice of death, Chu Ming was still able to scream loudly.

The spirit did not speak, and he continued to callously whip his suffering servant. With each frightening whip, the screams of agony from Chu Ming became quieter and quieter.

Qu Lanxi gnawed at her lips nervously, almost to the point of bleeding. As for Han Sen, he had come to a point of realization; he acknowledged just how difficult living in the Third God’s Shelter could be for humans.

The spirit was not willing to let Chu Ming die just yet, however. Although he struck hard, he was not attacking anywhere critical.

“Let’s go,” Han Sen said, as he pulled on Qu Lanxi to depart the shelter.

Back in the cabin, Han Sen looked at the dying Dragon-Blood Tree. With his analysis, he was able to determine that it was indeed alive, but only faintly.

He pulled out his blood-colored dagger and tried to unearth the roots. He wanted to see if he could move it, for he did not want to leave it where it was.

It would still require a dozen years to grow, so it would require about twelve more waterdrops. But Han Sen did not have any time right now, so all he could hope to do was move it someplace else.

After digging up the tree, he had to remove many of its roots. Unfortunately, this only led to the tree becoming even weaker.

Using a cloth, Han Sen wrapped up the tree roots and gave them a waterdrop. Then, he placed the entire tree on the back of Golden Growler.

As for the Blood-Pine Tree that Han Sen had planted near the river, he dug that up, too. He wondered if he would still be able to grow it someplace else.

He was not afraid of Qing Ming Knight, and it would not be difficult for Han Sen to take down Qing Ming Shelter; but Han Sen could not deal with the royal class Thorn Shelter. As such, he could only hope to hide deep within the tangled boughs of Thorn Forest once his planned deed was done.

After seeing how powerful the female spirit was, he knew he could only fight royal spirits with super king spirit mode active.

But its duration was far too short. If Thorn Shelter loosed many creatures to hunt them down, even if Han Sen could escape, Qu Lanxi would undoubtedly be killed.

That was why he couldn't claim Qing Ming Shelter once Qing Ming Knight had been vanquished. He couldn't make his presence known, and as soon as the spirit that presided over the shelter was killed, he'd have to dart off and vacate the area as soon as he possibly could.

Han Sen and Qu Lanxi prepared for their grueling task ahead, and he told her, "You wait near the gate. When I draw the spirits and creatures deeper into the shelter, that will give you the time you need to free Chu Ming and bring him to Thorn Forest."

"Just one thing; can we really do this? Do we have what it takes?" Qu Lanxi looked worried. She was very nervous, but Han Sen couldn't blame her. After all, they were on the precipice of taking down a spirit shelter. Even though Han Sen was stronger than normal surpassers, he was alone. A part of her believed his flight to the shelter's spirit hall would not be as simple as he was making it out to be.

"Yes, we do. Believe in me." Han Sen saw how nervous she was getting, and so he told her this with a voice of assurance.

Qu Lanxi was a mature woman, and she was the sort who would only panic when something extremely serious or grave was upon her. She didn't scare easy.

Han Sen patted her head like he would a child, which made her blush. Then, Qu Lanxi said, "We will wait for you in the forest."

"I won't be too far behind; I'll get this done quick," Han Sen said, with confidence.

They trekked back near Qing Ming Shelter, and Han Sen gestured for her to stay back a little.

"You have to come back alive," Qu Lanxi pleaded, as she nibbled her lips.

"I will." Han Sen smiled and entered the shelter.

With Han Sen's power, even without his super king spirit mode, he'd be just as strong as Qing Ming Knight. The only problem would be that Han Sen only had one gene lock open.

And with so many creatures and other spirits around, Han Sen knew he could not claim the shelter in his current state. But fortune had smiled on him, and he had a couple of things in his possession to help even the odds. He had the iron bug beast soul and the red dagger.

Chapter 907: Wipeout

After Han Sen entered the shelter, he went straight for the spirit hall.

The spirit hall's defenses were tough. In the plaza were ten ordinary creatures, and two knight class spirits stood outside the spirit hall itself, guarding.

Qing Ming Knight, however, was inside. For a person who had only opened their first gene lock, achieving triumph in the face of such danger seemed like an impossible accomplishment.

But this did not sway Han Sen's resolve, and without a shadow of fear, he marched directly towards the spirit hall.

A black tiger was quick to catch sight of the approaching intruder, and so it growled at him in warning.

