

Mystical Journey

#Chapter 21 - Read Mystical Journey Chapter 21

Chapter 21: Core (1)

From afar, Garen could see three contestants, including his sister. They gently released their bowstrings. Three lines of shadow flew out and nailed their targets.

His eyesight wasn't that good, but he managed to see that the arrows of the other contestants were slightly off the mark and Ying Er's arrow was much closer to the bull's-eye.

Cheers and boos roared from the crowd. Class 6, Ying Er's class, cheered the loudest.

The competition continued into the second round, followed by the third...

Garen didn't understand the rules at all. He just kept hearing the crowd cheer every time Ying Er fired an arrow. The classmates from Class 6 and all the female students were yelling Ying Er's name. It seemed that she was quite popular in school and not as subdued as when she was around their parents.

The archery event took more than an hour to complete; Garen kept yawning while he watched. When the time finally came for him to take the dojo test, he bid his sister goodbye and squeezed through the crowd behind him towards the exit.

Coming out of the crowd, the other parts of the Academy that were used for daily teaching seemed deserted. Occasionally, students and teachers would rush past while moving equipment, apparently to prepare for some sporting event.

Garen looked up at the sky. The sun was pale and its rays didn't provide any warmth. When an autumn breeze blew at him, a chill went through his body.

Heading out from the slightly deserted school gate, he turned towards the street where the dojo branch was located.

White Cloud Dojo had set up this branch dojo right by the street where Shengying Academy was situated. Many of the martial disciples were from the Academy. Combat was regarded as a part of the comprehensive development of quality education, so the Academy had no objections.

He took out the key and slipped into White Cloud Dojo through the main entrance. There was a mix of young and old people in white clothing sitting in the front hall. One of them was an instructor that Garen had seen teach before, the pretty Sharmilla.

Garen didn't know any of the others.

The seats in the front hall were usually reserved for the management personnel of the branch. Even though disciples were not specifically prohibited from sitting there, there were only those few seats when entering the front hall, so it would be unseemly for juniors to take up that space.

Garen gave Sharmilla a polite nod, then headed towards the courtyard through the left corridor. He didn't enter the courtyard, but continued walking left under the eaves. He came to a stop in front a small room with a white door and gently knocked on the door.

"Come in, it's not locked," a young man's voice answered from inside.

Garen opened the door and walked in.

The interior resembled an office archive room. A gentleman sat behind a desk. He whirled a pen in his hand, as if deliberating on a problem.

"Yes? How can I help you? The registration deadline has passed. You'll have to wait until the next quarter if you want to register." The man didn't look up from the documents in front of him.

"I'm not here to register. I'm Garen, one of the branch students chosen to be a Formal Disciple some time back." Garen walked over to the desk, took a chair and sat down. "I'm here to apply to be a Formal Dojo Disciple."

"Oh that. That's simple. Fill out this form right here."

The man handed over a form with a table of details to be filled in: name, age, family, etc.

Garen took a pen and smoothly began to fill in his personal information. A faint burst of cheering could be heard coming from outside while Garen was filling in the form. It sounded like some disciples had started a duel while the crowd looked on.

Garen turned around for a look. Peering out from the open door, he could perceive a few onlookers applauding and cheering.

"Those little bastards outside are betting on a fight. The losers will have to treat the others to dinner tonight. Don't let them distract you, just fill out your form," the man said with a smile.

Garen quickly filled out the form and handed it to the man. He saw the man review the details once, then pick up a seal and stamp the form.

“It’s done. Take this down to the Martial Colosseum and hand it in together with the \$1,000 application fee to the Financial Department, then wait for further arrangements.”

“Okay, got it. It’s just as well that I haven’t received my stipend yet. I could directly credit from that.” Garen stood up and left the office. He headed back under the eaves, form in hand, while looking at the crowd gathered around the courtyard.

The sounds of punches and kicks kept coming from the middle of the crowd. Garen peered in through a gap. One of the combatants fighting was a boy from his dojo class, whereas Garen did not recognize the other one.

There was nothing interesting about the way they fought. They were only slightly better than Garen; they should be normal students from the branch.

He kept to the path and turned into the front hall. The people who sat there earlier were all gone, with only a young student sweeping inside.

Without another thought, Garen walked out of the dojo and headed back toward the Academy. The tournament was still in progress, but the focus had switched to a girls’ swimming competition. The girls in swimsuits attracted catcalls from the crowd.

Without a second look, Garen took the form and headed out from the Academy. He hailed a carriage and directly headed towards the Martial Colosseum.

Ten or so minutes later...

“There are three people applying for the Formal Disciple certification today. I’ll remind you in advance that if your application doesn’t go through, the money you paid won’t be refunded.”

In the white courtyard, a middle-aged man with a handlebar moustache clad in black clothing was speaking loudly to the three youths in front of him.

“Understood!” shouted the three aloud.

From left to right stood a black-haired girl, Garen, and a brawny man. All three of them wore white Taoist robes.

“The test is very simple. Hold me off for half a minute and you pass,” the mustached man calmly said. He had his hands crossed over his chest, inadvertently exposing his strong chest muscles and some black hair.

“Half a minute?” The three of them were stunned. They knew that if the man was confident enough to say that, he must have something up his sleeve.

“Don’t worry, it’s actually just to test your overall quality,” the mustachioed man said casually. “Who’s first?”

“I’ll do it.”

The black-haired girl was the first to step forward.

Both didn’t exchange any courtesies. They stood their ground, their eyes met, and they abruptly started.

The mustachioed man took a forceful step forward and the ground shook slightly. He adopted a bow stance and deftly punched straight forward, not showing any of the delay that White Cloud Dojo trainers usually exhibited.

The girl didn’t manage to dodge in time and the punch glanced off her shoulder. When she was ready to counter attack, another punch followed, so she could only hastily evade.

In huffs and puffs, one attacked and one evaded. This continued until they went in a full circle. Finally, the black-haired girl gave a loud cry and fell to the ground.

The mustachioed man reverted to a resting position and stood still, not the slightest bit out of breath.

“About 17 seconds.” He shook his head.

“Thank you for your direction, Senior Brother.” The girl clenched her teeth, got up, and gave a bow. She then stood aside, ready to see the other two take the test. It was obvious that she wanted to see others’ performance after her own failure.

Having acquired the Secret Method and Explosive Fist Arts not too long ago, it was very clear to Garen that it should have been impossible for him to instantly apply them. Someone who was able to learn the Explosive Fist Arts in a few weeks wasn’t a genius, he was a monstrosity!

For this test, he was prepared to use only the minimum amount of power to pass.

