

Mystical 71

Chapter 71: Shifting Destiny 3

Knock! Knock!

"Open the door, old man!" Garen kept knocking on the door of the antique shop.

It was early in the morning, and there were only a couple workers in blue walking down the street. They saw Garen violently knocking on the door but did not bother to stop.

"Old man! You still sleeping?" Garen was out of patience and started to yell. He went to bed early last night and wanted to ask Gregor a few questions before heading to the Martial Arts Association for the ranking test, but no one was answering the door.

"Is he not here?" Garen thought and scrunched his eyebrows. He looked around and made sure no one else was around. He tiptoed and reached the edge of a window with his hand. He grabbed a blue key from the windowsill.

"I knew it would still be here." Garen smiled and opened the door with the key.

Creak.

The door opened slowly, and the place remained silent. The floor was covered with a black carpet, and there were several paintings hanging on the wall. The paintings were done in various colors, but mainly gold and silver.

Garen closed the door, walked toward the wall, and touched all the new items. He shook his head in disappointment. There was nothing that could increase his potential. Garen turned back and walked to the inner chamber.

It was dark behind the door curtain, so Garen carefully lit the oil lamps on the wall.

"Old man? Are you alright?" Garen scrunched his eyebrows and looked at the bed. It did not seem like anyone had slept in it. The blanket was still well organized.

Garen walked toward the bed and put his hand on the blanket. Cold.

"No one slept in here for sure. Did he go out last night?" Garen wondered. He knew something was not right. He walked toward the front of the shop and sat down on the old man's chair.

(P.S. I thought of using Double Gourd Vase with Slender Neck, but amphora seemed more appropriate)

Garen suddenly saw the dark red stain on the white Slender Neck Amphora. He narrowed his eyes and grabbed the amphora. Scratching off some of the dark red stain with his finger, he smelled it.

"It's blood..." Garen stood up slowly, a serious expression on his face.

"I hope the old man is okay..." he thought.

Garen started to investigate the situation and after several minutes he found some more bloodstains on the black carpet. He carefully checked around, but that was the only thing he found.

"Huh?" Garen found a white rectangular letter lying on the carpet under the table.

It said 'To Little Bastard' on the envelope. The words were written in black ink, and the handwriting was a bit messy, but still easy to read.

"It's the old man," Garen scrunched his eyebrows and opened the envelope. He pulled the letter out, noticing that there was almost no empty space left on the paper.

'I am on vacation kid! Don't try to find or contact me. I am good. An old friend invited me, and there are a lot of delicious dishes and nice drinks here. I heard he also prepared beauties for me. Hahaha. Don't get jealous. I don't think I am coming back. I opened the shop for fun, and I will leave it to you. You can do whatever you want with it.

Wait. I taught you how to identify the antiques. You better keep learning. I am counting on you.'

The letter ended here.

Garen finished the letter, but his expression did not change. He became even more serious.

"Old man... You think I will be tricked by this?" Garen thought and took the letter to the table. He lit an oil lamp with a match and toasted the paper carefully over the flame.

Sentences started to slowly show up on the back of the letter. Garen read the letter again after all the hidden sentences appeared.

'Garen, I'm sure you'll find my hidden message. But by the time you're reading this, I'll probably be gone already. To be honest, you remind me of myself. Though you aren't talented like me, our personalities are really similar. Well, make sure you take care of the necklace I gave you and don't lose it. It might help out in a certain situation.

Also, if... I mean, if you find something is strange in the shop, you need to leave it immediately! If anyone asks you about me, never say you knew me! There is barely anyone who can deal with them in this world. Don't call the police and don't seek help from others. It will only put them in danger. Only people with equivalent power would be able to fight them.

Sadly... You don't have the talent...'

The message ended here.

It seemed like the old man still had something to say.

Garen was breathing heavily while reading the message. He knew something happened to the old man, but he tried not to think about it.

"They? Old man, who are they?" Garen thought

There were many thoughts going through Garen's mind, and he just stood there with the letter in his hands.

Ka!

Suddenly, he heard some noise.

"Who's there!" Garen yelled. He put the letter down and rushed toward the source of the noise.

A man was walking toward the backdoor of the inner chamber. He turned back and looked at Garen after hearing his yell. The man looked surprised.

"Master was right. The kid came back!" the thin man suddenly yelled out.

