

Mystical Journey

Chapter 4: The Beginning (4)

The martial arts dojos in this world were similar to the taekwondo dojos back on Earth. Their primary purpose was to promote physical exercise and workout. There existed a dojo ranking system, but most dojos were basically superfluous and non-lethal, aside from those high-ranked traditional ones. The ones not fighting for the top rankings were only useful for exercising and for showing off.

In this culture, martial art was similar to music or dancing, a part of the regular educational curriculum aimed at making the children more versatile and well-rounded.

Garen followed other students and spread out into pairs. Facing him was the same girl from last time.

She had ordinary looks: a slim waist, flat chest, and her silver hair glimmered crimson under the fading sunlight.

“Rank 15, Daris.”

“Rank 16, Garen.”

The two stood facing each other, then greeted by using their ranking and names.

“Begin!” Sharmilla yelled.

Garen and Daris stopped worrying about the other combatants and focused entirely on each other's movements. The basic knowledge passed onto them did not contain any special moves or advanced fighting techniques. It was only a simple exercising routine and the Explosive Force Technique. In Garen's memory, there were no special fighting moves; the so-called combat training was just two people fighting based on their own combat experience, with the only difference from any other fight being that they could use the Explosive Force Technique, thus allowing their strength to be heightened for some attacks. In fact, this was the dojo's sole purpose in having a one on one combat training. The main goal was to test their students' raw strength and potential.

At this point, Garen stopped thinking superfluous thoughts. He pounced onto Daris and threw a punch towards her left shoulder. He had not used the attribute enhancement yet, wanting to see how strong his body truly was.

While his fist was still in the air, Daris dodged to the right and swatted Garen's chest with her shoulder. Neither of them was very agile and so Garen could easily react to the counter attack. He turned his body and tackled her with his own shoulder.

After a loud bump of shoulders clashing, both backed off a few steps. They then both charged and ended up in a grapple. Like before, they threw punches at each other without any form or routine. In the previous fight, Garen had been exhausted after wrestling for a while, which led to his defeat.

However, this time Garen made use of a brief gap when the two split apart and were both gasping for air to focus his attention on the five attributes at the bottom of his vision, stopping for some seconds on Strength.

"Clink"

A quiet sound ringed inside his head. Garen felt his muscle swelling up. In a blink, he felt as if he had grown larger.

Looking again at the Strength attribute, the number had increased from 0.31 to 0.41.

"This incredible change was the result of just an increase of 0.1 points?"

Garen's heart skipped a beat, and he looked at Daris who was still panting.

Without a word, he charged forward again, but this time he bent his legs and applied a heavy force against the ground to gather momentum. The result was a distinct increase in his speed.

His strength turned to force, and force turned into acceleration. It was an abrupt change that Daris could not have foreseen. She tried to dodge to the side like the last time, but it was too late: she was tackled by Garen while her balance was off.

Daris sat on the ground after being knocked over with a flip. It seemed she could not get up. She gasped for air with a stunned expression. Her eyes were filled with shock and disbelief as she stared at Garen.

"Huff... You..." She was panting heavily, "You actually still have... this much strength?"

Garen clearly felt the changes that took place in his body, and he was joyous but also confused. With no time to check on Daris, he went back to Sharmilla to record the combat results.

Sharmilla had noticed Garen's sudden burst of strength. Even though Garen had a weak body, he was one of the five students she had noticed this time. After recording the results, she nodded at Garen with a smile, "Go rest for now."

“Yes, assistant Sharmilla.” Garen wiped away the sweat with his sleeve and sat on the ground to take a break. Half of the students were sitting on the ground like him, waiting for the others to finish their fight. Watching the matches taking place under the shade, Garen slowly felt the full effects of the growth in his strength.

He raised his skinny arms, shockingly discovering a trace of contour of muscle, instead of the skin and bones from before. “Just by enhancing Strength by a tenth of a point I’m already much more powerful. My strength has increased at least by a third. Now, at the very least, I think I would rank 15th among the students, but probably not much higher. This is still a great improvement compared to before. What kind of changes would other attributes bring? Agility, Vitality, and Intelligence... If these attributes could enhance my body in the same manner...” Garen’s heart was filled with anticipation. “It seems I have to find the reason behind the increase in potential. If I can keep enhancing the strength attribute, I could probably join the dojo as a disciple. Then I would receive a handsome stipend from it.”