Garen took a look at the brawny man whose brow was furrowed, as if realizing the difficulty of the situation. Those able to participate in the test were extremely confident students from the branch dojos; all of them had learned the Explosive Fist Arts and White Cloud Secret Method.

It was unclear what level the man's White Cloud Secret Method was at, but his training in Explosive Fist Arts seemed effective. His muscles and skin had a particular characteristic to them, which looked similar to what an elementary level of achievement would produce.

Earlier, the girl completely lacked this characteristic and purely relied on a mishmash of techniques complemented by her reflexes.

"My turn." Garen didn't want to waste any more time so he stepped forward.

The mustachioed man glanced at him and seemed slightly impressed.

"You're a new disciple who has just been taught fist arts. Not only did you not lose confidence after witnessing the previous challenger, but you still maintain a fighting spirit. Not bad, not bad."

"Confidence can't be judged by appearances," Garen replied calmly after taking a deep breath.

"Very well! Shall I begin?"

"Please."

Garen stood in place. The mustachioed man's waist sunk low as he took a step forward and threw a quick straight punch again. Somehow, Garen instinctively knew that this punch was easy to dodge.

He didn't give it another thought as he turned his body sideways to the right. The punch missed. Garen had planned to grab his opponent's shoulder to do a takedown, but he didn't expect the man's fist to recoil and spring forward like a snake to punch straight towards his shoulder.

There was a 'shwiff' and Garen didn't manage to evade this time. The punch grazed his shoulder and he felt a slight burning pain.

Before he could catch his breath, another punch flew straight at him. This time it hit his right shoulder.

Garen was determined to face the attack head on, but was worried about revealing his level of Explosive Fist Arts, so all he could do was endure and dodge awkwardly to the side. However, he had never learned any practical dodging skills and was used to facing attacks head on. Although he was able to clumsily escape the full brunt of the punch with his dodge, he was still grazed by the side of the fist.

Fortunately, his skin was tough enough. His elementary level of training in Explosive Fist Arts had hardened the skin cuticles all over his body. The graze caused a lasting numbing pain, but he was otherwise alright.

“Eh?” the mustachioed man sounded perplexed. His punches incorporated a certain level of the Explosive Fist Arts so that recipients would not only feel pain, but would also be numbed to the nerves. Consecutively, he had hit the boy in front of him twice, yet the boy seemed fine and was still able to continue dodging.

Seven to eight seconds had passed.

[This boy has potential. His physicality seems good. He has a strong constitution for someone his age.] The man had an idea and wanted to test Garen. He retracted his fist and instantly threw it out again with increased speed.

As he threw the punch, a faint snap came from the sleeve as it tightened at his wrist.

This punch was aimed to hit Garen squarely in the right shoulder and it was twice as fast as previous strikes so Garen wouldn't be able to dodge it even if he saw it coming.

Wham! Garen fell back three steps, standing on the spot with his face slightly flushed. When he tried to raise his right arm, he realized it was completely paralyzed.

“Ten seconds.” The mustachioed man went back into a resting position and stood straight, a trace of disappointment in his eyes. He had a bulky build and his footwork seemed sluggish, but when he actually fought, the explosive speed of his fists was extraordinarily quick.

“Next. Let's get this over with.”

The brawny man clenched his teeth and stepped forward.

Chapter 22: Core (2)

Garen walked to the side helplessly; he knew that his performance definitely did not qualify. There was a huge difference between half a minute and ten seconds. Previously, he was confident that he would become a high-class disciple after he learned the Explosive Fist Arts, but he didn't expect that an examiner would be this strong. He thought to himself,

[Even if I fully unleash my power and fought without holding anything back, I still wouldn't be able to defeat him.]

The opponent's attacking speed was too fast, his strength was high, and the attack carried some kind of paralyzing effect. If someone was struck twice in the same location like Garen, then the result would already be determined at that point.

Bam! Bam!

Like Garen expected, the brawny man who went up next did not make it past the thirty second mark either. The man clutched his shoulder and got off of the stage.

The man with the mustache was at ease; he didn't even sweat. He relaxed his fists and lightly said to the three people, "Ok, the test is over. Your scores are far from qualifying. You guys still need to work hard. You are now dismissed."

At this point, Garen realized that the examiner didn't even use his full strength; fighting the three applicants was like a walk in the park for him. Garen tried to estimate the man with the mustache's level and strength.

[He's probably reached the maximum adult physical strength limit just like me, but he is way faster. His Explosive Fist Arts can't be at the elementary level, it must be at the intermediate level or above. From his status, it seems like his White Cloud Secret Arts is also at the intermediate level or above. He is also very, very skillful in terms of fighting techniques.]

After comparing himself with the mustache man, Garen felt a little bit better.

The black-haired girl on the side stepped up when she saw the test was over.

"Teacher, can you tell us what level of fighter you are right now?"

"What level?" The man with the mustache smiled as he smoothed his wrinkled clothes. "Do you know how fighters are ranked?" he asked.

The black-haired girl nodded and said, "I only know the Grandmaster of Combat rankings that the Confederation uses."

"That doesn't count. That's only the ranking for fake exhibition matches," the examiner said. He became a bit excited and continued, "I will tell you guys the ranking system that we have in our circle."

He pointed out three fingers.

"The first level are ordinary people who know a little fighting technique, or people who are interested in learning. This level also includes special forces from the military who are able to easily take care of one or two hooligans. We call this level Amateur.

“These amateurs are probably our dojo’s primary source of income, right?” The brawny applicant continued where the man with the mustache left off.

“That’s right. Because these hobbyists are excited to train, they are willing to spend money, just like how you guys got started. Also, the masters in our industry would sometimes be invited to teach at an influential or powerful amateur’s home, which is how the network in the industry originated. When a master is looking for a disciple, potential and physical requirements are only part of the equation; family background is also very important.

“That makes sense,” Garen nodded. “It’s impossible for a master to teach people for free and also offer free food and accommodations. After all, masters are people too and still need money to live.”

“I know some of it.” The black-haired girl continued, “Our White Cloud Dojo operates like this and our Dojo Master is a wealthy merchant who runs a huge corporation.

“You are all formal disciples and you guys might teach other people martial arts in the future. Therefore, I’ll give you guys some hints.” The man with mustache nodded as he said, “There are two types of disciples you should look for.”

He pointed out his index finger.

“One is the disciple who has a robust background with either money or influence. These type of disciples are there for the purpose of coverage and increased influence in the industry. They don’t have to be strong, but they have to be beneficial for the master’s brand.”

Then he pointed out the second finger.

“Next, there are the real inheriting disciples. The key traits to look for are potential and the fundamentals. They should be taught with all care since they would need to step up in the future when the master gets old and weak and can’t fight anymore. They need to be strong to maintain the reputation and the status of the dojo brand in the industry, so the brand doesn’t become a stepping stone for other people.

