

Mystical Journey

#Chapter 11 - Read Mystical Journey Chapter 11

Chapter 11: Secret Method 1

After leaving the judo, Garen was waiting for a carriage in front of the entrance.

“Mister, would you like a newspaper?” A young boy wearing a gray cap walked over with a stack of newspapers in his arms and held out a newspaper to Garen.

“Newspaper?” Garen thought for a while, grabbed the newspaper, and handed over a dollar from his pocket.

“Thanks.” The boy left to continue looking for the next customer.

Garen shook the grayish-white newspaper and spread it open. An enormous black headline suddenly appeared in his sight.

“Tensions between Weisman Empire and Republic of the Tulip increasingly apparent!! The stance of the Confederation will become important.”

He frowned and continued to look at the other headlines.

“The Chairman of the Confederation will conduct an ordnance inspection of the armed forces on the 19th at nine in the morning.”

“Shocking massacre in the Western Alliance, owner of a manor and 42 other people murdered.”

“Fascinating archaeological discoveries of historical remains found in Stonecliff Continent.”

Rustling the newspaper, Garen was just about turn to the next page when a pedestrian bumped into him. A page of the newspaper fell out, revealing a black and white photo.

It was a dark wheat field with a slanted scarecrow alone in the middle, surrounded by a sea of black wheat.

There was a caption below the photo.

“Shocking discovery of a purple wheatfield in the Southwest Province.”

Garen carefully looked at the photo; very subtly, he actually felt a trace of movement from his supernatural ability.

He scanned through the content below, and the name of a location appeared in his eyes.

“Mason Farm”

The sound of a carriage approached from a distance, and Garen quickly rolled up the newspaper and raised his hand to hail it.

The grayish-black carriage slowly stopped in front of him.

“Go to Bluetree Street.”

“Yes, sir.”

“After the Border War 15 years ago, the world has reverted back to a peaceful state. As one of the superpowers of the three continents, it is our historical duty to maintain world peace...”

The geography lecturer was standing on the podium, giving a history lecture filled with his own opinions. The adorable bald elderly man was vigorously waving his arms while turning back from time to time to chalk down important key points.

Within the white classroom, Garen was sitting in the back row by the window with his chin resting on his palm, flipping through the geography textbook on his table.

The entire textbook was white except for the cover, where a black flying bird was printed in the middle. It was the flag of the Yalu Confederation. The four characters on top of the image meant geography.

Garen flipped through the front pages in the images section and stopped at the page with the world map.

The white rectangular area represented the ocean; three irregular gray lands were floating in the middle of the ocean.

The three lands formed a ring pattern with a tiny gap in the upper left corner.

The upper strip of land was labeled Stonecliff Continent, the bottom left was Azura Continent and the bottom right was Fivestar Continent. These three continents were surrounded by countless islands of various shapes and sizes.

Garen's finger slowly and steadily glided on the Stonecliff Continent and finally stopped at the middle part of the continent, slightly to the left. There was an irregularly shaped land in that location, labeled as Yalu Confederation.

This region was close to a third of the entire Stonecliff Continent.

"This world sure is strange... Even though planes exist, no one has been able to explore the entire world. The continents are entirely surrounded by water with no end in sight. All of humanity revolves around the three continents, and the surface area is equivalent to all of the continents on Earth combined, if not more."

Garen flipped to the next page, glanced through it and looked out the window.

A group of people was setting pole flags on a field at a distance away. It seemed like they were preparing for some sort of activity.

The late afternoon sunlight with a hint of redness shined onto the field, covering the dark green surface with a layer of golden red.

It had been three days since Garen returned from the dojo. He already applied during the audition at the dojo, and all he needed to do now was to wait for the results.

If he passed, he would directly become a formal disciple of the White Cloud Dojo; he would be able to learn a Secret Method and even receive a monthly allowance.

Ting...

The sweet sound of the school bell rang out, marking the end of the class.

The geography teacher clapped his hands to get the class' attention.

"Well, today's lessons end here. I hope that everyone reviews after going back. I will be checking next lesson. Lan Ruo, thank you for your hard work."

"It's nothing."

A black haired female student with twin ponytails stood and nodded. She then left her seat and waited for the teacher to leave before she rapidly wiped the writing on the blackboard.

The girl had a pure and cold disposition. She had an oriental look with large black pupils; her bangs slanted diagonally downward across her forehead, and her skin was fair and delicate.

Garen knew her; there were only twenty-five students in the class—there was not a single person who didn't know her.

Lan Ruo was in the top three in academics in the class and top five in the entire grade. She was pretty and pure like a flawless ceramic doll, and her skin was as tender as milk jelly.

It was just that she had an indifferent personality and barely spoke to her classmates. Other than the basic greetings, she would always silently look at the person trying to start a conversation with her. Faced with her large eyes and expressionless face, they could only give up and leave.

“Have you seen Fayne?” Kalidor approached Garen from the front rows. With a head full of yellow hair, he wore a white shirt and yellow leather vest with a sapphire necklace hanging around his chest. With his thin frame and fashion, he looked extremely flamboyant.

“Fayne? We only just got off class and he’s already gone. Why are you looking for him?” Garen puzzledly asked. “That guy’s probably messing around with some girl somewhere.”

“Since his elder cousin came, let’s gather for lunch later. She’ll be bringing a female friend with her, so it’ll be me, you, Fayne and them. We’re all in the same grade, and I heard that they’re from an all girls’ school.” Kalidor raised his eyebrows.

“So what if they’re from a girls’ school? I need to go to the dojo later, so I can’t make it.”

“Why are you missing out on such a good chance?”

“I’ll go the next time, really.” Garen shrugged his shoulders. “This time, I really have something to do.”

“You rascal... This is such a good chance!” Kalidor muttered to himself as he left the classroom.

Garen was speechless as he shook his head. After tidying up the book on his table, he stood up and walked out of the classroom with his black cloth bag.

Twenty minutes later...

White Cloud Dojo Martial Coliseum

Within a dim and spacious redwood hall.

A bald elderly man sat cross-legged on the floor with a burning fireplace at his back. The red flames were continuously propelled outwardly, creating a crackling sound.

There was no lighting, only the red glow of the fireplace.

Over ten youths in white clothing sat cross-legged in front of the elderly man on the floor. Each of them had a solemn expression on their face as they looked at the elderly man.

“Congratulations,” the bald elderly man slowly said. “You’re the latest batch of official disciples this year.”

No one said anything, but their breathing became slightly heavier. Among them, the oldest was eighteen years old and the youngest was fifteen. However, without any exception, joyful expressions appeared on all their faces.

The elderly man noticed it and slightly nodded his head.

“When you become a formal disciple, the greatest benefit, other than not having to pay tuition fees, is that you’ll be taught a Secret Method of Martial Arts.”

“Secret Methods of Martial Arts are an absolutely undisclosed secret within each and every sect and dojo. So before we begin, I hope that you will be able to uphold the agreement that you just signed.”

The elderly man took out an ancient yellow scroll from his black gi and gently spread it open on the floor.

“Starting from the first person on the left, come up here and look at this once, then step back.”

The leftmost person was a girl who was sitting in a cross-legged position. As she stood, she walked to the front to pick up the scroll. After giving it a glance, she immediately returned to her original position. Then the second, third...

Each of them took less than ten seconds to finish reading.

Sitting in the rear was a purple-haired boy with red eyes: it was Garen who had rushed here directly from school to receive the Secret Method of Martial Arts. He was wearing a white gi with both of his hands on his knees, staring at the students who had seen the scroll.