Han Sen looked at the tiger and smiled. In the next second, he was clad in summoned armor and wielding a red dagger.

Han Sen swung his dagger towards the tiger's neck.

Instantly, the tiger's decapitated head was sent barreling through the air as blood squirted from the severed throat. In the next second, the body crumpled to the ground.

"Ordinary Creature Black Iron Tiger killed. No beast soul gained. Consume its flesh to gain zero to ten ordinary geno points randomly."

Han Sen was quickly overjoyed. He hadn't known how sharp or powerful the dagger was, nor its class. But its performance immediately exceeded his expectations.

The spirits and creatures all around were shocked, unable to believe a fight like this could erupt inside the walls of the shelter. And what's more, the intruder had started a fight with the creatures that guarded the shelter's spirit hall.

The creatures saw Han Sen run inside the plaza, and in unison, they all roared and began sprinting towards him. From every direction they came at him.

A vast array of different elemental powers swirled around and charged the atmosphere with an exciting volatility. There was fire, wind, thunder, and more; and everything was primed to take Han Sen down.

Boom!

Following an explosion that was a mixture of various elements, a giant crater was left in the plaza's floor. Rocks were scattered and strewn all about, as plumes of dust clogged the air and choked the sight of all who were there.

The spirits and creatures were humorously shocked, believing they had just encountered and wiped out the most stupid human they had ever seen. He never stood a chance, they thought to themselves.

Even the spirits that guarded the entrance to the spirit hall looked ahead cockily. They believed the intruder dead, as well.

As the two spirits guarded the gate, they smiled merrily.

For once, they could witness something exciting. And indeed it was, for they viewed Han Sen's attack as they would the performance of a clown in a carnival. No human had tried to attack Qing Ming Shelter before, so it was a funny spectacle.

But in the next second, from within the veiling dust, the shadow of a human flickered by each creature.

Acknowledging that their initial attacks had failed, they all activated their gene lock powers.

Amidst the chaos, Han Sen was still sprinting and not even taking the time to dodge.

The combined attacks had indeed all struck Han Sen, but his armor was able to withstand the force and its wearer was not dealt damage.

Katcha!

Another stream of blood flashed through the air, as an ordinary creature slumped down to the ruined ground.

Han Sen moved like a killing machine amidst the creatures. Like livestock, each creature was mercilessly slaughtered by Han Sen.

The faces of the creatures and spirits that were around all changed. As for the two guards of the spirit hall, they were frozen. No longer were they amused—now they felt fear.

Multiple powerful creatures had each been killed with a single strike, none being given the chance to fight back.

“Someone is attacking the spirit hall!” An alarm finally sounded from the mouths of the guards.

Qing Ming Knight had already felt it when the first creature had been killed. He frowned and wanted to go take a look at the intruder himself. But soon after stepping forward, he felt another one of his creatures perish. He was surprised.

But then, his face completely changed. One after another, he felt each of his creatures be slain.

“How is this possible? Has someone powerful come to my shelter?” He could not imagine what sort of person would be able to defeat so many of his creatures in such a short amount of time.

Only royal spirits or mutant creatures could do such a thing, and this was something he could not establish an appropriate defense against.

But his shelter was primarily ruled over by Thorn Shelter. They should have attacked Thorn Shelter, not this place.

Qing Ming Knight sped up his approach as his desire to take a look at what was going on increased. But as he neared the door, it was kicked open with tremendous force. Two shadows flew inside, which made Qing Ming Knight’s sphincter tighten. They were the knight spirits tasked with guarding the spirit hall.

Their throats had been slit open, and they were thrown through the door, dead before they even hit the ground.

When the attacker entered from beyond that door, Qing Ming Knight was surprised. He said, “Human?”

Humans and spirits were different. Qing Ming Knight could tell his intruder was a human, despite being entirely clad in armor with his appearance masked.

“How can a human come to my shelter?” Qing Ming Knight could not think straight right now.

There weren’t many humans in the vicinity, and there were only five in Thorn Shelter in total. But now, someone had just infiltrated his spirit hall.

“Announce yourself, you vermin! He who has dared trespass within my spirit hall.” Qing Ming Knight held a spear and called out to Han Sen.

“I’m the guy that has come to kill you,” Han Sen coldly responded. He used Aero, and he flew towards Qing Ming Knight like a rainbow.