“The selection process for heritage disciples is very rigorous; it’s very different from teaching other disciples. Many heritage disciples came from bad family backgrounds, so the master needed to be there to cultivate them. This kind of master-disciple relationship would be the most solid; it would be very close to a parent-child relationship. Eventually, the strongest heritage disciple would inherit everything that the master had. The other disciples would become the backbone of the brand.

“Therefore, you guys have to pay attention to these criteria when you’re looking for a disciple. If you want to cultivate disciples properly, you have to have money and resources.”

After he said that, the man with mustache fell silent for a moment and seemed like he was recalling something.

“Right. We were talking about the ranking for the fighters, how did we end up here?” He quickly snapped out of it. He smiled and said, “Let’s focus on the rankings. Amateurs can be considered at the bottom. One level higher would be the professionals; the professional fighters who were trained from a young age. This becomes more complicated and ranges from people who are able to fight off three to five hooligans to people who are not afraid when faced with a dozen people to a few dozen people. As long as firearms are not involved, fighters in this rank can handle it. No one knows how strong someone is in this rank unless they fight them first hand. Most people can only estimate someone’s strength by using their fame and influence. Oh, the Confederation’s five ranks from A to E also applies here. For example, I’m considered an E rank. The letter ranks represent the degree of ability.”

“The smaller ranks within the amateur level are ranked from 1 to 9. Letter ranks are only used when someone is at a higher rank than amateur.

“Above the professionals, there are the Dojo Masters. People rarely achieve this rank in the industry. You are not a Dojo Master if you simply open up a Dojo; it’s more complicated than that. Dojo Master represents a completely different level.

“Are people in this rank the same people who are able to break a gigantic green boulder with one punch?” The brawny man’s eyes shined.

“Hehe... that is the story of Dojo Master Rizal who has the nickname of Belligerent Fist. You are roughly correct. At this level, they have reached the peak of human potential and are at an unimaginable level. Dojo Master Rizal can’t block a bullet with his body, yet his defense is considered one of the best in the industry.” The man with the mustache laughed, “You could never reach that level, but it’s because of these fascinating stories that we are motivated to train and practice our skills, is it not?”

“My goal is to become someone like Dojo Master Rizal and stand at the very peak!”

“So could someone on the Dojo Master level beat one hundred people alone?” The black-haired girl asked another question.

“If the hundred people are just thugs, then Dojo Master could beat them easily one after another. Dojo Masters could probably also beat them if they all come at the same time. Top ranked masters don’t have any obvious shortcoming in terms of speed or endurance. The people with obvious shortcomings have already died in real fights.” The man with mustache shook his head as he sighed.

“Alright, you guys can go now. Come back after you guys practice more.” He waved his hand and said, “Just soak the part of your body that got punched with hot water and the numbness will go away.”

“Ok!” The three of them replied individually. Although they didn’t pass the test, they were a bit excited after learning a lot of industry secrets that outsiders did not know.

It was Garen’s first time hearing this information about the Martial Arts world, but he felt it was very similar to the Martial Arts world on Earth. He pretended to be excited by this knowledge as he thought about his current situation and started to walk away.

[Looks like I have to become one of the two types of disciple this man talked about in order to get the core teachings. I have no hope of becoming the first type, but the second type is possible; the difficulty level is just a bit high.] Garen thought to himself.

“Hey, young man named Garen, wait a second!”

He heard the examiner shout.

Garen was surprised, but he turned around instantly.

“What do you need?” he asked the man with the mustache, who was walking towards him, perplexedly.

“You passed, why are you walking away?” The man with the mustache was also confused.

“My score passed?”

Garen was shocked.

“Yeah, you are only sixteen, your requirements are different compared to theirs. Couldn’t you tell that they are adults?” The man with mustache smiled and said, “You are the only disciple who passed the test these past few years. Which branch are you from? Who is your instructor?”

When Garen quickly realized what was going on, he was delighted.

“I’m from the Shengying Academy branch, my instructors are Sharmilla and Luo Ya.”

“Your body is quite strong.” The man with mustache squeezed Garen’s shoulders. “After some training, you are already about rank 4 or 5. You are fine even after taking two punches from me, especially the second punch. Yet you have fully recovered already. From the data that I read, you were still thin last month, but you grew a lot.”

Garen on the other hand just smiled, he didn’t know how to explain everything.

“Ok! Kid, you have a good foundation. Let’s go, come with me and meet your senior brothers and sisters. I didn’t expect that I would accept another disciple in my fifties.” The man rubbed his mustache and said with a smile.

“Accepting disciple?” Garen was surprised. “Are you the Dojo Master Fei Baiyun?!!” He thought the man was only a regular examiner.

“Why? I don’t look like him?” the man with mustache said with a semi-smile on his face.

“No, no... You just look too young. You look like you are in your forties and I heard that the Dojo Master is in his fifties,” Garen quickly spilled out the truth of what he was thinking.

“You little punk...” Dojo Master Fei Baiyun rubbed Garen’s hair and felt speechless. “I have nothing to do at this age, so I decided to come to the Dojo and test disciples with the hope to find some disciples with high potential. Surprisingly, I actually found a few in the last dozen years; they are your senior brothers and sisters.

“Also, you were trying to hide your full strength earlier. There is no need to hide your tiny amount of strength. You are not at that level yet. When you meet your senior brothers and sisters, don’t do that or it would only make them laugh, especially your senior sister. For the purpose of practice, she has beaten a dozen full grown white bears to death.”

The mustached man laughed.

“White bear...!!” Garen was defeated by this information. He had only read about this creature in books. A white bear was about a man’s height when it stood up and its rough skin was very thick. This skin could not even be penetrated by a bullet from afar and could only be pierced at close range. It had about a ton, or 2,000 pounds, of strength. The senior sister that he hadn’t met yet was able to beat a dozen white bears to death? It was unimaginable!

“Of course it’s not like what you think. They didn’t attack her at the same time. She only fought one bear at a time. The white bear isn’t very fast, so if you could dodge its attack, you could win easily by counterattacking. However, none of your dodges can fail or else you could be killed. Only under this life-threatening pressure is your senior sister able to improve quickly,” the man with the mustache said with deep feelings.

“Let’s go. I will introduce you to them. I know about your family background as well. You don’t have to host a fancy ceremony or anything. I will invite some of my friends in the industry to come as witnesses for a simple acceptance ceremony. The Dojo will pay for all your training related expenses so your family doesn’t have to worry about the cost. After your parents witness the ceremony, you will officially become my formal disciple.

“Ok, master!” Garen nodded seriously. Although he knew that he could reach this formal disciple level, he didn’t expect it to happen so fast.