It was soon his turn. Garen stood up and walked to the front. He knelt in front of the elderly man, picked up the scroll and carefully looked at it.

A human figure was drawn on the light yellow scroll: the figure was posing in a weird posture— similar to the horse stance — emanating a rich and special hidden meaning.

Garen looked at it once and easily remembered it. At the same time, he detected a light fragrance from the scroll. It was very faint and similar to the smell of honey.

As he returned to his position and sat down, he suddenly felt sleepy.

“Now, take the posture shown on the scroll. Take note of that particular hidden meaning,” the bald elderly man’s voice clearly sounded out.

Everyone stood up, spread out and began to imitate the posture shown on the scroll.

Garen followed suit as well: his arms were thrust to the front while tiptoeing on one leg and on his heels with the other.

After taking the stance, the skill section at the bottom of his field of vision suddenly changed. A new skill actually gradually appeared: White Cloud Fundamental Secret Method: Elementary.

Garen felt a warm sensation slowly converging in his chest and abdomen, then spreading to his four limbs. His entire body rapidly entered into a comfortable state.

Within the attribute column in his field of vision, his strength attribute slowly started to change. It jumped from 0.44 to 0.45.

The elderly man’s voice sounded out again.

“Do you feel a pleasant feeling spreading throughout your body? It means that you have already successfully learned our White Cloud Secret Arts. In the future, use this pose to meditate. This Secret Method will increase your strength based on your physical condition and talent. This Secret Method has three stages: the beginning Heat Stage, intermediate Frost Stage, and finally Heatfrost Interchange . Every time you move to the next stage, it will increase your strength to a certain amount. If a normal person were to reach the highest level, their strength will increase to twice their original strength. Of course, it would take a while to reach that point.

“In addition, the growth of the Secret Method is progressive. There are also some restrictions when training with this method: do not train when you’re too tired, do not train when you’re too hungry, do not train where there are lots of distractions...”

Garen was sitting in the back, listening to the key points explained by the elderly man. As he continued to hold the posture, he was experiencing a pleasant feeling throughout his body due to the increase in blood flow.

He continued to listen to the key points as he monitored the attributes and skills section at the bottom of his field of vision.

After thinking for a while, his line of sight finally focused on his newly gained White Cloud Secret Method.

After a few seconds, a burst of energy suddenly rushed into the skill.

The display status of the White Cloud Secret Method gradually changed, from elementary to intermediate.

Chapter 12: Secret Method 2

Humm!!

In the instant the change was completed, Garen felt a tingling sensation throughout his entire body. Suddenly, his blood flow increased, and the pleasant feeling from just now abruptly changed to a cool and refreshing feeling as his heart rate accelerated like a rapid drum beat.

At the attribute column at the bottom of his sight, his strength attribute was once again changing. From the initial 0.45, it gradually changed to 0.46, then to 0.47, 0.48, 0.49 to 0.5!! The number stopped at 0.5 and, at that moment, Garen felt that all the muscles in his body were screaming in pain; from various parts of his body, a powerful force rushed out.

His arms, legs and chest were all slightly enlarging.

Puff...

Garen could not help but exhale, the air that he breathed out was slightly hot.

At this moment, the elderly man's voice sounded out again, "After training, use the Secret Method of our dojo together with the basic fighting techniques. A special technique to exert force combined with the Secret Method training will allow you to achieve the most explosive output. You will experience the benefits yourself in the future. Each stage will experience a different level of explosiveness."

"At most, a normal person's instantaneous peak force is around 200 pounds. By training using a Special Method and the use of an Explosive Force Technique, your strength will be able to reach this limit and might even exceed it.

"And so!"

The elderly man stood as his eyes swept through the students.

“There are no shortcuts in martial arts! There’s only diligence! Sweat! Effort!! As long as you put in enough effort, you can compensate for your lack of talent!”

“Yes!” Everyone could not help but shout out loud.

The elderly man nodded in satisfaction, took out a piece of paper from his pocket, then walked to the wall and pasted it on. Then, he walked out of the hall and closed the door behind him.

Garen’s entire body was bulging, and his blood was flowing at a high speed. However, he did not feel cold in the slightest. He breathed out once more and slowly recovered from the posture; he rested while standing still. Everyone around him was caught up in the excitement and did not notice his strange demeanor.

The wooden hall was filled with clamor; students who were familiar with each other were asking each other about their experience regarding the Secret Method.

“Hey! Garen, how are you feeling?” Feeling a tap on his shoulder, Garen quickly turned around and found Erwin standing behind him.

“There’s a pleasant feeling throughout my entire body; it feels similar to how it feels after going for a run!” Garen quickly replied, “Senior Brother Erwin, how about you?”

“You can just call me Erwin.” There’s a trace of excitement in Erwin’s expression. “I feel the same way you do. Also, I heard that after training using the Secret Method, our Explosive Force Technique will be even stronger. Moreover, the stronger our body is, the more powerful our peak force will be! My original strength was around 120 pounds, but I think I’ve reached 200 pounds with this Secret Method! This is a normal man’s limit!

“It’s just that starting from 160 pounds, it gets even harder the more we train. In order to exceed 200 pounds, every slightest improvement requires a lot of hard work and effort.”

“Senior Brother, since you have a strong foundation from the start, your situation is better than ours.” Garen helplessly shrugged his shoulders. “I am content as long as I can reach your standard.”

“That’s simple.” Erwin patted Garen’s shoulder with a smile. “With a weak foundation, you’ll find that you will improve quickly from the start and only slow down much later. Since there’s a limit to the human body, it only gets harder towards the end. In our White Cloud Dojo, the highest record is 250 pounds.”

“250 pounds?” Garen quietly noted down this number. “Where can we test our strength?”

“The headquarters specially made sandbags with different weights so that we can test our strength. We can roughly estimate our strength based on how far we can hit the sandbags,” Erwin explained.

“Why don’t we go and try it out?” Garen was eager to try.

“That’s right, Senior Brother Erwin, let’s go and try it.”

While the two of them were talking, two of the students approached and introduced themselves. The boy was Khairul and the girl was Rodelisa; they were in the same batch as Garen.

“Sure, let’s go and test our current strength!” Erwin was interested as well. He brought the three of them out of the wooden hall and traversed through the red wooden corridors. They soon passed by a rectangular sports field made of white stone and entered a black courtyard built on its edge.

Within the courtyard, five black sandbags of different sizes were hanging on a black metallic frame. On its right, there were many old boxing gloves on a wooden shelf. There were already some students around the sandbags testing their strength.

Garen looked at all of the sandbags; from left to right, they were labeled: 120, 140, 160, 180, and 200. The five sandbags each corresponded to a different weight. A white line was drawn behind the sandbags; it was there for validation. Only when the sandbags crossed the line after getting hit would the force of the blow be considered as meeting the corresponding weight.

At that moment, a group of people had already given it a try, and no one managed to hit the sandbags far enough to reach the white line. They could not do it even with the lightest 120 pounds sandbag.

Soon, a slim and flat-chested girl with short silver hair walked out of the crowd. It was the girl that competed with Garen for the 15th placing: Daris. Daris stood in front of the 120 pound sandbag. She breathed in deeply, took a step back and pulled her right fist back. Like a coiled up spring, her pose was impeccable, and she had a solemn expression on her face.

Following her movements, the surroundings quieted down. Everyone was attentively looking at her to see how well she would do.