“You fool!” Qing Ming Knight noticed how low Han Sen’s speed and strength were, so he raised his green-light spear and dashed forward to engage with his aggressor.

Chapter 908: Claiming Qing Ming

The green spear collided with the red dagger to a shocking result—the green spear was knocked away.

The dagger and Han Sen moved like a descending rainbow; one that would touch down at Qing Ming’s heart.

Qing Ming's face dropped, as he now understood how his guards and protecting creatures had been slain. The dagger was too powerful.

Qing Ming Knight was an elite that had opened four of his gene locks. In the nick of time, he was able to just about dodge Han Sen's airborne strike and retaliate with a fist of his own.

The green light that enshrouded his fist was like a mystic hellfire, and it guided the fist to a direct hit on Han Sen's forehead.

Qing Ming Knight coldly laughed in reaction, and thought to himself, "It does not matter how sharp or how powerful your dagger is—nothing can overcome my green light."

Pang!

When the green light came into contact with Han Sen, it was like glass being thrown against steel. The helmet did not break, and it pushed through the light without even slowing down.

"Impossible!" Qing Ming's eyes opened wide as he gargled the words out. Blood choked his tongue as the dagger sliced through his throat. He was decapitated, and his head dropped to the ground like a stone.

Not stopping for one second, Han Sen raced towards the statue in the spirit hall and grabbed the spirit stone from the stone sculpture's forehead.

Outside the hall, many creatures and spirits came forward to witness who they believed to be their new ruler. They stepped into the spirit hall, and quickly crowded it.

There they all saw Han Sen, taking the spirit stone.

Boom!

The green spirit stone turned into a bright and horrible green light.

Qing Ming reluctantly appeared out of the spirit stone and knelt before Han Sen, before all the creatures and spirits in the hall to make a vow. "I, Qing Ming Knight, am willing to submit and offer absolute loyalty to a new master. I can become the most faithful of servants."

All the creatures froze in place, staring at the day's most unexpected spectacle. The owner of Qing Ming Shelter, the spirit they had always served, was kneeling to pledge obedience to a human.

And there was no ulterior scheme or ploy; it was happening for real.

The contracts that each creature, spirit, and human had signed with Qing Ming Knight were broken at that instant. They were each and all free. He had been claimed, and the marks he had given them all vanished.

Qu Lanxi, back on the outside, was bringing Chu Ming and Golden Growler to Thorn Forest. When she felt the mark break, she burst into tears of joy.

“He did it!” Qu Lanxi wiped away the tears that came. Not only was she happy for Han Sen’s victory and exacted vengeance, she was happy to have reclaimed her freedom.

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In the spirit hall, Han Sen walked forward with Qing Ming Knight. As he moved forward, others stepped to the side. Like a parting of the seas, every living thing in the hall moved aside to create a way for him.

Qing Ming Knight had been claimed. Their master had been defeated, and so they were not willing to fight Han Sen anymore.

Han Sen, after exiting Qing Ming Shelter, did not dilly-dally. He immediately climbed upon Little Wind and took off running in the direction of Thorn Forest.

The moment Han Sen claimed Qing Ming Knight, a spirit sent word to Thorn Shelter over what had occurred.

“A human has claimed Qing Ming Knight, and a vow was sworn.” Inside Thorn Shelter, a cold-looking female spirit frowned.

If Han Sen was there, he’d have been surprised. The master of Thorn Shelter was the very same spirit he saw in the valley. It was the female spirit that used bugs to create sacred-blood creatures.

“What?” All the spirits and creatures looked angry; the former even more so.

To spirits, swearing loyalty to a human was widely regarded as humiliating.

“D*mn it! Baron, allow me to go kill that human and the traitorous scum.” A handsome spirit stepped forward and pleaded his desire.

“Baron, allow me, too.” Another few spirits stood up and walked forward, each wanting to go to Qing Ming Shelter and slay the human that was there and Qing Ming Knight.

“The human brought Qing Ming Knight to Thorn Forest,” the baron said with a sigh.

The spirit from Qing Ming Shelter who sent word to the baron hadn’t been able to see Han Sen enter the spirit hall. If she had known about the dagger, she wouldn’t have been as calm or composed.

“Baron, I will go to the forest and slay them,” the handsome spirit said.

The other spirits hesitated, as something evil and mystic lurked in the tangled, knotted reaches of Thorn Forest. Even with the spirit stones for respawning, there was no guarantee such devices would work if they were to perish in the darkness that veiled those woods.