"We didn't come here for nothing," someone else agreed. He then continued, "Take him out and we can leave."

"Got it. I will take care of him." The thin man laughed and walked toward Garen.

"Kid, you're unlucky," the man said, pointing a finger at Garen.

Boom!

Some invisible force stopped Garen from moving, and he felt like he was glued to the floor.

"What is this?"

Garen's expression changed. He wanted to raise his arm but he could not move at all. It was as if he was locked between two cement walls.

"Is this the talent the old man spoke about? That's their power?" Garen thought. He tried his best to move, but nothing happened.

Garen stared at the man in front of him and saw there was a black tattoo on the back of his right hand. It looked like a complex pentacle.

"James Silva, stop playing and hurry up," the man outside the door spoke again.

"Okay, fine." The thin man named James Silva looked annoyed. He pointed his first finger at Garen again.

Crack!

There was a sound of glass shattering.

The man no longer seemed annoyed. He froze, then slowly looked down and saw a arm jabbed into his chest. The teenager who had been previously restrained was now standing right in front of him with a cold look on his face.

Boom!

The thin man was struck again and fell to the floor after hitting the door. He stopped breathing after rolling several meters away. Garen walked out through the backdoor and entered the backyard.

There were three men in black standing in there, staring at the thin man lying on the floor. For a time, they couldn't understand what had just happened.

"It's Old Man Gregor! It's him! He's back!" a man at the left yelled in a shaky tone.

"Shut up! That old bastard is dead already! He was finished off by our master!" the leading man in black yelled back at him. "Take him out. We need to leave!"

"I only want to live a peaceful life, why do you have to do this?" Garen had no expression on his face as he looked at the three men calmly. His body started to expand, and his muscles puffed up. Garen's upper body became twice its original size, and he looked like a demon from the tales.

"I don't have the talent? Ridiculous..." Garen said.

BAM!

Garen leapt forward, the floor shaking underneath him, and caused a hole to appear after landing. It was as if the ground was struck by lightning.

"Spread out!" the three yelled, but Garen grabbed two of them before they could act. He squeezed the two's heads with his hands and they exploded. The backyard was splashed with blood and brains, painting a horror-filled scene.

The last man jumped away and trembling drew out his two daggers. He leaned forward, in a desperate attempt to stab Garen's neck.

BAM!

Garen slapped the man like one would slap a fly. His victim lost his balance and was blown away by the impact. The man hit the wall, dropped his daggers, and remained stuck like a gruesome painting.

Garen inhaled heavily and quickly walked towards the wall. He then dragged the man by the hair and punched him in the stomach. The man coughed blood and it splashed on Garen's clothes.

"Tough guys, huh? Without the invisible force shield, you're all weak, just like any other normal person," Garen said.

"Ha...Haha..." Blood was coming out of the man's eyes, ears, mouth and nose, but he could still laugh. "You're done... You still live with your parents, right? And you have a young sister? White Stallion is on his way to your home. If it was not for the Master's order, I'd be having a great time with the young girl... But White Stallion is worse than me... He's going to f*ck your sister to death! Hahaha!" the man yelled until his last breath.

Crack!

Garen broke his neck without hesitation.

"Telling me your friend's location, huh? Don't worry... He's going to be there with you soon..." Garen said.

He went back to the ground and rushed out of the backyard, leaving a hole where he came down. With just one step, Garen moved four meters forward and soon disappeared in the morning mist.

Chapter 72: Shifting Destiny 4

White fog surrounded Huaishan City without anyone taking notice of it.

From the main street to the back alley, everything was covered in fog.

Bluetree Street.

Rows of light yellow covered buildings stood side by side. A man could be seen strolling along the sidewalk in his white suit, playing with the keys circling his finger.

"This mission isn't half bad... I can have a rest, even take a break from those three idiots. Also have a taste of a little girl as an extra."

The man seemed to be mumbling something to himself as he walked with a wide smile across his face. His eyes fixated on the little girl not far in front.

The little girl was Ying Er, who was leaving her house to buy some stuff. She was wearing a white t-shirt and low-waist jeans with her waist line showing. She had the slim legs and waist that many girls envied her for. Though her chest was not fully developed and her looks were average, but this young body that was rich with youth was the type that White Stallion liked the most.

White Stallion followed closely behind and couldn't help but gulp, noticing the movement of her hips while she walked.