“Judging from her flawless posture, she must have trained before,” Erwin whispered to Garen. “I heard that her family runs a dojo as well. It’s just that after her father passed away and her mother fell sick, there was no one to take over, and it was difficult for the the dojo to continue. She joined the White Cloud Dojo to make a name for herself, and once she gains enough fame, she’ll be able to revitalize her family’s dojo.”

“Isn’t she only sixteen or seventeen years old? It must be hard for her to take the responsibility of her entire household on her shoulders.” Garen slowly nodded.

Hah!!!

Suddenly, Daris charged forward while wearing the old gloves, her right fist striking out in a straight line and brutally hitting the black sandbag.

Bang! Ow!

Daris was struck by the sandbag as it swung back, causing her to fall onto the floor. Her eyes reddened and welled up with tears.

The surrounding students all burst out in laughter.

“From her posture, you wouldn’t think that she would only reach a third of the distance...”

“Shouldn’t the requirement be lower for a girl?”

The sandbag made a whooshing sound as it swung and continued to wobble around.

Another boy went up and tried; he looked muscular and was a head taller than both Garen and Erwin.

With a dull thud, the boy struck the sandbag and it covered most of the distance and was only a small distance away from the white line. “It was so close to reaching 120 pounds.” He shook his head and walked off.

“I’ll go!”

The boy next to Garen, Khairul, managed to reach half of the distance. The girl, Rodelisa, managed to reach a third of the distance.

“Aren’t you going to try?”

“I’ll continue watching first.” Garen nodded. He did not know his current strength either, but he was slightly expectant as well after greatly improving.

“Then, I’ll go first.” Erwin walked towards the sandbags as he rolled up his sleeves.

Bang!!

Erwin easily crossed the white line for 120 pounds. With an easygoing expression, he warmed up his fist in a relaxed manner.

The spectating students immediately quieted down; all of their attention were attracted. This was the first new student that easily passed.

Daris was also standing in a corner looking at Erwin; in her eyes, envy was written all over.

“Senior Brother, good luck!”

“You can do it!”

Garen and the other two loudly shouted.

Erwin smiled and walked to the front of the 140 pounds sandbag. He took a standard fighting stance and breathed in deeply.

Bang!!

The black sandbag immediately swung up, flying over most of the distance before easily crossing over the white line.

Then, it was the 160 pounds sandbag; with a dull thud, there was still a little distance before the sandbag could reach the line.

Erwin shook his head with a smile. “I can’t do it, this is my limit. I’ve already tried many times before. I had a breakthrough today only because of the Secret Method; I couldn’t even reach 140 pounds before.”

“I’ll give it a try as well.” Garen walked forward and stood at the 120 pounds position. Wearing the gloves and not using any techniques, he immediately took a pose and breathed in deeply.

“I’ll use three quarters of my strength.” He slowly relaxed the muscles in his arm, estimating three quarters of his strength.

He tightened his fist.

Bang!!

The black sandbag immediately flew out; there was still a little distance before it could cross the white line though.

Even though his fist was wrapped inside the gloves, Garen could still feel a numb sensation in his hand.

“Not bad!!” Erwin loudly cheered. As a lifelong martial artist, he could tell that Garen did not put in all of his effort into that punch. If Garen had tried his best, he would easily

break through to 120 pounds. Previously, Erwin thought that this junior brother would not be able to do it, at least not within such a short amount of time. "As expected, youngsters still in their puberty are scary..." Erwin was speechless as he shook his head.

Among the other students, the previous few that almost passed looked at Garen's physique and did not want to admit defeat; they got ready to start trying once more. All of them made up their mind to break through to 120 pounds that day.

The rest of the students were still quite lacking. Some of them started to gather around the students with better results to ask them about force exertion techniques, while the rest slowly dispersed.

Daris bit her lower lip as she stared at Garen. "He wasn't as strong as me previously... Yet, he has grown so much within a month! How is this possible!?" She recalled training day in and day out just to inherit the dojo, but she barely reached the standard of an ordinary girl due to having a weak physique from birth. Along the way, she shed a lot of tears and suffered a lot. In that moment, she suddenly felt wronged from the unfairness of this world.

Garen relaxedly stretched his hands and neck as he estimated his current level. "If I use all of my strength, I should be able to easily break through to 120 pounds. However, 140 pounds should be quite difficult. My actual strength should be much lower than Senior Brother Erwin."

From within the entire White Cloud Dojo, Erwin's level was superior among the new disciples. However, he had reached the limit of his physique, so he would need to put in a lot of effort to make any more improvements.

The strength of ordinary formal disciples was around 160 pounds, while the stronger ones were disciples that had been training for a long time. The highest 200 pounds could only be reached by the dojo master; that was the limit of adults. At least, that was the limit of adults in the confederation.

The fact that Erwin was able to get close to the limit of an adult by the age of 18 was obviously the result of long-term training. And since Garen was able to reach 120 pounds by 16 years old, it was clear that he was within the upper tier among his peers.

Furthermore, he had yet to use the second stage of the Secret Method after comprehending it. When combined with an Explosive Force Technique, his strength would greatly increase, and he might even be able to reach 140 pounds.

Chapter 13: The Beginning of the Beginning 1

Coming out of the ring satisfied, Garen removed his gloves and walked to Erwin's side.

"Looks like I'll be able to catch up to you very soon, Senior Brother Erwin."

"You think you're the only one improving?" Erwin threw him a look of feigned contempt. "Alright, let's put this topic aside. You have to go home for dinner later, right? It's quite far from here to the city center, so head home then or else you won't be able to find transportation later."

"Okay, I'll be leaving first then." Garen was aware of the situation too. He greeted two other people on his way out the door, walked past the courtyard and exited the main entrance of the Martial Colosseum with a few other students.

White Cloud Dojo was just a dojo in Huaishan City. It had two branches and a main Martial Colosseum. Both branches were within the city, and only the main Martial Colosseum was located in the outskirts, which was quite a distance from Bluetree Street where Garen lived.

After finally managing to hail a carriage, both Garen and another female student going the same way squeezed into it. The carriage started heading down the gray cobblestone road towards the city center.

Sitting on the right side of the carriage, Garen reclined on the leather seat, closed his eyes and rested with his head tilted slightly upwards. The crisp sound of hooves on cobblestone could be heard incessantly.

The girl beside him took out a book and started reading it page by page; the sound of pages turning came at regular intervals.

In a daze, Garen slowly fell into a half-asleep state.

Some time passed. There seemed to be a slight commotion going on nearby. He gradually woke up and looked out the carriage window.

The black-haired girl beside him also turned to her side to look out the left window. A group of colorfully dressed children were playing chase and ran past the side of the carriage. These children, seemingly from Zhejiang, each had an assortment of red, yellow, and green gift boxes in their hands.

"Ahh, it's Children's Day today." Garen realized.

"It was yesterday, but some families choose to celebrate it a day later. That way, it's less crowded and probably safer for the kids." The black-haired girl turned around to face the front of the carriage again. She took a glance at Garen and asked, "Where are you getting off?"

“I’m getting off at Pennington.”

“It’s already Blacktree Street here. We’ll be at Pennington soon.”

It was then that Garen noticed the buildings passing by outside had become gray ones; the walls of each engraved with reliefs. Both sides of the road were each lined with a row of candlenut trees.

“Thanks for the reminder. The corner of Pennington is just up ahead. Sir, if you could just let me down here?”

“Of course.”

The black carriage slowed down to a stop at the corner of Pennington. Garen stepped off the carriage and paid the fare. Afterwards, he straightened his clothes and started walking towards Dolphin Antiques at the corner of the street.