“Okay.” Thorn Baron nodded.

“Thank you.” The handsome spirit turned around, not willing to wait around after receiving permission to go after Han Sen. He immediately began walking towards the exit.

“Take the Dark Turtle. It will help you find them,” Thorn Baron told the handsome spirit.

The handsome spirit looked pleased, and he turned around to say, "Thank you very much."

He knew the Dark Turtle had strong senses, so locating the human would not be difficult, even in those rotten reaches.

The handsome spirit took the turtle all the way to Qing Ming Shelter. If he wanted the turtle to find the human, it'd have to pick up his scent first.

Han Sen rode Little Wind, and before long, caught up with Qu Lanxi. Together, they ventured into Thorn Forest.

Not long after entering, Qu Lanxi masked their scent to keep them safe on their passage through the darkness of that forest.

They did not dare traverse the deeper recesses of Thorn Forest, but they thought they could find a safe location somewhere beneath those trees. Thorn Forest was an incredibly large woodland.

They went in a different direction than they had gone when they followed the bugs, but after fifty miles of travel, they were still unable to find a place to hide. They did, however stumble upon a most powerful and most mighty tree. Its lifeforce was almost as strong as the iron bug king's.

Chapter 909: A Big Tree in the Forest

Seeing this tall, lonely tree from afar, Han Sen frowned. The tree possessed a grand lifeforce, but there was nothing else alive in its proximity.

There were no creatures near it, so Han Sen thought it was a little strange.

It was not an ordinary geno plant, that was for sure. If Han Sen could sense its presence from a dozen miles away, why would no other living creatures desire to be around it?

"Let's rest here and tend to Chu Ming's wounds." Han Sen believed there was something wrong in the direction they were headed. So, he decided to take a break. Carefully lifting Chu Ming off of Golden Growler's back, Han Sen got to work on healing the beaten man with his holy light.

Chu Ming had been severely injured, but the damage he had suffered was not critical. After an hour of this healing, Chu Ming was fully recovered.

"Lanxi, why would you rescue me? We signed a contract with Qing Ming Knight; you can be killed for this disobedience!" Chu Ming woke up and immediately noticed his presence in Thorn Forest. Quickly, he was able to mostly gather what had transpired in the time he was unconscious.

"You mean this guy?" Han Sen summoned Qing Ming Knight.

“Whoa! He... he...” Chu Ming was given a jump scare, and immediately started stepping backwards. With wide eyes, he asked, “What in the sanctuaries happened?”

“What happened? Me, that’s what happened. Qing Ming Knight now belongs to me,” Han Sen said.

“Are you pulling my leg? How is that possible?” Chu Ming looked at Qing Ming Knight, unsure whether or not he had slipped into a twisted dream of sorts. He pinched his leg to see if he would wake up, saying, “This must be a dream. It’s a dream, isn’t it? I must still be the shelter’s hanging pinata. It’s a dying hallucination of mine, for sure!”

But Chu Ming, feeling the nasty pain that stemmed from his pinch, knew that it was no fabrication of the mind. What was happening was real.

Han Sen and Qu Lanxi then relayed the entire tale of what had occurred to Chu Ming, who seemed to struggle with believing its authenticity.

The three of them continued to rest, and Han Sen decided to prepare a meal for them. He retrieved one of the tree crabs he had hunted and started to cook it.

This surprised Chu Ming once again. The three of them, after filling their bellies, decided to get some shut-eye while Little Wind remained on guard. With Han Sen’s latest pet there, they didn’t have to worry about getting attacked without warning.

After midnight, Little Wind suddenly howled. Roused from their slumber, they all jolted up to look about for whatever was coming. But strangely, there was nothing to be seen.

Little Wind was only a creature, so they couldn’t ask it what had caused the unrest. They poked about the area for a bit, but were unable to discern the problem; furthermore, Little Wind had gone back to being quiet, as well.

Just in case something happened, Han Sen decided to remain awake and stay on-watch, allowing the other two to sleep and rest-up.

Nothing ill befell them that night, and when the sun rose the next day, they all merrily packed their gear and discussed where their ultimate destination should be.

“If that tree is a high-level geno plant, we have to go take a look. Since it seems devoid of other creatures nearby it, we might be able to snag a few goodies for ourselves.” Chu Ming looked at the giant tree with saliva drooling from the corner of his lips.