"I should take action once there are fewer civilians around..." He counted the distance and resisted his urge to act immediately.

After some distance, he spotted Ying Er humming while turning right into a narrow back alley.

White Stallion was delighted by the situation and increased his pace. It could be seen from his face that he could not hold back anymore. A white handkerchief appeared on his hand out of nowhere, coated with something needed for this occasion.

Clack. Clack. Clack.

Suddenly, footsteps could be heard coming from the corner ahead of him. Three tall men slowly walked out from the alley, each of them with golden earrings of various sizes hanging from their left ears.

The three men prevented White Stallion from entering the alley.

"Piss off!" The good-looking one among the three told him. He seemed to be the leader of the group. His expression was dim, obviously in a bad mood.

This guy in front of White Stallion wore a brown coat with a furry collar and had his hands tucked into his pockets. His hair was bright red, like a fire burning in a fog. The golden earring hanging from his ear was carved with a clear number 6.

"Puny mortal..." The smile on White Stallions face faded. "How dare you to address me in this tone..."

The red-haired man was taken aback. He didn't expect someone to speak to him in that kind of manner. He let out an awkward smile before speaking,

"It's been so long since someone dared to speak to me like this...." He took out his right hand from his pocket. "It seems as though you are one of those experts that are tracking me... Would be disrespectful of me if I don't give them a gift...."

"Cocky... Still, mortals are mortals." White Stallion smirked, reaching out with his right hand to take off his black gloves, revealing the Black Pentagon Tattoo. "I will gouge your eyes out and keep them for my new collection." A mysterious energy began forming around him.

"You must be looking for a death bed..." The two men beside the red-haired man retreated after he raised his hand. Oddly enough, a blood red scar began emerging from below his right eye. It looked like an eye shadow done by a lady, sharp yet enchanting.

Huff...

A wind blew past, racking up some leaves along the way.

Garen was running hastily through the streets, surging past the pedestrians. He had already taken off his shirt and was gripping it under his arm. The upper part of the shirt was stained with blood.

"Damn it... Please don't be in trouble!" His face was pale, heart growing more impatient by the second.

It was a 20 to 30 minutes' walk to get from Pennington Street to Blue Tree Street, but Garen managed to reach his home in ten. Unfortunately his parents must've gone out, as well as his little sister, Ying Er. Garen wasted no time leaving the house and continuing his search along the street.

He was trying to figure out where his sister might have gone to while running wildly around the neighborhood.

"She might've gone to the market at this hour! Or maybe she's at a fruit stall!"

Garen hesitated for a while before deciding to head off to the market.

The scenery beside Garen started to blur in reverse yet the road ahead of Garen was still clear in his eyes.

"Pass this crossroad and make a right turn, then I should make a left turn after a few hundred meters."

Thump!

A muffled sound came from the empty street in front.

A blurry figure could be seen flying in the fog. It tumbled to the ground and rolled a few times before stopping in front of Garen's boots.

He came to a halt, lowering his head to look at the man lying in front of him.

A suit dirtied to a point where it was barely recognizable to have been white once. Right now it was only grey and brown due to numerous stains. Even the man's neat hair was thrown into disarray. However, what was most worth noting was that both of his arms were twisted in an unnatural way, obviously broken.

Then Garen noticed the Black Pentagon Tattoo at the back of his right hand.

"It's similar to those guys' tattoos..."

He bent over and grabbed the man's collar, bringing him upward.

"You're White Stallion?" he asked. After all that running, his breathing took a bit of minor adjustments to return to normal.

"It's you... Hehe... I can't believe I will die in the hands of a mortal..." White Stallion chuckled before letting out his last breath. His eyes slowly faded as his soul began to seep away from his body.

Garen was stunned by what he had just witnessed. He shook the body for a while before noticing a black shape emerging from White Stallion's neck's right side. It was connected with the Black Pentagon behind his right hand.

Garen tossed away the corpse and let out a breath. He took a few steps forward as he began to see clearer what was ahead of him.

Three tall men wearing golden earrings sat in front of a narrow back alley with exhausted looks on their faces. Dark blood stains could be seen under the nose of the one with red hair.

The red-haired man raised his head to look in Garen's direction after hearing the footsteps.

"It's you." He let down off his guard for a moment. "Damn it, I thought there was another monster like him coming!" He scowled while trying to get up using a wall.