Life in the true Martial Arts World of this era was about to slowly unfold for him.

Chapter 23: The Core (1)

“This will be the first time that I can actually enter the real martial arts circle!”

Garen was excited. After all, he loved martial arts when he was on Earth, but didn't have the opportunity to train and learn when he was young. Now, with this opportunity as the beginning, his lifelong most cherished dream was about to be realized.

“The only thing a bit strange is that some people have names similar to Chinese names, like the name Fei Baiyun. It sounds like a Chinese name. He even seems like a grandmaster of combat who went to western countries to teach martial arts.”

Garen followed Fei Baiyun as they walked under the eaves of the roof. Garen couldn't hold the thoughts in his mind any longer, so he asked, “Master, you're not of the Confederation, right?”

Fei Baiyun nodded as he smiled. “You can tell? Yeah, my name is pretty different from the names here at Yalu Confederation. I wasn't born in the Yalu Confederation, I'm from a huge empire at the east.”

“East? Like from Republic of the Tulip?” Garen asked.

“No, it's a place very far away, very far that not even planes can get there. Only huge ships can...” The smile on Fei Baiyun's face slowly disappeared, only to be replaced with a tinge of sorrow. “We were only able to reach this place because we were very lucky. I can't even return now. Enough of this, we're almost there. Be careful not to get hazed by your senior brothers and sisters,” he said.

“Oh...ok...” Garen answered. However, he was still thinking of the modern China back on Earth. The two of them walked into the lounge and started heading up the side stairs to the second floor. Garen saw the two disciples who had participated in the test with him in the lounge talking with a blond man. The black-haired girl turned around and looked at Garen, traces of envy apparent on her eyes.

The other strapping man shrugged his shoulders and said, “Don't feel envious. If you have time to envy someone, you are better off training more and then fighting for your entrance qualifications next time.”

“We are all getting older... There's no chance.” The girl shook her head and said, “This is the last time that I'll be here. My parents are sending me abroad to Cisilyn to study Business Management. The only time I can come to the Dojo would be during long breaks. This little kid must have passed the test. What's his name again?”

"I just saw it moments ago. I think he wrote Garen on the data sheet." The strapping man also turned around to look at Garen.

"Alright, alright. People like us can never devote 100% of our time and energy into training. We are still able to live how we want to live at present, but when we get older, we'll have to accept the arrangements from our families. Therefore, not qualifying could be considered as something good. We won't regret this after all." A helpless expression popped on the blond man's face as he said, "I'm really envious of senior sister Rosetta..."

The three of them fell into silence for a moment as they heard the name Rosetta.

Garen vaguely heard their conversation and looked at them. He just saw the black-haired girl raising her fist at him, cheering him on.

He nodded back as he smiled and gestured an "OK" sign back. He then quickly followed Fei Baiyun to the second floor.

The second floor was a wide, open hall. A layer of dark brown carpet was laid on the ground, and a huge grey circle was drawn at the center of hall.

On the four corners were a couple of red wooden cylinders that supported the roof.

What was strange was that there wasn't a column at the center of the room to support the roof. The ceiling of the hall looked like two slanted flat boards leaning against each other such that it looked firm and aesthetically pleasing.

There was a huge black and white oil painting at the end of the hall. Garen saw it clearly as he was walking up the stairs. The painting was of a huge white ship sailing across the waves and tides in the ocean.

Under the oil painting were a few tables and chairs made of redwood. Two people in black uniforms were chatting there; one of them was standing while the other was sitting on a chair.

The one standing was a girl that looked in her twenties. Her dark brown hair was tied into a ponytail, which was draped over her shoulder. She was wearing a pair of tight black shorts and a camisole under a vest, her fair-skinned, slender arms and thighs fully exposed. What was intriguing was her big chest under the camisole. Its size made it seem as though the zipper of her vest would break anytime.

The girl leaned against the wall. From afar, Garen could see her facial features that made her look very valiant. Her lips most especially, the way she spoke was concise and persuasive. She was definitely someone who was straightforward and powerful.

The one who was standing was a white-haired man. He was also in his twenties, but he looked ordinary and had a fatigued countenance. He was the kind of person whom you couldn't easily recognize on the street. However, his arms were quite lengthy to the extent that when he was seated, his hands could effortlessly touch the ground. It gave people an feeling of incongruence.

Both of them stood straight and walked toward the stairs as they saw Fei Baiyun taking someone up here.

"Master, you found someone after the test today?" The brown-haired girl was surprised, her curiosity evident as she observed Garen carefully up and down.

"I finally found someone with high potential. His foundation and work ethics are both above average. I will stop taking disciples after this last one." Fei Baiyun laughed as he sat down on a chair. "His name is Garen. He will be your junior brother from now on."

"Last one? Hehe! Finally someone who is younger than me!" The white-haired man said with a villainous smile on his face, "I've been waiting for this day for so long. All the senior brothers and sisters had been bullying me whenever they got bored, and I wasn't even allowed to fight back! Now it's finally my turn."

"Look at you! Do you think you are getting bullied just because you are the youngest?" The brown-haired girl knocked him on the head half-angrily.

"Alright, alright. Introduce yourselves. All four of you will be helping and relying on each other from now on. I won't be taking any more disciples in the future after all." Fei Baiyun smiled and said with his eyes half-squinted.

The brown-haired girl nodded and said, "I will go first."

She looked at Garen who was standing obediently at the side and said: "My name is Rosetta, the first disciple of the master. I will be your senior sister from now on."

The white-haired man put away his ridiculous smile and said, "I'm your second brother Joshua..."

"Second brother? Screw you!"

A tough, gigantic, towering man quickly rushed up the stairs. His voice was as deep as thunder, and he had a white tiger tattooed on his upper body.

"Hey, little Josh, since when did you become the second brother here? Why haven't I heard of it?"

"Eh... Isn't this our strong, handsome, invincible and charming second brother Farak?" Joshua shivered as he hid behind his senior sister.

“I said third brother. You must have misheard it! Misheard... Hehe.” A timid expression appeared on Joshua’s face, as if he was a mouse who had just met a cat.

The towering Farak ignored Joshua. He walked up to Fei Baiyun and clenched his fists to salute. “Master, I heard that you just took in a junior brother; I came here just to meet and welcome him.”

“Come, let’s all sit down.”

Fei Baiyun was most proud of his second disciple Farak. Farak was only in his twenties, and yet he was already at level 3 in terms of the White Cloud Secret Arts. His Explosive Fist Arts were also at level 2. With the herculean strength that he was born with, his combat ability was off the charts. Farak, at this point, wasn’t weaker than Fei Baiyun when he was at this age. Although Farak still couldn’t beat his disciple Rosetta, Farak’s strong physique and his direct fist-to-fist combat style was the most compatible with everything that White Cloud Dojo was teaching, and it was the style that Fei Baiyun really favored.