A ray of scarlet sunlight shone in and lit the whole antique store a warm shade of red.

The old man was once again sitting in front of the bookshelf directly facing the entrance, and had dozed off at the desk.

Garen walked through the door without disturbing him, and directly headed towards the left side of the store with a sense of familiarity, to where the Bronze Cross Emblem was placed.

He picked up the emblem and examined it. There was a thin layer of glimmer on it, but that didn’t matter. Holding the emblem, Garen’s attention shifted to the Attribute Pane in the lower part of his field of vision.

Although 100% of the Potential Attribute had been used up, several days of continuous “accumulation” had made Garen’s Potential rise to 47% once again.

“You again, kid?” Old Man Gregor spoke from behind him, “You’re here to see it everyday. If you like it so much, why not just buy it so you can look at it all you want?”

“Am I not already trying to save up? Do you think it’s possible for me as an ordinary student to casually come up with such a large sum of money?” Garen refuted without turning around to face him.

“It’s up to you. Your presence makes my shop seem livelier anyway. But rules are rules, it’s 10 bucks an hour.”

“Yeah, yeah... You’re really obsessed about money.” Garen was rendered speechless.

He dawdled for more than an hour holding the emblem, while the sky outside gradually darkened. Garen reluctantly put the emblem down after seeing his potential increase slightly at an infuriatingly slow pace.

“Remember to take good care of it. I’ll be back!”

“Yeah! Scram kid, you’re even more long-winded than me!” The old man impatiently waved his hand and continued, “It’s time for me to close up anyway.”

“No wonder you don’t get any business here.” After multiple interactions, Garen was already familiar with the old man’s temper. Initially, there was still a veil of civility between the two, but after growing more familiar, both just let it all go and spoke their minds.

More than two weeks had passed.

Garen resumed his normal routine in the academy, travelling between the antique store and the dojo day in and day out. His Potential steadily increased past 100%, allowing him to allocate new Attribute Points again.

It’s just that he hadn’t decided on what to add the points to. Originally, he meant to raise his grades in a few subjects, but unfortunately, not all skills could be enhanced with Attribute Points.

Only a few special skills allowed such enhancements, and not others; for example, National Studies and Foreign Languages. The high-grade learning materials for these subjects weren’t even distributed, and Garen had no relevant memory of them, so naturally, he couldn’t understand any of it.

It dawned on him that his Attribute point enhancements could only work on skills and subjects already within his field of knowledge.

Simply put, if he was taught a level of the White Cloud Secret Method but had no clue about its further levels, he would need follow-up training before he could enhance it. So, under such circumstances, he wouldn’t be able to compel an Attribute point enhancement since his memory bank didn’t have the blueprint for further enhancements.

Attribute Points and his Unique Skills, as Garen concluded, were more like means with which to substantially develop, mine and utilize his potential, expressed in the form of skills and levels. They were not like skill points in a videogame that allowed him to learn new things instantly.

Therefore, to enhance a skill, one would have to have a comprehensive understanding of the content of the next skill level. Leave something out, and the skill couldn't be upgraded.

Putting aside his own development, his relationship with his sister Ying Er seemed to have changed. Ever since that odd session of playful slapstick the other day, Ying Er would be in a hurry and wouldn't say much every time they interacted. What happened? Garen wasn't sure what was going on with Ying Er. He just felt that things had become more awkward than before. After meals, she would clear the dishes quickly, then dash back to hide in her room, not speaking to Garen anywhere near as much as she used to.

In the blink of an eye, midterms were approaching fast. Confederate schools had three semesters in a year, so each semester was quite short. Ying Er's archery tournament was about to begin too.

Garen did some light reviewing. Only the exams in third year of high school were important anyway, so he didn't really bother about the other semesters. It's not as if university was the only option. Moreover, Mathematics and Physics here were effortlessly simple. It took him a mere ten days to boost his mastery of both subjects to the advanced level. He even managed to attain elementary level for both National Studies and Foreign Languages through rote memorization.

After enhancing his intelligence, his memory and comprehension had improved as well. Pairing that with his adult consciousness and mind, this made his results far better than that of the previous Garen. If not for the fact that his focus wasn't on studies, he would probably be on par with the top students.

The afternoon sun shone on Pennington Street at an angle which cast long silhouettes on the street. Both sides of the street were deserted, and only a few pedestrians passed by, all with thick windbreaker jackets on.

Two black cars were parked by the side of the road. The polished surface of the car bodies reflected a pale yellow glow. In one of the cars, the driver could be seen sleeping soundly at the wheel.

On the right side of the street, a purple-haired boy with burgundy eyes was rubbing his hands together and striding along in a hurry. His hair was slightly long, extending from his temples to his chin. His purple hair wrapped around his face, occasionally being blown backwards by the wind. He was wearing a light gray sweater and trousers, which accentuated his porcelain white skin.

The boy looked up at the advertisement banner on a distant building.

The red banner read: From 21st to 25th of September, Elizabeth Jewelries Autumn Bargain, Discounts ranging from 50 – 90 %.

“It’s already September? Time sure flies...” Garen quickened his pace. He was on his way to the antiques store. It was already a few days past the time limit that the old man had mentioned. Because he had only just been freshly selected as a disciple at the dojo, he could only participate in the internal tryouts in the next quarter; there was no way he could make any money from tournaments for now.

He didn’t have the money, but the other buyer that Old Man Gregor mentioned hadn’t appeared either. Garen felt at ease and justified to continue making one to two hours of contact with the emblem every day to absorb more Potential.

“Enhancing skills with Attribute Points still isn’t as worthwhile as using it on my own Attributes,” Garen carefully analyzed, “Skills can be improved through mastery. Unless it’s a difficult skill to improve, using Attribute Points on my own body would be better. Improvements like these are long-term enhancements. If I used a few Attribute Points on Physics or Mathematics just to make it easier for myself to attain an advanced level, it would have been a waste. The most that would have achieved was saving me some time. It would be more worthwhile if I used it on the difficult-to-improve White Cloud Secret Method...”

Garen glanced at the Attribute Pane in his lower field of vision.

Strength, enhanced by two points, was now at 0.52. Potential was at 124%.

“I obtained the improvements in strength by training in the White Cloud Secret Method, and partly through daily strength exercises. Moreover, since gaining Attribute Points seems to have the effect of fortifying and maintaining the body, my strength won’t decrease from lack of training.”

He glanced at the Skills Pane.

White Cloud Secret Method: Intermediate. Fundamental Combat Skills: Elementary. Explosive Fist Arts: Uninitiated.

“Explosive Fist Arts, the fighting technique that only Formal Disciples can learn upon initiation, as well as the intermediate level White Cloud Secret Method – I could use Attribute Points to enhance these.” Garen hesitated. “Explosive Fist Arts can raise the strength of the whole body to its highest limit, and the strength of the fists can be increased by threefold; it is the upgraded version of Fundamental Combat Skills. Generally, it takes two years to master the basics, at which point the skin would harden and hitting a sandbag with gloveless bare hands wouldn’t cause any injury, whereas the White Cloud Secret Method is the basis of all fundamentals, capable of producing exceptional results if accumulated throughout a long period of time. It has been said that

it takes more than 10 years to reach the advanced level, and one would have to possess extraordinary talent...” /

Garen was particularly interested in the martial arts of this world now. It was very similar to the national martial arts on Earth in his previous life, but was much more commonplace than the latter. Even though both were difficult to train in and apply, this wasn't a problem for him because he had his special ability.