"Might I ask, expert, what kind of monstrous opponents are you facing exactly? I even had to let out my qi-gong because of him! You're lucky I got here in time or your sister would be in deep trouble by now."

Garen just nodded along, not knowing what had happened. He noticed that the golden earring on the man's ear had a number 6 carved on it.

"I owe you one, Sixth Golden Hoop." He turned his eyes toward the other two. "What about them?"

"Temporary henchmen, they practice Body Hardening Technique. They helped me block some of the attacks but from the looks of things they won't live long." The red-haired man shook his head. "I'll have someone inform their families." He suddenly turned and looked at Garen furiously.

"I've already taken care of this incident for you! Don't tell me you're still not joining the Golden Hoop? Don't blame me if I turn against you!"

Garen was speechless. All he could do now was force a smile.

"Take this!" The red-haired man tossed a piece of a golden earring toward Garen.

Garen caught it properly and took a look at it. It was a golden earring with a number 9 carved on it. It was as big as a finger nail and it looked delicately made.

"Temporary replacement for Ninth Golden Hoop?"

"Not temporary. Didn't you almost take care of Tenth Golden Hoop? It's only natural that you have this ranking." Number Six sneered.

"You even know this?" Garen was stunned.

"The trait of your combat arts is too obvious, even your whereabouts are too obvious."

Garen shrugged, having nothing to say.

"Alright, go take a look at your sister. I have to ask someone to take care of things here." The red-haired man wiped off the blood stains from around his nose and walked toward the dead corpse.

Garen picked up his pace and walked into the back alley. This was the shortcut his little sister always took. After getting out of the back alley, Ying Er's back figure finally appeared within Garen's eyesight.

He rushed out, hugging his little sister.

"Ying Er!"

Ying Er felt a familiar presence hugging her from behind. She almost dropped the tomatoes and potatoes that she was carrying from the market, startled by this sudden action.

"Brother! What are you doing! Are you not embarrassed? We are on the main street!" She struggled to get away from Garen but felt the difference in strength between them. Trying a few more times to no avail, she gave up and just let him do what he wanted.

"Ying Er... I'm so glad you're fine...." Garen held his half-a-head shorter sister tightly in his arms.

"Fine from what?" Ying Er was being hugged by Garen from behind with her hips awkwardly positioned against Garen's crotch region. "Let me go or I'm going to be so pissed!"

"Okay, okay, I'll let go." Garen also felt the awkwardness and swiftly removed his arms from around his sister. He was relieved to know his sister's current condition. Most of the passers-by stared at them ambiguously, assuming that they were in a relationship.

"Where is mom and dad?" Garen asked, ignoring the attention of the passing people.

"They went to get some coal and firewood. The winter is coming, we need to have these stuff prepared to avoid getting cold." Ying Er held up the groceries she bought from the market. "It's your turn to carry this as a punishment for the jump scare just now!" She shoved the sack to Garen.

"Okay!" Garen was relieved. He felt good at this moment.

"I have to continue buying groceries. You follow me closely and try not to lose me okay?" Ying Er turned and walked forward, toward the sidewalk not far in front of her. Both sides of the street were full with various stalls selling vegetables along with some housewives who had woken up early to pick the fresh ones.

Garen carried the groceries with one hand, while tucking away the golden earring into his pocket with the other.

"I owe the Golden Hoop big this time... Still, at least the safety of my family is guaranteed. If the Golden Hoop's background is what Number 8 said..."

If it was true, it should be a good thing for Garen to join the Golden Hoop. One thing for sure was that he had to be cautious when he was around Dale and the gang. One false move may lead to them discovering his secret identity.

Taking a deep breath, Garen realized that he was too lazy to concern himself with this issue. His heart sank when he recalled that the old man had gotten himself into trouble.

"Judging from the looks of these guys just now, the old man should've been a respectable figure in the past. Just his name was enough to frighten them back there. As to the master they were mentioning..."

Cold determination flashed through Garen's eyes.

"Whoever brought harm to you, I swear, I will take revenge for you... I swear."

A sweet and fishy smell suddenly burst from his chest and to his throat. Garen immediately covered his mouth and forced it back down. His entire throat was covered with a sticky smell of blood.

It was the internal injury he had gotten from forcing himself to fight the three black-suited henchmen earlier on. He didn't take the time to adjust himself before rushing out from the scene. It was not until 10 minutes after that he took a proper rest.