“Your junior brother just became my disciple, so he hasn’t learnt anything yet. You guys should bully him less.” Fei Baiyun stretched his neck as he said with a smile, “After a year or two, he will be in a much better shape.”

“Nothing wrong with that. Junior brother, just come and ask me if you don’t understand anything! I have a lot of experience in evasive maneuvers.” Rosetta smiled with her arms crossed in front of her chest.

“I specialize in heavy punches. You can come and ask me if you don’t understand anything in terms of explosive strength.” Farak patted Garen’s shoulder.

“And me, your third brother. If you need any help, just come and find me at Huaishan. But if you are at any other place, then I can’t do anything about it... Hehe.”

“Now, we are all brothers and sisters, so there will be more opportunities to get to know each other in the future. How about we go and celebrate now?”

The conversations were very intimate. Although Garen was the weakest of them, none of his senior brothers or sister looked down on him. All of them were the disciples of the master and were so intimate that they looked like a family.

Bam! Bam! Garen got patted by the powerful palms. He was fortunate enough to have achieved the elementary level on the Explosive Fist Arts. Otherwise, his body might not be able to take the full brunt of these pats on the shoulders.

“Let’s go to Worcester Restaurant; they have some great seafood. The dishes there all taste amazing.” Rosetta suggested.

“I will pass this time. You young people are able to have more fun together without me.” Fei Baiyun smiled as he shook his head. “I have some other plans already. I have to meet up with an old friend.”

“Okay then. We will just hang out with ourselves tonight. We’ll treat Master some other time!” Rosetta waved her hand as she said with the temperament of a senior sister, “Let’s go test Junior Brother’s foundation!!”

“I like it!” The third brother Joshua said as he peeked at Garen with “malicious intent”.

“Don’t bully the junior brother!” the towering Farak smacked his palm on Joshua’s head and rubbed his hair. “He just became master’s disciple! He is not there yet!”

Garen stood on the side and watched his senior brothers and sister messing around until Fei Baiyun stopped them; he was smiling the whole time.

“Okay, who is first? Make sure you don’t use your full strength.”

“I will go first.” Joshua was excited. Although he was in his twenties, he was still acting like a kid.

He stretched his black uniform and walked to the center of the hall. He then lowered his right palm and gestured Garen to come.

Although Garen wasn’t too sure what it meant, he knew that this was some kind of test to reveal his full strength, or it could be to see where he ranked among the four of them. The most important reason of all, however, was probably to show him how strong his senior brothers and sister were, so as to properly establish their positions as his Seniors.

In a dojo, Seniority was established by fighting, not talking.

Garen walked up to the center of the hall and faced third brother Joshua.

He put on a simple boxing defense pose. He didn’t know anything about proper combat, so he could only use this most basic boxing stance which could help him exert his full power.

Joshua smiled, letting Garen see all of his white teeth. “Be careful, I’m attacking!”

As soon as Joshua finished the sentence, he leapt forward and aimed his right palm at Garen’s right elbow. This attack was so fast that it created a ‘Whoosh!’ sound.

This strike was average in terms of speed and power in an outsider’s view; it looked like a simple greeting that friends would give each other.

But it was different in Garen's eyes.

Although this palm strike from Joshua wasn't fast, it gave him a flexible and agile feeling. Garen's instinct told him that if he tried to dodge this strike, this strike would quickly change trajectories and follow his body tightly.

From the wind that this palm strike generated, Garen felt that the strength in this strike wasn't weak at all.

Many thoughts went through Garen's mind, but he didn't overthink the situation. He took this strike head-on, but he also suppressed a part of his strength just like what he did during the test with Fei Baiyun. He only exerted about 140 pounds of force.

At the same time, he swung his arm from the side and slapped at Joshua's approaching palm.

Pia!

"Eh? Junior Brother's reaction is very quick!" Senior Sister Rosetta was surprised as she suddenly stood up from her chair. "Although Joshua's speed isn't that fast, most people in our White Cloud Dojo couldn't really spot his attacks clearly. I didn't expect Junior Brother to react this fast and block the attack before it reached him. His vision and body reaction are far superior than average disciples."

"Of course," Master Fei Baiyun laughed proudly. "This is where his talent lies, and he is sly enough to hide some of his strength. White Cloud Secret Arts is the technique that we practice at White Cloud Dojo. Although it could result in a substantial strength increase, speed and reaction times would be negatively affected. Therefore, the key reason why I took your junior brother in is because of his talent and potential in speed and reaction time. This way, his natural abilities will cover up the shortcomings of White Cloud Secret Arts."

"Master, you are right. Disciples from our White Cloud Dojo have always lost in speed compared with other Dojos." Rosetta calmed down and agreed with Fei Baiyun.

In combat, after Garen blocked the first palm strike, he kept on consciously trying to block and parry the palm strikes coming from all angles. These strikes struck his body and made continuous hard slapping sounds.

Every time a palm landed on Garen's body, he would feel a numbing sensation of weakness dispersing into his body.

Chapter 24: The Core (2)

His agility, eye speed, and physical reaction were all fast enough to match the fist's speed. However, he usually could only block the first punch before the change in attack method left him defenseless.

After being whacked more than ten times, Garen staggered a few steps backward. To be beaten up repeatedly without a chance to counter attack made him very depressed. When he finally stabilized his body, he hastily pushed forward with his palm.

There was no technique involved with what he was doing. It was a simple and plain strike in the form of a palm. It received the powerful palm from Joshua head-on.

Bang!

The two palms clashed together with great force.

Garen turned his foot and fell back more than 10 steps. His face turned white and, for a moment, he could not catch his breath.

All he felt was a surge of heat that spun around continuously in his chest. This heat was trapped inside and could not leave his body. The middle of his right palm was boiling hot and as red as a lobster.

Looking up, he saw Third Senior Brother Joshua walking over with a worried look.

"Are you okay Junior Brother? Just now I got lost in the moment and forgot you were underage. I used a little bit too much power..."

"It's okay..." Garen had felt Third Senior Brother restrain his strength when he realized something was wrong. As a result, Garen was not wounded at all. Garen lifted his right arm, "My blood is just a little congested."

Just now, he estimated that Third Senior Brother's palm strength definitely exceeded 180 pounds. Looking at Joshua, Garen was sure that that was not even Joshua's limit. Joshua was also definitely a freak who could surpass 200 pounds.