He had wanted to learn martial arts to strengthen himself in his past life, but he lacked the conditions to. Now that all the conditions were met, naturally, his interest has piqued; it was almost as if he had become obsessed with them..

“Fortunately, I have the emblem, which allows me to accrue Attribute Points. Following this progression for enhancements, I'll enhance the White Cloud Secret Method first, then boost my Explosive Fist Arts to the most advanced level. By then, I'll be able to reach the upper tier of the entire dojo! Even the Dojo Master of the White Cloud Dojo himself had merely attain the third tier in his Explosive Fist Arts and advanced his White Cloud Secret Method by another level, although it wasn't a full mastery.”

“As long as I keep using the emblem to aid my enhancements, I can boost my martial art skills to a level similar to that of the Dojo Master with just five Attribute Points!”

Snapping out of his excitement, Garen had reached the corner of Pennington. Unusually, the entrance of Dolphin Antiques seemed a bit messy today.

He quickened his pace and walked into the store. He was greeted with a shock.

It was chaos inside: antiques and broken debris were strewn all over the floor, it was all a mess.

A man and a woman, both clad in windbreakers, stood at the store entrance while interrogating the old man.

Chapter 14: The Beginning of the Beginning 2

The man appeared to be 40 years of age. He had a cute little mustache above his lips and an overall mature-looking face. He wore a black top hat and his black trench coat draped down all the way to his ankles. The one thing that caught Garen's attention was the black pipe he had in his hand. He was smoking patiently with a frown on his face; white fog shot out of his nostrils from time to time.

The woman standing beside the man was very pretty. She was around the age of 20 to 30 with her light blonde hair in a ponytail. Her entire appearance was elegant and clean, and her white trench coat was spotless without the slightest hint of dirt. With her delicate

and beautiful porcelain-like face, she seemed like a professional who was decisive and simple.

The arrival of Garen did not catch the attention of the three people in the room. He walked softly until he was beside the old man and eavesdropped.

“...Then, the time of the crime should be last night. The exact time has to be deduced based on the evidence at the scene of the crime,” the man rubbed his chin and said in a low voice.

“That’s right,” the old man answered in a low voice as well. “That is the situation as I know it. I have told you everything I know. Oh, this is a regular customer of mine, Garen.”

The man checked out Garen from head to toe, then nodded. “Can I ask you a few questions?”

“Sure, no problem,” Garen responded hastily.

The man asked Garen about the condition of the shop last night, then began to wander around the store with the lady in white.

Old Man Gregor was kneeling on the ground, picking up the scattered old books. He was quietly cursing the thief.

“Old man, you were robbed?” Garen kneeled down as well and helped to pick up the books.

As soon as “robbed” was mentioned, the wrinkles on Old Man Gregor’s face twisted into a lump. “I was not feeling well today, so I decided to only open the shop in the afternoon. You know me, I definitely wasn’t opening the shop just for you. Who would’ve expected that as soon as I walked in, I saw...”

The old man and the young man got along strangely well. When they chatted, they forgot about the age difference and formed a cross-generational friendship. Garen felt warm on the inside. He knew that the old man actually felt fine and had been for days. The old man always opened the shop for him in the afternoon before his visit and closed the shop right after he had left. He did not care about money at all. He knew that Garen was simply coming to see the emblem, and therefore opened the shop exclusively for him.

Old Man Gregor was too lonely. He wanted to find something to do to kill time and, perhaps, bickering with Garen was one of the most interesting times in his day.

“Which things are missing?” Garen was suddenly worried, as he remembered the Bronze Cross Emblem.

“Some stuff went missing, including the Bronze Cross Emblem you like so much.” The old man had a long face as he confirmed Garen’s worries.

“F*ck!” Garen’s expression changed. “Are you sure it’s lost?” Suddenly, he remembered something and immediately suggested, “No, I think you may have missed a spot when you searched. The emblem was so small. There are so many things here. Maybe it fell in a corner somewhere.” He quickly cheered up.

“There is no need to search again. The emblem is definitely lost.” The old man shook his head. “I already searched everywhere before you came...”

Garen was silent. The emblem was essential for him to improve his potential. He had searched the entirety of Huaishan City, and the Bronze Cross Emblem was the only thing that had the potential for him to absorb. Now that his sole source of improvement was lost, the perfect life and the bright future Garen had planned suddenly darkened.

The two of them kneeled onto the ground, not sure what to say now.

“Who are those two?”

“They are federal detectives who are investigating the serial thief case: Dale Quicksilver and Miss Si Lan. They are here to help solve the case,” the old man informed Garen in a whisper.

In this world, crimes were normally solved by detectives. Famous detectives and policemen had the right to investigate crime scenes immediately after crimes were committed. Since most cases were solved by detectives, famous detectives had a high societal ranking.

Garen nodded and observed the interaction between the two as he picked up more books.

The two of them wandered around for a long time when Dale Quicksilver finally broke the silence.

“This is definitely the doing of the Golden Hoop! The style of the crime is exactly the same as Navici!” He gently touched the edge of a table and sniffed it under his nose.

“This guy ran away quickly!” Miss Si Lan frowned.

“Si Lan, remember what I said the time we solved the Light of Wendini case?” Dale Quicksilver asked suddenly.

“Sir, you mean?”

“Yes”—he then turned his body around—“If the Golden Hoop appears, the two of you must remain calm and not provoke him. This criminal is atrocious, do not anger him! Any carelessness will result in casualties! He is a retired officer from the special forces.”

“Not an issue!”

“Of course!”

The old man and Garen quickly stood up and answered.

“We did not come all the way from Navici for fun. This time... we will not let you get away again!” Dale Quicksilver turned around and mumbled. His gaze became strangely profound, “Si Lan! Inform the White Eagle at once. Tell them there is no need for further investigation, say that we already caught the tail of the criminal!”

“Yes, sir!”

Dale Quicksilver shook his trench coat and walked toward the front door in big steps. Si Lan followed after him closely.

“Sir, should we wait for the White Eagle before we make any move? Out of all the cases we have dealt with, the Golden Hoop is the most dangerous. This is also our first encounter...”

“No, it will be too late if we wait for them to take action...” Dale Quicksilver raised his head and stared at the flaming red sunset sky. “Relax, nothing is going to happen... No matter how dangerous, he is just an ordinary person. All human beings have a weakness!”

“Don’t you think this is too risky... after all, the Golden Hoop was an officer in the special forces. He had received formal training and can easily defeat five to six adults empty handed,” Si Lan’s face was still frowning.

“Don’t worry. We are not going to personally attack him,” Dale Quicksilver smiled kindly and pinched Si Lan’s cheek. Si Lan blushed and lowered her head. “Alright, let’s go back.”

“Yes, sir.”

With one person in front and other in the back, they marched away.

Inside the shop, Garen sat down in a chair and watched their backs until they were gone.

“Old man, who’s this Golden Hoop? Is he famous?”

“He is a serial thief and killer. Have you not been paying attention to the recent news? There have been multiple instances of stealing and murdering all over the country. I’m

lucky that I didn't have to personally face that Golden Hoop..." Old Man Gregor, who was cursing just moments ago, was rejoicing, "I heard that the Golden Hoop was once surrounded by police. He wounded two policemen with a gun then casually ran away by hiding himself in a crowd. The only wound he received was during a brawl with a policeman when a bullet brushed against his arm."