If it wasn't for Garen's strong physique, and he was like other Martial Adepts, he'd be left unable to move.

"That power felt like psychokinesis. Its force was really strong. Luckily it was countered by pure strength, but other types of fighters would find it difficult to face. Maybe I can get some evidence from the corpse..."

Chapter 73: Meeting and Discussion 1

Garen applied direct pressure to his chest and tried to hide his injury. He thought he needed to go to the Dojo and ask for Master's help.

"Ying Er, I will have lunch at the Dojo so don't wait for me. I will take the groceries back home first," Garen said.

"Dojo again... Mom and Dad are home today," Ying Er said, disappointment etched on her face.

"Don't be upset. I heard they got a better job and we'll be able to spend more time together now." Garen patted his sister's head and smiled. He asked Master to move his parents to a better position, and it seemed as if Master had already done it.

Garen's uncle could do something like this easily, but for some reason he never helped his parents. He arrived home and put everything down, then went straight to the Dojo.

There were a lot of repairs going on in the city, and many infrastructures were being rebuilt. Garen could see workers and bullock cars that carried materials everywhere. The downtown area had become messy, no longer as clean as before.

He kept thinking about the three people he met earlier, while quickly walking down the street, and just felt that something was not right.

"If the invisible force field was the talent the old man talked about before, the key to all the questions would be the book he asked me to read that day." Garen thought he finally found a clue. "After

watching me read the book, the old man looked disappointed and said I was not talented. I've not seen that book since. It may contain the answers to all my questions..."

Garen slowed down a bit. He saw a pancake stand moving towards him after turning at a corner. The owner of the stand smiled and handed him a small piece of paper before passing.

Garen stopped for a second and looked at the piece of paper. A Golden Hoop was drawn on it, and there was a sentence written below the graph: '28-3 Stone Bridge, Willow Street. Urgent.'

Garen put the paper into his pocket and took a deep breath. He then turned back and crossed the street.

East of the Huaishan.

A yellow river slowly ran across the city area, and it looked like a wide yellow ribbon dividing the city in half. But it was a dirty one.

There were many square shaped light-yellow houses on both sides of the river. Some of them were tall and some short. They looked like a bunch of unorganized blocks. Sometimes, people in the houses could be seen through the windows.

There were many dark yellow stone bridges built over the river. Many pedestrians and cars were going across them. There was a silver black bust standing in the middle of one bridge that was far from the downtown area. The bust with its stand was about three meters tall, and it was a man with a moustache surrounded by flowers.

There was a bronze introduction panel in front of the bust, and a man in check sweater was standing beside it. The man was about 30 or 40 years old. He had brown eyes and an aquiline nose. With his short grey hair, he looked ruthless.

A strong young man with short purple hair appeared on the left side of the bridge and slowly walking toward the bronze panel. He was wearing a black sweatshirt, though the shirt was large, it could barely hide his muscles. The sunlight was not strong, but the young man's arms still looked shiny.

"Master Nine?"

Garen heard the voice and looked at the man's aquiline nose. The man revealed a golden earring he was holding with his right hand.

"Nine?" Garen scrunched his eyebrows and stared at the man. He then realized he just took over position of Number Nine. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Master Six was checking the retrieved bodies, and he thought you would be interested in the results. He asked me to inform you about them," the man answered respectfully. His voice was low, just enough for Garen to hear him.

"The bodies... Lead the way." Garen's expression changed, and he said with a deep tone.

"Sure, please follow me."

They went across the bridge and left the downtown area. There were many oxcarts and carriages on the road. Garen barely saw any cars around, just ox feces by the roadside from time to time.

They crossed two streets and walked into a narrow path beside a small hill. On the other side, there was a black wall separating the living area from the path.

The two had already left the city area, and Garen could hear insects making noises in the bushes on the side. He followed the man with an aquiline nose and kept checking the surroundings.

Quack. Quack.

Garen saw several white-feathered ducks crossing the path after turning a corner. An old farmer with a straw hat was guiding them with a branch. He looked relaxed. Garen and the man went around the procession and kept advancing. They saw an empty ground by the end of the path, and behind the empty ground, there was a small building that was surrounded by green trees.

The sunlight was blocked by the trees, and the building was covered in shadows.