"Joshua's strength is around 300 pounds, the weakest one out of all of us. My strength is about 350 pounds. Your Second Senior Brother is the strongest. He was tested two days ago and his strength is above 450 pounds," Elder Senior Sister Rosetta walked over. She grabbed Garen's arm and massaged it slowly.

"Martial arts does not comply with the idea that the stronger you are, the more likely you are to win." Second Senior Brother Frank rubbed his chin. "Rosetta, you have already surpassed Stage E of training. I am still stuck at Amateur Stage Nine."

"You are lacking in agility. Having only strength is not necessarily a good thing. It slows you down because you are so heavy." Rosetta pinched Frank's arm with a smile on her

face. "Look at all the fat on your body. When we hang out tonight, we will have to order extra meat just for you."

"That's because I'm consuming a lot of energy now," Frank shrugged helplessly. "Next, let me test the extent of our Junior Brother's skills. At the same time, we can roughly evaluate the highest stage our Junior Brother can achieve."

"Sounds good. After all, you are one of the judges in our city that determines the Amateur Martial Arts placements," Rosetta agreed while nodding.

Frank, nicknamed Eiffel Tower because he was two meters tall, stood in front of Garen and forcefully pushed Joshua away. Joshua speechlessly ran to the side and sat down to watch the battle.

"Junior Brother, you better beat him up good!" Joshua waved his fist and softly encouraged.

"Senior Brother, you got our roles mixed up..." Garen smiled bitterly.

Everyone in the group softly laughed.

"Please." Frank stood barefoot on the ground. He casually swung his arm and released a wave of wind that made a mess of Garen's hair, despite a distance of four meters between them.

Garen knew that these Senior Siblings were fully grown adults. Not only had their strength reached the usual limit, but the synergy between the Explosive Fist Arts and other techniques raised their peak strength far beyond the standard maximum value. After all, the standard value was set based on an average adult male.

Therefore, everyone here was much stronger than him. At times like this, not displaying any personality defects or bad habits was more than enough. Winning was simply impossible for Garen.

Comprehending this, he inhaled deeply. He expanded his chest and held his breath.

Side step! Straight punch!

Bang!

The fist hit Frank's body heavily. It felt like the punch landed on a rubber car tire that was sturdy but elastic. The powerful rebound caused Garen to retreat four to five steps.

Feeling this shocking resistance, Garen was aghast.

“Your guess is correct. The technique I practice is the Mammoth Secret Technique,” Frank replied with a smile. “The Explosive Fist Technique is a basic technique in our dojo. It is an iconic technique that enhances the user’s explosive power. Of course, it also makes the skin more durable. The real Secret Method of our dojo is the Mammoth Secret Technique. This is a secret technique that we do not pass down publicly.”

“A secret technique?”

“Yes, every dojo has exclusive martial arts skills called secret techniques that they selectively teach. In White Cloud Dojo, the Explosive Fist Technique cannot be considered strong because most dojos have similar techniques. However, the Mammoth Secret Technique is different. It is something unique that only we have and other dojos don’t. This technique allows the user to defend himself while enhancing muscle strength,” Frank explained patiently.

“Now I will use one-tenth of my power to attack you. You should try to block me.”

“Alright.”

Garen readied himself in a guarding position as he concentrated fully on the opponent. All the strength in his body converged. He knew that even if he unleashed all his strength, in front of his Second Senior Brother, he was considered to be the same level as a bean sprout. He could easily be destroyed with one wave of his Senior Brother’s hand. However, during these times, he especially needed to be careful and not expose his secret.

No matter how much talent one has, it was impossible to perfect the White Cloud Secret Method and elementary Explosive Fist Technique within a month. To successfully do so was beyond the capabilities of a genius. Only a freak or a monster could achieve that.

The moment someone dug deep into the issue, they could find out about his secret abilities.

Frank stretched out his right arm and grabbed Garen’s right shoulder with his big hand. Like a handheld folding fan that was blasted down by a strong gust of wind, Frank pushed down.

The two of them stood together. One was unmistakably gigantic, the other was extremely petite. It was like an adult capturing a kid.

The speed of the palm was not that fast, but the way it moved seemed inescapable. The giant hand was quivering nonstop, as if at any time it could swing in any direction it wanted. This feeling of uncertainty clouded Garen’s judgment and he had no idea which direction to dodge if he wanted to evade.

Helplessly, he mustered 140 pounds of strength and met the palm with resolution.

After he struck, Garen felt like he hit a metal plate. The throbbing from the collision greatly pained his hand. A strange wave of power pressed down from the top of Frank's hand. It wasn't exactly heavy, however as soon as Frank's palm contacted with Garen's, a forceful shivering and numbness extended down Garen's arm.

Subconsciously, to resist this numbness, Garen unleashed all his strength and ruthlessly pushed forward with two hundred pounds worth of strength.

The result was the same.

Flopping, he fell on his butt to the ground. His entire body was numb and he had no strength left in his body.

Frank nodded in approval and retracted his hand.

"Your physique is not bad. If you learn some fundamental combat arts and do not conceal a part of your strength, then achieving Amateur Stage Six is no problem."

"Really??" Garen lowkey celebrated. "Stage Five amateurs can earn five to six thousand monthly if employed..." He then bitterly smiled. He thought that he could battle equally with these Senior Disciples if he used all of his strength. However, the result was all the same because of his weak abilities.

"Only five to six thousand could make you this happy? Are you in need of money?" Fei Baiyun walked over and slapped the top of Garen's head.

"I have something I want to buy." Garen then suddenly remembered that the emblem was gone. The happiness he felt died down.

"Before your Senior Disciples, you dare to hide your real strength? Did you know that your Second Senior Brother was born with monstrous strength before he was introduced to martial arts? At age 15, he had 200 pounds of strength, a height of 1.9m, and doubled your Elder Senior Sister in size. So you were born with more strength than a regular person, what's there to hide?" Elder Senior Sister Rosetta teased.

Garen was speechless. As long as nobody found out about his unusual level in the Explosive Fist Technique and the Secret Method, he was okay.

Behind him a few people dragged out chairs and sat down. The three Senior Disciples began to discuss the details of the recent practice just now.

Elder Senior Sister advised on aiming only to hit the vitals of the opponent using speed and explosive force. Hitting the fatal areas of the opponent was the easiest and cleanest way to win a battle. Therefore, she taught Garen that in order to kill with one attack, he must pay attention, dodge, and respond to the opponent's explosive power. It would

most effective for him to concentrate all his time and energy on improving only one area.

Second Senior Brother advocated for overall strength. He lectured Garen to exercise his whole body because if he was able to fully improve physically, he could face any situation with ease.