Listening to the old man, Garen faintly felt that this was not the first time the Golden Hoop and Dale Quicksilver had had a feud.

"A few days ago, in a manor down at the countryside, Dale Quicksilver's friend had a brawl with the Golden Hoop and was close to arresting him," the old man added.

Garen squinted his eyes and saw that at the end of the street, Dale Quicksilver and Si Lan were negotiating with a strong looking man in black. The man had a tense gaze, bulky muscles, and movements that exposed him as someone who knew Martial Arts.

"Is Dale Quicksilver's friend that person?" He pointed toward the sturdy man.

The old man peeked in the direction. "Yep, that's the friend. He was in the shop moments ago."

Garen nodded. From the man's body language, he could tell the man's combat level.

"Based on his body type and his aura, he is most likely an ordinary adult who has above average strength. He probably trained in military style combat, and it is possible that he knows special explosive techniques too."

Because of the instinct acquired from training, Garen could naturally compare the differences between the man and himself. "If we had a battle, I do not have nearly as much practical experience; however, strength-wise, I am definitely stronger than him! The strength of an ordinary adult, converted into numbers, is 0.5, and I have long surpassed this number. If I focus all my energy on special explosive techniques, I will win in strength by a landslide. Therefore, if the Golden Hoop is similar to them..."

Garen again focused on the skill panel in his vision.

"Only I am different than others. I can attribute points to different attributes. My actual strength does not match my physique." He had observed everyone else in the Combat Center, and everyone was the same. The heavier and bulkier physique someone had, the more muscles they had and the stronger they were. He was the only exception. He had an ordinary physique, but if he decided to explode all of his energy, he could easily surpass the limits.

"Bang!"

After a dull impactful sound, Garen punched hard at a 180-pound sandbag, which swayed over the passing line.

He was shirtless. His white, sturdy muscles were quivering on his body. He was not wearing any gloves; instead, he was hitting the sandbag with his bare fists. It was evening; the boxing room was empty except for him.

“After only two weeks, I can easily punch 180 pounds. White Cloud Secret Arts mixed with Explosive Fist Techniques sure is amazing.”

Garen grabbed a towel and wiped the sweat off his face.

“No wonder White Cloud Secrets Arts is a closely guarded secret art. It is the most fundamental art you could learn from the White Cloud Dojo. By now, the students who started training at the same time as me are far behind me. The level needed to attain Intermediate Secret Arts in addition to its growth speed are also higher than others too. On top of that, the first time I used the Secret Arts, the results were so great that I was able to upgrade it. Hmm... I guess that in the future I will never be able to achieve such great results again. I can't believe I was able to combine the use of the medicinal aroma and the Secret Arts to achieve a score above 0.5.”

When he was just starting to learn the Secret Arts, the old man from that day took out a secret art scroll that faintly had a medicinal aroma. It was the type of aroma that mixed well with the incense in the fireplace, stimulating deeper comprehensions during Secret Arts Training.

He again posed in the stance required for the White Cloud Secret Arts, and a surge of cold air slowly extended from his chest to his limbs. Muscles from his entire body were pulsing to the rhythm of his heart.

The body adjusted the most and improved the greatest during the first time a secret method was used. That day, Garen only adjusted slightly, but he was already able to handle the 120-pound weight. Now that he had recovered, his strength increased again. He was now able to utilize all the enhancements he received.

To exceed 180 pounds was not a difficult task.

Standing in the stance dictated by the Technique, Garen's attention was again focused on the skill panel.

“The Explosive Fist Technique is the real combat method in the Dojo. It is not a technique that only looks impressive. If I can successfully master the Explosive Fist Technique, then I can truly start my ranking tests. If I can get a ranking, then I can start teaching at a Dojo and receive better salaries... Then I can start collecting jewelry that contains potential.”

Garen was again calculating inside his head. Feeling determined, he shifted his vision onto the Explosive Fist Technique.

“This is the one!”

Following his exclamation, the surge of cold air was sucked out of his head and squirmed onto the location of the record of the Explosive Fist Technique in his vision. The word “Uninitiated”, finally, jumped slightly and abruptly changed into Elementary.

Instantly, Garen felt his body tighten as if a waxy liquid was being produced by his internal body. The liquid sluggishly seeped through his skin and covered it.

“Boom!”

Inside his brain, a loud noise rumbled.

Chapter 15: The Incident

All of a sudden, Garen felt like half of his body was frozen in frigid ice while the other half was scorching hot. He felt an overwhelming dizziness, as if someone was continuously pummeling on his head with a hammer.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He could hear his heartbeat. Beat by beat; it pounded like a war drum. With every heartbeat, the streams of ice and fire began to merge together.

The freezing and scorching streams of blood intertwined, but remained distinct. They formed a delicate spiral inside Garen’s body and began to flow rapidly.

Within the training hall, the serene moonlight scattered through the high windows. It created a delicate white cloak on Garen’s body.

His face flushed like a cooked shrimp as he stood blankly in front of the sandbag. Steam began to rise from his hair, his body, and his pants as his sweat evaporated.

He didn’t know how much time had passed.

Ka!

He slowly twitched his body. A loud, crisp sound resounded from one of his joints and echoed across the room. Subsequently, all his joints began to repeat the same sound as if popcorn was being popped.

His mind finally regained consciousness. The first thing he did was to walk in front of the 200 pounds sandbag. He lifted his right arm and took in a deep breath.

Peng!

The sandbag flew in the air and passed the qualification line. The remaining force of the swinging sandbag forced the metal frame to squeak. Garen stabilized the sandbag after it flew back.

[My strength increased again...]" He opened his right palm to examine his skin. His palm was covered by a crystallized texture which felt like a glove. Unlike before, he did not feel any pain hitting the sandbag.

The status under his vision also changed.

His Strength grew from 0.52 to 0.53, while his Vitality also increased from 0.31 to 0.33.

[When I combined this with Explosive Fist Arts, my skin's durability increased quite substantially.] He rubbed both of his hands as he scanned the training room. He saw a wooden rack at the corner filled with weapons. Sword, shield, broadsword, heavy sword, dagger, axe, and hammer. The rack had everything.

Garen approached the stand and grabbed a silver dagger. He gently lifted the dagger. Under the pristine moonlight, the dagger reflected a silvery shadow. The tip of the knife was blinding with its sharp edge.

He lightly slashed the back of his hand with the dagger.

Zzzp... It felt like he had slashed hard leather, and only left a slight white mark.

[Indeed... The Explosive Fists Arts can increase the body's durability! No wonder the procedure included tempering the body against wooden stumps.]

He was genuinely surprised. He began to increase the force exerted on the dagger, starting from one pound of strength. Two pounds... Three pounds... Five pounds... Ten pounds... 15 pounds... 20 pounds!!

All of a sudden, the skin under the dagger revealed a small cut, barely penetrating to the muscle underneath. The dagger was lodged inside, completely unable to move. Garen felt pain and quickly pulled back the dagger.

[Around 20 pounds of force is required to barely penetrate my muscle. The Explosive Fists Arts are indeed powerful. No wonder it takes years to train and master even with the help of natural talent, and no wonder White Cloud Dojo is renowned for this skill.]

Garen had tested his durability with his relaxed muscle, but if he flexed, 20 pounds would not be his limit. He gave this a slight thought, then tested it. He started with a force of 20 pounds and increased it to 50 pounds before the dagger finally pierced into his muscle.

[This is almost equivalent to the Body Hardening Technique. It's incredible!]