"That's it." The man stopped by the entrance of the building. "This is one of our bases in Huaishan. Please go to the second floor. The other masters are waiting for you there."

Garen looked at him but did not say anything and just entered the building. A lady with black hair walked out of one of the rooms on the second floor. She looked sexy dressed in a tight leather suit. The lady had a ponytail, and was tall and slim. Her eyes were dark purple, and they caught Garen's attention.

The lady was pretty, but she seemed hard to approach. She saw Garen going upstairs and walked back into the room without saying anything. He felt a bit speechless.

"No.10 is here too... I guess she knows who I am." Garen shook his head and kept moving. There was a strong man standing by the entrance to the second floor.

"This way, please. According to the rules, please put on your earring," the strong man told Garen.

Garen nodded and took the golden earring out of his pocket. He hesitated for a second, rubbing his earlobe. He decided to just put it on his left little finger, turned the number side up, and entered the room on the right.

It was the only room on the right side of the second floor. It was big with a rectangle table, two bookshelves, and several high backed chairs. All of the furniture were made of some red wood. Garen could smell its light fragrance.

A man and a lady were standing in front of the bookshelves. The lady was Number Ten, while the man was blonde and had only one eye. They were talking about something.

Number Six and a pale man with a black cape were playing cards on the table.

"You're here? We can start." Number Six stood up and laughed, he put down his cards. "Sorry, Number Eight, I win again."

"Bullshit!" Number Eight cursed. He stood up and looked at Garen. "You're a bit late," he said.

"Sorry, I am not familiar with the route," Garen replied, nodding to him. Number Eight had invited Garen to join the Golden Hoop, and he was the only one Garen was familiar with. So he walked toward him and stood by his side.

"So, what's the matter?" Garen asked.

Number Six smiled but did not answer the question.

He clapped and said, "Okay everyone. We're here to discuss the thing about the Silversilk Castle. There are five members from the top ten here, and we haven't met like this in years."

"Cut the crap!" Number 10 barked, stopping Number Six from saying more unnecessary things. "We're busy organizing our territories and aren't here to waste our time."

"Fine." Number Six scratched his head. "First, I would like to introduce our new member, Number Nine!"

Clap.

They clapped their hands several times but no one seemed to care.

"I still have no idea about the Golden Hoop." Garen shrugged.

"Take those," Number Eight handed Garen a stack of paper. "Leave them here after you finish reading. Someone will burn them."

Garen grabbed several pages, and found out they contained the information about the Golden Hoop.

He read through the information quickly, and learnt some basic knowledge about the Gold Hoop.

It was a large organization that sold antiques and jewelry. The top ten members of the Golden Hoop created an information network that collected rumours about antiques. If there were requests for certain items, the organization would do whatever they needed to get them for the buyers.

The top ten members were responsible for the organization, but they were not ranked with the numbers, and they all had their own territories and networks. They joined the organization just to make more profit.

Each of the top ten members oversaw a certain task: some needed to collect information about antiques while others needed to communicate with buyers. They could buy the antiques they wanted, or they could also get them from the others' territories. They would work together as long as there were benefits.

Number Six spoke again while Garen was still checking the information. "Recently, our customers have shown a great interest in Antiques of Tragedy, and Number Nine is an expert of Antiques of Tragedy. He will make sure the antiques we get are real. This is the main reason I agreed to take him in."

"Also, Number Nine is a Martial Adept, and he is very close to rank E," Number Eight added. "We've already voted to confirm his membership and don't need to discuss it anymore. Number Six, get to the point."

"Fine." Number Six nodded and looked at Number Ten. She did not seem to care about any of this. "We sometimes make changes to our top management, like Number Seven, who just joined us about two years ago. Well, let's get down to business." His face got serious.

"Just then, I had a fight with Number Four about that item from last time. You guys are well aware of that. So I was in a terrible mood and received the news from our dependents. They said people are targeting the relatives of the newly joined Number Nine. So I rushed there to unleash my anger. However, I didn't expect..."

"What did you encounter?" Number Eight asked in a lowered voice.

"I don't know." Number Six shook his head.

The other people focused their attention on him. He had obviously piqued their curiosity.

"Just be straight forward and tell us. What's with the hesitation?" Number Ten grimly said. Number Seven beside her calmly glanced over with reticence.

Number Six closed his eyes and didn't respond right away. He was instead trying to remember what had happened.