“But San Mu is right. Danger must lurk there, for it is abnormal for there to be no creatures in that tree’s vicinity,” Qu Lanxi said.

“We are still in what is essentially the borders of Thorn Forest. There is nothing to be afraid of... ah! What is that?!” Chu Ming, as he scanned the area, suddenly screamed aloud.

“What’s wrong?” Han Sen looked around and noticed something amiss.

“This is Thorn Forest, yes? Haven’t we walked about fifty miles to get to this point?” Chu Ming noticed swathes of massive thorns tangled with the trees ahead.

“I’m fairly sure those thorny vines weren’t there last night.” Qu Lanxi was shocked, and she looked around to see what else might have appeared.

On the previous day, they had walked through what seemed to be a gentle forest. What they now saw ahead of them was a wretched tangle of thorny vines that weaved their way through the trees around them. If they were indeed in the borderlands of the forest, nothing like this should have been close to them.

Qu Lanxi wanted to take a closer look, but Han Sen stopped her.

“Let’s not wander off on our own before we properly evaluate the situation.” Han Sen looked around him with concern at the vast array of thorny vines. Their number equaled the trees they coursed between. Had they not known any better, they would have believed themselves to be in the deeper recesses of the forest.

Yet they knew they had only walked around fifty miles. They knew they shouldn’t have been seeing such thorny vines already.

“Is it because of that giant tree?” Chu Ming pointed at it.

“No way; it’s just a tree. Are you suggesting it has teleported us deeper into the forest or something?” Qu Lanxi said.

Han Sen was not willing to cast doubt on Chu Ming’s theory, since he believed the man might have been correct. The environment had changed, all except that one giant tree, and so he said, “Where we are is mostly different, save for the tree’s position. I think Chu Ming might be right. If there is another possibility, I’m having trouble discerning what that may be.”

“So, you are saying the tree brought us to a deeper part of the forest?” Qu Lanxi asked.

“I am not entirely sure yet. It’s either that or the thorn forest is looking to expand.” Han Sen stepped forward to get a better look at the tree and said, “We should take a look at the tree in greater detail. Perhaps a closer inspection will clarify our situation.”

“If the tree did this to us, wouldn’t it be dangerous for us to poke around it?” Chu Ming suggested.

Han Sen shook his head and said, “If we are now indeed within the deeper, darker, and more treacherous reaches of Thorn Forest, it will be dangerous no matter which way we venture. At least we can confirm there are no creatures near the tree.”

The three of them then decided to visit the tree and investigate.

Han Sen commanded Little Wind to lead them from the front. He was the strongest of their party, even though Han Sen had already consumed the Iron Bug King and obtained seven geno points.

Han Sen thought there might have been a flaw with the iron bug; after all, it hadn't completely evolved. The woman spirit had forced open its shell, which was perhaps why Han Sen did not receive many geno points.

The three of them carefully approached the tree and when they arrived, Little Wind seemed reluctant to approach. Han Sen had to pull and tug at Little Wind to get him to follow.

"Someone is under the tree!" Chu Ming suddenly called out as he pointed at the tree.

Chapter 910: Tree Door

Han Sen had better eyesight, and he saw that the person was dead far before Chu Ming did.

The dead person was a man, and he was clad in an outfit of the Alliance. He had been there for some time, it seemed.

Han Sen's best estimate placed the man's death at around sixty years before their find.

What Han Sen could not guess was how the surpasser had died all the way out there. There were no wounds, and there were no visible tears or damage to the outfit.

All that could ultimately be determined was that the man had been dead for quite some time, and now, only the lifeless body and its dusty garb were left to tell his tale. While the man's face had dried up like a husk, it was not rotten.

"This person was a human, one who died a very long time ago, it would appear," Han Sen told Qu Lanxi and Chu Ming.

When the three of them ventured nearer, they were able to get a better look at the person. The clothes were well-preserved and the face was fine.

He was a middle-aged man with a beard, and although they could not be certain, he seemed to have passed away peacefully.

As they examined the man lying against the tree, Han Sen made a more accurate reading of the tree's lifeforce and was surprised to find it stronger than he initially believed it to be. But curiously, he believed there to be something living inside the imposing wood of its composure.

But aside from how he felt, there was no indication that what he thought was true. There was nothing suspicious in the area surrounding the tree, though that in itself could have been the more dubious fact. Aside from the dead body perched against it, not a single thing was in the area surrounding the tree—living or otherwise.