He placed the dagger back onto the wooden rack. As he loosened his muscles, blood began to emerge from his arm, but it immediately clotted.

He looked downwards at the 24% remaining Potential. Garen tidied up and dressed, then took the key beside the sandbag and left the training hall.

Any official student had the right to use the potential testing equipment in the secondary hall. Therefore, every official student had a key to the hall.

As Garen left the secondary hall, he could not spot a single soul on the street. The cold breeze carried a newspaper from the distance as he began to jog through the night. Garen had become accustomed to this habitual exercise.

It was almost 10 o'clock. The street was not in a crowded area with a large population. Garen took the desolate route for an easier jog. In ten minutes, he only spotted a few people.

The dim yellow light shone in on the peaceful street. Garen's footsteps echoed in the wind with the occasional wooden clap from a shop closing in the distance.

Beep!

A loud beeping noise came from the dark street across the corner. Garen moved from the middle of the road to the left side as he saw a black antique vehicle approach him from his right side. The bright yellow headlights blinded him for a brief moment when the car made a turn. He tried to block the radiance with his hand.

Just as the car passed him, a number in his vision suddenly changed.

[My Potential is going up!?!]

He immediately turned and ran to the car. The Potential Meter increased from 23% to 45% as soon as he turned around.

The only thing in his mind was to stop the car.

"Please stop!"

Garen dashed in front of the car and yelled with his arms wide open.

The cars in this world were slow to begin with. It didn't show any sign of stopping after being blocked as it headed directly at Garen.

"F**k!"

Garen sidestepped to avoid the car as he began to chase the vehicle.

"Finish him."

Faintly, he heard a woman's voice in the car.

Bang! The car door suddenly opened and directly hit him on the flank. A pitch black dagger silently darted at Garen's stomach.

Garen's heart abruptly jumped as he subconsciously grabbed the arm behind the dagger. His left hand naturally punched the door window.

Bang!

The arm that held the dagger snapped like dried branches. The red muscle and white ligament tore as blood spilled all over the car.

Simultaneously, the car door window easily shattered. Between the tiny glass shards, Garen's left hand directly punched the passenger's head. The person's face caved in when the forceful impact landed. The shape of his face changed as his nose, eyes, and mouth jumbled together due to the violent force. Stained with blood, white bone shards collided audibly against the windshield.

Garen was shocked.

So was the person still driving.

The car continued to move forward. Garen wrenched the front passenger door wide open as he dragged the car to the side. A graceful looking body fell out from the open door. It was the physique of a young woman with an attractive figure.

The girl's body dropped in front Garen with her face completely disfigured. It was like ketchup mixed with tofu. Her right arm, which held the dagger, hung limply on the side of her body. A black trench coat accented her exquisite figure. From the side, it was easy to see her charming cleavage. From her appearance, she was a young lady.

Under the pungent smell of the blood, he sensed the light fragrance of perfume.

He looked at the body in front of him before blankly staring at the car in the distance. He felt he could see the features of the man driving, along with his cold, bloody stare.

[I just killed somebody...] He stared at his brown pants, now stained with blood, Garen felt a sudden fear from the bottom of his heart.

“I just killed somebody...” he mumbled under his breath as he looked at the woman’s body.

Abruptly, he scanned his surroundings on the empty street. After he made sure that no one saw him, Garen immediately took off running.

The frightened and rhythmless footsteps resonated in the distance.

After he rushed home, he dashed straight into his room without a word.

“Brother, I’ll leave your allowance for next week on the dinner table...” Ying Er walked out of her room. Dumbfounded, she stared at Garen who stepped in front of her. Her face turned pale and she stopped in the middle of her sentence.

Bang!

The bedroom door shut.

“Garen’s back? He didn’t shower after his jog?” their mother Betty asked, opening the bedroom door.

“Yeah Garen, did you exercise again?” Garen’s step-father’s voice transmitted from the bedroom.

“Mhm, he seems to be rushed today for some reason. I didn’t even see him before he got back to his room,” his mother complained before she closed the door again.

Huff... Huff...

Huff...

Garen leaned against the door as he caught his breath. His face was an ashen white as his pupils dilated and contracted. The image of the split second when he killed the girl replayed vividly in his head. The shattered bone shards, the crimson red blood, the crooked broken arm, and the pair of wide bloody eyes.

“Nobody was there.” He tried to remember his surroundings. There was no one on the street due to the isolated location. The streetlight was dim and the headlights were not shining on him.

He reevaluated the situation before he mumbled, “Nobody saw it, except for the guy driving.”

Garen learned how to control his excessive strength gain through continued training, but in that dire situation when his life was on the line, he thought that it wasn't enough to just defend and his uncontrolled power was brutal.

The result was that the opponent could not be more dead.

Dong! Dong! Dong!

"Brother, are you okay?" Ying Er's voice resonated through the door.

"Don't worry; I'll be out in a minute after I change." Garen tried to respond in his usual tone.

"Mhm, then I'll boil the water for you first?"

"Okay, thanks."

Her footsteps faded into the distance.

He tried to calm down his rapidly beating heart. He changed into his bathrobe before he grabbed his uniform and balled it into a lump, careful not to expose the parts with blood before walking out of the door.

Boo!

"What are you doing !!" There was a figure in front of the door. It was Ying Er in her school uniform.

Reflexively, Garen wanted to close the door, but Ying Er put her foot in the doorway. Without much time to think, he dashed to his bed, threw his bloody clothes underneath the mattress, and sat at the edge of the bed.

Bam.

The door of the room closed. Ying Er walked in with a look of suspicion, her red eyes scanning the situation inside the room.

"What kind of mischief are you up to again?"

"What mischief? My trousers weren't pulled up, and I didn't expect you to be standing at the door, so I just blocked it for a while." Garen combed his hands through his hair to massage his numb scalp.

"That's not true! What's that under your bed?" Ying Er's sharp eyes immediately spotted the suspicious trace. She walked a few steps forward and stood facing Garen. "Move aside, I want to find out what disgusting things you've been up to!"

“What are you trying to do? It’s late, stop playing,” Garen said with a deliberate frown.

“Move aside!” Ying Er was one of those who ignored everything once her temper got the better of her. When she saw that Garen wouldn’t budge, it fueled her suspicion further.

“Stop it!”

“I said, move aside!” Ying Er’s voice deepened as her expression became ice-cold. “Looks like you didn’t learn a lesson the last time...”

Garen’s complexion slightly changed. “The last time” was the previous Garen; he tried to hide his collection of dirty magazines, but Ying Er found them and beat him up till he cried. Even though it wasn’t actually him who experienced that shameful incident, it was enough to make him choke.

But no matter what, the clothes underneath his bed absolutely could not be discovered!

When she saw that he continued to keep silent, Ying Er’s expression turned uglier.

“Looks like this time around, I’ll have to give you a lesson you won’t forget!” She started cracking her knuckles.

“It’s not what you think, trust me!” Garen looked up into Ying Er’s eyes. He had just killed someone by using too much force, and the last thing he wanted to do now was to fight his sister. He was worried that he might accidentally do it again...

Ying Er stared into his eyes and realized there wasn’t a sliver of embarrassment or anger in them for being exposed, but instead a hint of sincerity.

Both stared at each other for a while.

Ying Er slowly breathed a sigh of relief.

“You’re sure?”

“I’m sure!” Garen replied in haste. “Apart from this one thing, I’ll agree to whatever you want.”

“Fine. I’ll ask you a few questions. If you can answer me truthfully, I won’t bother you about this,” Ying Er paused.