After ten seconds, he gradually opened his mouth.

"I originally thought it was releasing the body hardening technique outside of the body, but later I realized it was impossible." He looked at everyone, and even Garen, who was looking through the documents, raised his head to focus on him.

"I would imagine it was psychokinesis. The guy I encountered must be someone who possessed the power of psychokinesis from the legend!"

"Psychokinesis?" Number Eight rubbed his chin, pondering.

"You read way too many novels, Number Six." Number Ten sneered. "I still have a business that I need to negotiate. If you're telling me something imaginary and fake, you'll have to excuse me for leaving!"

"No, what he said is true," all of a sudden said the silent Number Seven. "I have seen psychokinesis before. The world they live in is completely separated from that of normal people. Just like martial adepts, they're light years ahead of ordinary people."

"Do you have any evidence?"

"Unfortunately, no." Number Six shrugged. "There was a black tattoo on the back of the corpse's hand, but for some reason, it disappeared after death."

"It's gone?" Garen put down the documents.

"Mhmm, completely vanished," Number Six confided. "I got someone to dissect the corpse but didn't manage to find anything useful. Psychokinesis is one thing I want to remind everyone to be careful of. If possible, collect some intelligence in this area. Number Nine, if you have any information, try your best to notify everyone since it originates from you. You also have to be aware that they are strong, at least the person I met was powerful."

Garen nodded.

"The second thing, it's the white rock eye we have. It already has five bidders. Currently, 56 million is the highest price. The item was acquired through our back office, and the front office has nothing to do with it. Therefore, the money will be only divided among the people that contributed," Number Six explained. "The appraisal will be up to Number Nine. This thing could count as an Antique of Tragedy, and it is said that anyone who keeps the antique in possession for over two months would be overwhelmed with diseases and pain. The book of silence... I don't know if it is true or not."

Joyous in his mind, Garen immediately nodded in agreement. "My appraisal is not a problem." He looked at some information and became aware of the difference between the front and the back office of the Golden Loop.

The front office consisted of the first five numbers, whereas the back office were the latter five numbers. The two sides never got on friendly terms since the relationship had always been strained.

"That's good. Now we divide up the money. Number Eight is the pivotal contributor this time and takes home 80%. Number Ten receives 10%. Number Nine and I will each take 5%. Us four will divide the money. Number Seven will take 100 thousand from number eight that received the most as tradition. Is everyone okay with this?"

"Yes," Number Eight said. "Number Nine contributed a major amount as well and should be rewarded accordingly. If it were not for him, I wouldn't have been able to acquire the item. I'll split one-third of my share with him."

"It's okay, 5% is more than enough." Garen smiled. "If it can be sold for 50 million, I can receive two million. It is enough."

"There is no rush. The money is not as simple as it looks." Number Six gestured. "As a newly joined member, you have to prove your worth to the group. Appraisal alone is not enough to assume the position as Number Nine. Everyone must complete a mission when they join which would be beneficial to the organization. It is your turn now."

Garen slightly raised his eyebrows. "Is this an examination? What kind of mission?"

"We don't know yet. But next time when trouble arrives, you alone will have to take care of the problem. This is to prove your ability to handle difficult situations alone as part of the top ten golden loops." Number Six shrugged.

Unbothered, Garen nodded. "This is not a problem. Also, about those psychokinetic individuals, are there any leads? Regarding their origin?"

"The only thing we know is that it's connected to the explosion case in a rural area. As well as the Dolphin antique store's owner's mysterious disappearance along with the three bodies found in the backyard."

"I killed those three people," Garen interrupted him. "Can you help me look for Old Man Gregor's information? His store should be recorded within certain bureaus. At least his personal information."

"Let me try. Number Ten is in charge of Huaishan area. You can go talk to her about it." Number Six mischievously smiled at Garen.

Garen was speechless. He had just injured and almost accidentally killed Number Ten. It would be senseless to ask her for help now.

"If there are any leads, please let me know as soon as possible."

"No problem." Number Eight patted Garen's shoulder. "Don't be too sad."

"No need to be sad. I'll eventually find him, and kill him!" Garen said calmly.

After the money was split, the white rock eye fell into the hands of Garen to determine its authenticity within three weeks. He took it and left the small cabin while everyone else dispersed separately as well. Only Number Ten stayed behind. It was her place after all.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The black sandbag flew higher and higher.