The increase in strength did not bring many changes to Garen’s school life, other than the fact that now he eats a lot more. He stopped caring about school work, focusing entirely on grasping the true essence of the attributes. In order to continue filling the Potential meter, he started paying attention to the jewelry and gems that the girls were wearing. Also, after school, he would go to jewelry stores and pretend he wanted to buy something. After visiting every single jewelry store in the city, Garen had only found items that could increase his potential meter at a thrift jewelry shop: one was a sapphire and another was a tiny ruby on an earring. After touching these gems, his Potential meter raised to 89%. Unfortunately, he did not find any more special gems similar to those after the earring. Garen, by now, had also discovered what appeared to be a rule for the gems that could fill his potential meter: they had to be antique items from a long time ago.

“Hey Garen, wanna visit Jaderipple Lake with us this weekend?”

A few students gathered on the rooftop of one of the school buildings. They were hanging out and chatting near the railing, overlooking the school.

The morning sunlight was cool and pale, softly shining on their bodies without much warmth.

Garen was there as well, leaning against the railing. Kalidor and two youngsters he had just met were with him. Their names were Jake Reese and Fayne. There were also three other girls, Ai Fei and two of Fayne’s friends. The seven of them had just gotten to know each other this week.

“Jaderipple Lake? Where is that?” Garen asked Kalidor.

“It’s near the paper mill in the suburbs. We’ve only been there once. There were tons of swans at the lake, along with many other types of birds. And... you know...” With a sinister smirk on his face, Kalidor made an eye gesture at the girls who were merrily chatting behind them

“The point is, it’s a desolate wildland...” Jake added from the side. This boy looked quite mature with his short red hair and tanned skin. He looked like a candid fellow, but in truth, he had tricked and hurt a lot of girls’ feelings with his honest appearance.

“Easier to get things done...” Garen added, and the three of them laughed maliciously.

Kalidor winked at Fayne. “It will be every man for himself, so don’t blame me... There will be more girls this time, but Fayne and the two girls who are friends with him are going as well.”

Garen shook his head. He had met Fayne’s friends some time ago. Fayne was from a wealthy family and the girls he brought were very pretty. However, last time they were together those girls all hung out solely among themselves, completely segregated from the impoverished students. They didn’t bother talking to them even after Fayne introduced the groups to each other.

“If it’s like the last time, then forget it.” Garen replied, “I don’t have much spare money left anyway and don’t want the trouble, you guys can go by yourselves.” Garen had grown some muscle in the last few days, so he did not look sickly and skinny anymore. His body had become more muscular and manly.

“It’s fine. I can pay for your share, no problem.” Kalidor said as he slammed Garen’s shoulder. “Everyone traveling together is more fun. What’s the point of sticking around by yourself? If we don’t hang out often, we’ll become distant. What’s going on, you don’t like the gang anymore?”

“You’re paying for me again? Last time was...” Garen was speechless.

“Forget about all that, so do we have a deal? We’ll meet at the Academy’s front gate at 9 A.M., you guys good with that?”

“Of course.”

“I’m fine with that.”

The others had all agreed, and Garen was forced into an accord by Kalidor. Even though he really didn’t want to go, he couldn’t resist in the face of Kalidor’s overwhelming enthusiasm. He was under the impression that if he didn’t go, Kalidor would break up their friendship.

After settling on the time, they asked the girls to come, but Fayne's friends had things to do and declined the invitation.

Only Ai Fei stood on the rooftop, with her right hand holding down her mini skirt. The place she was standing on was very windy, making the hemline of her skirt flutter in the wind. Ai Fei held her skirt with an uneasy expression, afraid of a wardrobe malfunction. Even though she was wearing leggings, an upskirt still was one of a girl's most feared embarrassments.

Hearing the invitation to Jaderipple Lake, Ai Fei looked to Garen first. Ever since the goat milk event, the two had been feeling like they had a lot in common.

"Garen, are you going too?" She asked.

"Well... Fayne promised that if I go, he'd let me see his family's jewelry collection... You know, it's my hobby now."

Ai Fei nodded and slightly furrowed her brows. In the last few days, she had been paying some attention to Garen. She thought that this young man was different from the others. He was a lot more mature and prudent than the other boys, and his family was also financially similar to hers.

"Wouldn't that leave your sister alone at home?"

"She's going to practice at the archery club. Apparently, she's about to join a competition. Her school performance might be lackluster but she sure is good at archery," Garen explained. He had to agree this time because he knew that Fayne's family had an antique jewelry that could not be purchased elsewhere. It was very ancient, similar to the teacher's black and red pearl he had absorbed the energy from earlier.

In order to enhance his abilities, he could not decline this invitation. The last enhancement to strength allowed him to reach rank 14 in the White Cloud Dojo's class. After researching ways to fill his Potential meter, Garen found that this world was not as simple as he thought...