“No problem!”

“Do you like dad?”

“Of course I do. That’s easy.”

“Do you like mum?”

“Of course.”

“Do you like uncle?”

“I do.”

“Do you like Ai Fei?”

“Of c... Who’s Ai Fei?”

Garen took a deep breath. “Good thing my reaction was quick...”

The palpitations that he suppressed earlier resurfaced. Seeing his sister’s expression finally turn bright again, he felt as if he just escaped the clutches of death. He would have never thought that she knew Ai Fei, the prettiest girl among the female students around him.

“Alright... I’ll spare you this time. But if you bring those disgusting things in here again, don’t blame me...” A satisfied smile broke across Ying Er’s face. “Okay, I’ll go out now. Rest early.”

“I know, I know. Alright, you get some rest too...” Garen breathed a sigh of relief. “See you tomorrow.”

“Yup, see you tomorrow... you wish!” Ying Er cried out. She pounced over and slid under the bed in a flash.

Garen hurriedly crouched down and followed suit, reaching for his bundle of clothes.

The bloodied clothes were shoved deeper under the bed by Ying Er’s vigorous movements; he could barely reach them.

“What’s in the clothes? Tell me!” Ying Er squeezed further under the bed, trying to grab the bundle of clothing.

“It’s nothing!”

“If I catch you, you’re dead meat!” Garen clung onto both of Ying Er’s legs while she crawled forward in an attempt to break free.

Garen put his weight on her from behind, but he didn’t dare to exert too much force, so all he could do was keep a light hold on her. Incidentally, he exerted too little force; Ying Er managed to free herself, and she lunged forward.

Bang!

“Ouch! That hurt...”

Ying Er hit her forehead on the underside of the bed, and her body curled back.

Behind her, Garen suddenly felt that his head was stuffy—he was inside his sister’s skirt.

Round buttocks covered by black pantyhose were inches from his face; he could even see a hint of white underneath. His nose almost touched the skin of her buttocks.

The smell of girly fragrance mixed with a hint of sweat wafted into his nasal cavity, instinctively causing him to inhale.

At that moment, both were completely frozen.

In front, Ying Er didn’t dare to move a muscle. A blush spread over her face, neck, and the entirety of her body.

She could distinctly feel Garen’s face on her bottom—he had probably seen everything under her skirt.

Garen’s mind was in a state of chaos. The most attractive part of a girl’s body was all of a sudden right in front of him, and he didn’t know how to respond.

Knock knock knock.

Someone knocked on the door.

“Are you two done playing in there? Time for you to wash up and go to bed! You have class tomorrow!” their father, Eisen, shouted from the doorway.

Both their hearts skipped a beat. It was nerve-racking.

If their father saw them in this state...

“Yup, almost done!” Garen snapped out of it and frantically shouted in reply.

They waited until the footsteps of their father leaving gradually faded.

Garen leaped out from under the bed in an instant.

He was then followed by Ying Er, with her hands covering her buttocks. Her face was red as she hung her head low; she didn’t dare look at Garen.

“I’m off to bed,” she mumbled softly, then quickly opened the door and left.

Garen took a deep breath and sat on his bed. At this moment, he felt a strange calm wash over him.

That bout of ambiguous tension had oddly suppressed his anxiety and panic from the previous event of having killed someone.

There was still a faint aroma of Ying Er in the room. Garen sat on his bed until the lights in Ying Er’s room went out. He then went out to find a clothes-drying pole and used it to hook the bloodied clothes out from under the bed, then crept into the bathroom to wash them.

A week later.

“Hey, old man, what’s the latest? Any new stock that’s particularly good? How about letting me have a look?”

Garen sat bored beside the table, fiddling with a golden button. Apparently, it was from the clothes of the famous Agate Queen who lived three hundred years ago.

“New stock? What new stock? That burglary cleared me out!” The old man was fumbling at the bookshelf. “That’s right! I have a book here that you might appreciate. Think of it as the reward for comforting this old geezer in my moment of crisis.”

“What book?”

“You’ll see.”

The old man continued rummaging through the bookshelf. Then, he took a stool and stepped on it, pulling out a large black hardcover book from the topmost shelf.

“Here, take it.” The old man struggled down from the stool and handed the book to Garen.

Garen took the bulky black brick from the old man and wiped a thick layer of dust off the cover, revealing some unknown black text.

He turned to the first page.

In that instant, Garen’s pupils shrunk slightly.

A huge gust of cool current poured into his palm and flowed to his head through his arm.

“Potential! It’s Potential! So... so much energy!”

He didn’t know how to react. There wasn’t any indication when he first held the book, but when he opened it, he started absorbing Potential.

His heart beat unnaturally fast. Garen glanced over the rapidly increasing Potential figures at the bottom of his vision and looked directly at the content on the page of the book.

The yellowing pages were crammed with an unknown text. Garen flipped through the book page by page. Some black-and-white sketches were occasionally interspersed in between the text.

The pictures were mostly weird, irregular geometric lines, which looked as much like a design for a mechanical contraption as it did a map for a complex terrain. They were densely marked with text and tiny symbols.

Garen didn’t have a clue what the content meant, but that didn’t stop him from absorbing Potential from the book. Turning it page by page, time slowly crept away.

Half an hour later...

Garen slowly closed the book and let out a long sigh.

“Finished going through it?” The old man squinted to look at the cover carefully; a trace of disappointment flashed over his eyes.

“Yeah, done. This is definitely a precious ancient antique!” Garen definitively said.

“You don’t say.” The old man seemed to relax a bit more, as if relieved of a burden. “Alright, I’m closing early today. You go ahead, I still have something to take care of.”

Garen took a look at the sky outside. The sun had completely disappeared below the horizon, and only a residual trace of red stained the clouds.

“Fine, I’ll be leaving first then. See you tomorrow.”

“Well, beat it kid!” the old man jokingly added.

“Oh yeah, how’s the progress with Detective Quicksilver?” Garen turned to ask.

“There was an explosion in Kyora Town just outside the city, and Detective Quicksilver was injured. He’s in the hospital now.” Old Man Gregor shook his head and sighed. “Even the famous Detective Quicksilver has faced a setback; looks like there’s no hope of getting my belongings back now.”

“That’s not necessarily the case. I looked up Detective Quicksilver, he’s no ordinary guy. The mystery of the stolen million-dollar oil painting in New Zealand, the nine serial killings in West Riyadh, and cracking the case of the torch legend, etc. The guy keeps facing new opponents, and keeps heading to new places to solve riddles; you can tell he enjoys solving cases. From how I see it, this golden bracelet won’t be an exception,” Garen comfortingly said.

“Thanks for your kind words. Get going now, I need to close up.” The old man waved his hand to rush Garen out.

“Alright.” Garen walked out of the store carrying his bag.

He looked at the Potential points at the bottom of his vision.

Potential: 179%. It was around 58% initially, and that was due to the increase after meeting that car on the night he killed someone.

“That book...” Amidst his delight, his eyes showed a trace of doubt. “Something feels off.”

After Garen left, Old Man Gregor closed the front door and went back to sitting in front of the bookshelf. He opened the black hardcover and gently caressed the pages as a complicated expression emerged on his face.

It wasn’t after a long while before he finished looking through the entire book.

“I should have known this would happen, but surprisingly I can’t help but want to cling on to something...”

The old man shook his head and slowly closed the pages.

He kept turning the pages until he finally closed the cover. The black text on the cover had turned dark red, as if fresh blood had flowed through each stroke and coagulated.