Third Senior Brother believed in survival before anything else. If one cannot beat the opponent, one should run. He believed that practicing martial arts just to strengthen the physique was enough, therefore there was no point in fighting to the point of injury or death. It would be unpleasant to ruin relationships between people and enemies would only accumulate if one always fought every battle to the end. Based on his beliefs, the more friends the better, since everyone would live in harmony that way.

Third Senior Brother's beliefs were unanimously despised by everyone else. Elder Senior Sister and Second Senior Brother's debate over who was right became more and more heated. In the end, they could not reach a consensus and ended up battling it out physically.

After a few rounds that lasted for more than 10 minutes, Second Senior Brother was eventually defeated, though he did not admit defeat. It was obvious that his strength exploded too quickly and he was very afraid of hurting Elder Senior Sister. Because of his thick skin and fat, he was instead punched repeatedly, losing the battle.

Garen watched from the side with cold sweat spilling out of his pores. Only when these Senior Disciples battled each other did he realize their true strength.

He was terrified that he would be helplessly slaughtered in seconds the moment he went against any of them.

Eldest Senior Sister was the strongest, yet still was only at Stage E, so it was difficult to imagine what higher staged seniors could do.

"Alright, alright, everyone stop," Fei Baiyun announced while loudly clapping. He looked at Garen and said, "Don't think too much. The reality is that the higher you go, the harder it is to step into the next stage. Those above the E Stage usually have a better understanding of the laws behind these techniques. Those big dojos are all the same. Strength like your Second Senior Brother's can be placed at the medium to upper class anywhere."

"Those who achieve higher stages are usually stronger when it comes to special Secret Methods. For example, I know about a type of Secret Method that could instantly accelerate and achieve unmatched speed for the user. Combine that ability with a sharp weapon and a high-quality killer secret technique is created. Different techniques have different effects based on different environments and the influences around them.

In our White Cloud Dojo, we were enlightened with the Mammoth Secret Technique from the inspiration of the mammoth.”

Garen knew that his real abilities were nothing before his master and his Senior Brothers and Sister. Everyone here was considered to be great figures within the martial arts community. Although Garen did not know how they would fare in real battles, regular people could not kill his seniors even if they had guns, unless they attacked vital areas.

Fortunately, his master and Senior Disciples did not even consider the fact that he had already advanced the White Cloud Secret Arts to the second stage. If he could reach stage three, then he could improve his strength attribute again.

None of this was actually important. From the Senior Disciple’s conversations, Garen learned that the White Cloud Secret Arts was used to enhance strength. With every increase in level, it could forcefully improve the strength attribute. However, the end result was already determined at birth.

The higher a person’s natural talent was, the greater the increase in strength, and the stronger the total strength.

Second Senior Brother was a perfect example of this. He was born strong and trained the White Cloud Secret Arts to a high level. Coupled with the Mammoth Secret Technique, his strength grew to a frighteningly powerful level.

The key point was that Garen’s strength attribute could be improved infinitely by his special ability. Therefore, he could reach the same level as his Second Senior Brother despite his lack of natural talent.

Compared to Elder Senior Sister’s style of hitting the vital points of the opponent, Garen was leaning more toward Second Senior Brother’s straightforward style of being holistically trained. With this method, there would be no vital weakness. No matter how critical the situation becomes, his fighting style could face it easily and effectively.

Even now, Garen’s heart was actually still filled with fear and insecurity toward this world. These emotions, along with his crazy passion for martial arts, made him more than willing to devote all his energy into training.

Chapter 25: Abilities (1)

After exiting the Dojo, the few Seniors came out for food and drinks. As Garen was practically force fed alcohol and had gotten somewhat tipsy, he was afraid to go back home and be punished for underage drinking.

Since his Senior Siblings bombarded him and requested him to drink, Garen had no choice but to give them the satisfaction and comply. Any one of them there had the ability to disable him with one hand.

After finalizing plans for next week's Acceptance Ceremony, Garen finally managed to get out of the hotel. He wandered down the city roads at night to digest the alcohol.

As he walked, his head felt heavy while his feet felt light. After roaming the streets for a long time, he unknowingly returned to Pennington Street.

The moonlight was like a white veil that draped down, the entire street appeared milky and misty.

Faint lights peeked out of the windows in the two buildings on the side. People's shadows moved from time to time beneath the faint yellow light, and a piano was dimly playing; its beats were crisp and a little choppy.

Garen walked along the right sidewalk. Gusts of cold wind blew onto his face, clearing his foggy mind.

In front of him, a black double carriage approached. On the carriage, the hanging horse lights shook from side to side, shining bright enough to see only the rider's silhouette.

The carriage passed by Garen before turning into the corner and disappearing. Then, there were only the occasional echoes of breathing sounds from the horse.

Garen buttoned up his collar and quickened his steps.

Walking to the end of the road, he stood before Dolphin Antiques. He originally only wanted to clear his mind and walk around this area; however, the light in the antique store was still on.

Walking in front of the door, he knocked the door.

"Open up old man!"

The door creaked.

On the metal door, a round hole opened. The old man's smiling face was now visible along with his sparse and messy white hair.

"Ah it's you bastard," he sniffled and smelled the alcohol, "You dared to drink at your young age!"

The old man hurriedly opened the door and let Garen come in.

“Ughhh... Old man, do you have anything that can sober me up?” Garen’s head still felt heavier than his feet, like he was walking on a cloud. He tried to walk in a straight line yet his body kept on falling to one side.

“I own an antique store, not a grocery store.” The old man sat down, he seemed to be taking pleasure in Garen’s pain. Turning his head and glaring at Garen, he said, “You’re scared that your family would notice that you’ve been drinking. That’s why you’re wandering outside trying to sober up, am I right?”

“How did you know?” Garen sat on a red-clothed stool, after moving the fake antiques on top of a table nearby, and massaged his temples.

“It’s very obvious just from looking at you. I was about to go home, but since you’re here, I will stay a bit longer. These days, it is not very safe in the city at night. You should be careful and don’t stay out too late.”

“I know, I know, don’t worry,” Garen dry coughed, “Old man, do you have any water here?”

“In the room at the back. You get it yourself, I’m too lazy to take care of you,” Old Man Gregor was sitting at his desk writing something to help with the criminal case.

Garen wobbled his way to the only other room in the shop and poured himself a cup of water. The moment the cold water entered his stomach, he felt better.

Returning to the main room, he dragged out a chair and sat down beside the old man at the table.

Under the influence of the alcohol, Garen asked the question he had been wanting to ask for a long time.

“Old man, where is the book you showed me last time? Can you let me read it some more?”

Old Man Gregor bit the feather on the end of his pen, pretending not to hear.

“Hey old man, did you hear me?”

“I heard you! Why are you being so loud?” Old Man Gregor waved his hand, “Even if I give you that book, it would be useless. Without that ability, no matter how many times you read it, the result will be the same.”