“Let’s see if he has something on him. Perhaps we can learn more.” Chu Ming wasted no time in patting the man down to see what he might have been carrying. The man did not possess a rucksack or bag, just a number of pockets.

From one pocket, he found something.

Inside this pocket, there was a wallet and a few little trinkets that did not seem to indicate anything special.

“Let me check the wallet; perhaps we can learn of his identity.” Chu Ming opened the wallet to see a number of cards and some money.

There was no identification card, however. And neither were there any licenses. Still, Chu Ming examined each card that was there.

There were only a few technology cards, and so it seemed as if the identity of the mysterious corpse would have to remain a mystery.

Han Sen, however, did see that one card possessed the Nine-Life Cat symbol. This told him that the man must have had some association with Blood Legion.

This also told Han Sen that Chu Ming and Qu Lanxi did not know of Blood Legion’s significance. As Han Sen mused on this, Chu Ming continued to search the body of the man for any secret pockets he might have missed.

“Stop this desecration and show some respect. This person died here, alone. Let’s give him the burial he has so long been deprived of,” Qu Lanxi said.

Chu Ming, however, did not listen to her pleading and continued rummaging through the man’s pockets. As he did so, he said, “I don’t think he’d like to be buried here. Perhaps if we can identify him, we can give him a proper Alliance send-off sometime in the future.”

While what Chu Ming said may have seemed considerate and even heartfelt, the words were only spoken to subdue Qu Lanxi’s feelings. Chu Ming wanted to see if the deceased person had some goodies on him, and she wasn’t going to get in the way of that.

If he could discover high-class geno weapons on the man, they’d be incredibly rich. It wasn’t as if dead people could make use of such armaments, after all.

But unfortunately for Chu Ming, he could not find anything. Upon this miserable realization, Chu Ming then sought to flip the body over and have a look in the pockets of the man’s backside.

So, he did. And upon rolling over the body, something slipped out. They each looked at it with curiosity.

Han Sen bent down to pick it up and noticed it was an old-fashioned watch.

The likes of this did not exist anymore, and people tended to make use of smartwatches. The delicate arts of watchmakers had mostly been lost to the annals of time and advent of technology; old fashioned

watches lacked programming and worked off the extremely accurate synchronization and unerringly calculated movements of cogs and gears. If you wanted one of these, the best place to find one would be in an antique store.

The watch had stopped at nine o'clock, what day or year was unknown, as such old-fashioned devices did not give such information.

But that did not matter, for in the sanctuaries, such watches did not work.

Han Sen then examined the upper-portion of the watch, and what he saw made him freeze. There was a picture inside it of a middle-aged man holding a boy who had to be around eight or nine years old. The middle-aged man was the person who had died.

But the boy in the picture was a person Han Sen had seen before.

The little boy in the picture was Han Sen's father. In his family photo albums, Han Sen had seen many pictures of his father when he was young. He was certain, without a shadow of a doubt, that the boy was his father.

The little boy was even wearing clothes Han Sen could recognize.

And the accessories he wore were ones he had seen before, as well. Han Sen knew he could not have been mistaken, and neither was what he was seeing a coincidence. The chances of two human boys wearing the same clothes and accessories, having the same hairstyles, and looking similar in the face was all too unlikely.

If the little boy was Han Sen's father, the bigger question now was who the dead man was. And whoever he was, why did he have such a photo?

The man was not his grandfather nor his great-grandfather; he did not look like them at all.

And wrack his mind as he might, Han Sen was unable to think of who that person might have been.

"San Mu, that little boy looks just like you," Chu Ming joked, as he looked at the little boy.

"Fate has led me to this watch, so I will be taking it." Han Sen pocketed the watch, planning to bring it back and show it to his mother when he returned to the Alliance. Perhaps she would possess the answers he sought.

"It's just a watch, though. That thing is useless. Why do you want it so bad?" Chu Ming laughed, as he continued digging through the man's pockets despite not finding anything more significant.

Just as Han Sen planned to roll the man back over, he noticed something amiss. There was something wrong with the place the man had been previously lying against.

That portion of the tree looked slightly different. They had not noticed it before, as their focus was on the dead body.

Han Sen decided to inspect it closer, and he was surprised to see the faint outline of what looked vaguely like a door. Feeling the bark, Han Sen's hand ran over a lump shaped like a doorknob.

The man had died with his back against a tree door.