“Says who? That is because I didn’t read it carefully last time,” Garen non-sensibly said, “If you give it to me this time, I will for sure read it very carefully!”

“You bastard sure know how to pick items. Do you even know how high the market price is for that book? If you damage it, you couldn’t afford it even if you worked through your next life,” the old man sneered.

“It’s calling showing appreciation, do you understand? I simply appreciate antiques! It’s not like I asked you to gift it to me,” Garen said. Nowadays, he came over to bicker with the old man every day. Even if he didn’t want to see that book, he would be requesting some other stuff from the old man.

“Also, what kind of ability do you need to read a book?”

“No ability means you have no abilities.”

“You don’t understand,” the old man nodded in satisfaction at his own writing, “Dale Quicksilver has some conjectures about the robbery.”

“What conjectures?”

“They’re investigating a crime in the rural area right now. They found a clue that indicates that the stuff stolen in my shop is still in the city. Though they are still investigating, I have hope that most of the stuff will be returned to me.”

The old man put away the pen and paper on the table and capped the ink bottle. He glanced at Garen, “Also, stop thinking about the book, I mailed it to a friend a while ago; it’s no longer here.”

“Then do you have anything similar here? I’m only interested in stuff similar to the emblem and that book.”

“You mean you like objects that have troublesome stories behind them?” the old man asked in shock.

“Troublesome stories?” Garen was a little stunned.

“The Bronze Cross Emblem belonged to generations of wastrels. The entire family’s savings were all wasted by them. The book has a similar story. They are all objects that ruined their owner’s life!” the old man sobbed a little and exclaimed.

“Objects with troublesome stories eh?”

Garen was deep in thought.

After walking out from the antique store, he sobered up a little and pondered this problem.

“If potential can only be found on objects with troublesome backstories...” he remembered the Halo of Tragedy from a while ago, “Then what kind of potential did I absorb from those objects?”

Without realizing it, he found himself walking on the sketchy road that led him home. The houses on the two sides were scarce, clearly displaying the black and green mountain and the empty forests behind the houses.

“This is the road...”

He froze. Looking at his surroundings, he suddenly realized that it was the road where he accidentally killed a person for the first time.

The white and gray sidewalks were rutted and uneven. The road in front also had a dark red bloodstain that was clearly visible, but he wasn't sure if it was from the murder last time. There was not a single person around, only a white car's front lights were flashing from far away.

Garen hastily walked past the puddle shaped bloodstain. After so long, the stain had completely dried. Mixed in it were a few strands of thin and long hair.

Cold wind kept pouring down his neck, he suddenly felt cold.

Marching forward a few steps, a person appeared from the left alley and swiftly ran towards Garen's direction.

This person was wearing a black trench coat and a round hat, and the sound made by the person's boots were rapid and snappy.

Garen shifted his body to make room for the person to pass.

As if drunk, the person crookedly walked straight into Garen.

“Watch out,” Surprised, Garen extended his arm to stabilize the person. Suddenly, he seemed to see a spark of yellow light piercing through his belly. His stomach felt a pinch like he was bitten by a mosquito.

He felt no sense of danger, no shock and or fear. Garen was stunned at first then his heart felt cold. He realized what was happening immediately and extended both of his arms to tightly squeeze the person against his chest.

“Who sent you here?”

The bones creaked and cracked as they broke one by one. The person slumped and relied on Garen for strength. Losing all ability to resist, both of the person's arms and multiple ribs were broken by Garen.

The eerie thing was, that person still tightly hugged onto Garen without a word.

Garen, holding onto the person, was about to ask some questions when he saw a silhouette from the faraway alley pointing something at him.

A shiver escalated for his foot to his brain, a surge of terror that he's never felt before overwhelmed him.

Garen felt like the tip of a knife was placed on his nose. The closeness to danger made him numb.

Borrowing light from the moon, he was pretty certain that the person had faint red pupils and was holding a black gun.

Bang!

A crisp and loud sound.

Simultaneously, as Garen saw a spark, he also felt a small hot object entering his chest with precision. The person he was holding also shuddered, as he too had been shot.

His chest was burning as if the skin had been scraped off.

"They're even using guns now!" Garen didn't have time to think to push. He pushed away from the person on top of him and mimicked what he had seen in movies by making a fancy jump to the left. "Bang, bang!" He dodged two bullets.

Using his newly increased agility attribute, his reaction and physical speed were a little faster than his opponent.

The bullets almost hit his calf but instead created two yellow sparks on the ground.

Protecting his face with his arms, Garen was no longer afraid. Rather, he felt a mixture of excitement and astonishment.

He knew that the bullet went through a body before landing on him; therefore the damage was minimal and only resulted in dead skin being lodged inside him muscle. From that analysis, he roughly estimated how much damage each bullet could cause him. As long as his vitals weren't hit at a short distance, he would not die at this scene.

After dying once, Garen had absolutely no fear of death anymore. He felt his heart beating crazily fast, but heavy and strong. All the strength in his body exploded out of him.

After three shots, he ran towards that person while protecting his face with his arms.

The person hiding in the alley thought the first shot had already killed him. The other two shots were only fired to make sure of that. The person thought Garen would have no more strength, let alone having that explosive force.

The distance between the two wasn't far, only about ten steps. Dodging three shots, Garen aggressively dashed toward the person who panicked and raised his arm to shoot again.

PA!

Garen slapped the person's hand, sending the gun flying for 20 meters before finally rolling down to the middle of the road.

Garen grabbed this person's neck with one hand and punched the stomach with the other. A black shadow flashed and sliced across his arm.

Garen felt pain in his right hand, and looking closely, he saw the opponent was holding in the back of his palm a dark blue dagger. The blueness of the blade eerily shone under the moonlight.

Garen looked at his wound. The cut on his right hand was starting to turn blue.

"Poison!" Waves of coldness unexpectedly emerged from his heart.

He wasn't sure what weapon the opponent held since it so easily cut through his skin. He also didn't know what poison was applied to the blade; however, the numbness and itch he felt on his wound meant it was not a regular poison.

Garen suddenly remembered his sister Ying Er, who was studying at home. He remembered Old Man Gregor who fooled around every day in his antique shop. Finally, he remembered the martial arts he had found and planned to master in this lifetime.

He didn't want to die. He only traveled to this world a while ago and had just adjusted to the life here. He didn't want to die! Not when he finally had the chance to live again!

"If you want me to die, I'll drag you down with me!" Garen snarled, he charged forward, held onto the person's hand that was holding onto the dagger and slashed in the opposite direction.

Whooshing, the person's chest was deeply cut, and a loud scream filled the air.

The voice was that of a woman.