Garen forcefully smashed the sandbag with all his might, one punch after another. The metal sand inside the sandbag concaved from the excessive force.

His upper body was exposed, and the sweat dropped down like rainfall. He was only wearing black shorts, and the contracting and expanding muscles gave a sturdy but flexible vibe.

"From a martial adept's perspective, you're doing quite well."

In the training hall behind his back, Fei Baiyun took a white colored chair and sat down firmly. He had a cup of hot tea in his hand and occasionally took a sip or two.

"White Cloud Secret Arts, Combat Techniques, Explosive Fist Arts. You have learned it all. The next step is to take it to real combat. You must fuse all the techniques into particular moves and fully unleash your potential. This is what you need to do. In a few days, you'll go with me to a conference and see the skill level of other martial adepts," Fei Baiyun said in a calm and slow voice.

"Yes, Master," Garen answered respectfully, stopping his training.

"There is nothing wrong with hiding your power. It's just that if you don't usually fight at your limit, your performance would be below expectations in a critical battle. Although hiding your power would make your opponent underestimate you, there are always accidents. You can never completely hide." Fei Baiyun took another sip of the tea.

"Everyone at the conference will be martial adepts. You'll have to remember that you can't be arrogant just because you have some achievements. The White Cloud Gate is nothing within the martial adept circle. There are far stronger opponents out there. Don't underestimate anyone because of your mastery in Explosive Fist Arts."

"Don't worry Master. I know where my limit is." Garen nodded in agreement. After witnessing Golden Loops' martial adepts as well as the existence of psychokinesis, his original thoughts of being considered a strong martial adept after a couple of breakthroughs were shattered. His opponents were stronger than ever, and no one was weak. This point alone was enough to eradicate his arrogance.

"As long as you understand. Now go back and pack a few things. We'll leave the day after tomorrow. Remember to let your family know." Fei Baiyun smiled, pleased.

He was extremely satisfied by this latest disciple. As long as he didn't betray the White Cloud Gate, everything else would be irrelevant. His potential and power were impeccable even compared to Farak. It was unbelievable that he managed to reach the second level of Explosive Fist Arts in just one year time.

"I'll only bring you this time. I've brought your senior brother and sisters separately before. This is the opportunity for you to expand your understanding of the martial adept world. There will be plenty of

opportunities to fight, and you must be prepared for them. Also, you'll be representing the White Cloud Gate as the core disciple. You have to be cautious of your image."

"I'll be leading?" Garen was surprised. "Master, how many people are going this time?"

"Including you, a total of five people. The other four are selected based on their potential. They are your junior brothers and sisters. You'll have to take care of them." Fei Baiyun smiled.

"Ok..." Garen was slightly troubled as he had a lot of things that he needed to figure out, which meant he wasn't in the mood to take care of other people.

It had been several months since he met with the Golden Loop. He had to return the rock eye within three weeks. He had also saved up four attribute points.

The Black Jade Disk was completely out of potential now. Garen tried to absorb the potential from the Bronze Cross Emblems at the Silversilk Castle that he got from Dale Quicksilver. However, the absorbing speed was too slow. It was questionable whether he could increase one attribute point in a year's time.

Therefore, he only had four remaining attribute points left, and he was faced with the situation where he had ran out of potential that could be absorbed.

During this time, he used Manuyllton Corporation and the Golden Loop to collect Antiques of Tragedy, except that none could provide the potential at a fast enough pace. He started to suspect that the problem came from himself. Potential generated attribute points, therefore, when he was weak, it was easy to absorb a large amount of potential from any Antique of Tragedy.

But now, the potential he was absorbing was becoming negligible. A large factor in this could be that he was stronger compared to before, thus, to generate an attribute point a significantly larger amount of potential was required. Therefore, normal Antiques of Tragedy could not sustain his needs.

A stream of water was ample to fill a cup, but for a jug, it would be minuscule.

That was what Garen deduced. The stronger his body was, the higher amount of energy would be required. It would only be natural this way.

Chapter 75: The Speechless Martial Adept 1

There were no more sources of potential, as well as no leads to the old man's death. It all made Garen impatient.

Adding to it the inheritance of his uncle's business and the trouble caused by the teens from Lambrath's mom's side of the family, Garen was becoming even more frustrated.

He watched Fei Baiyun stroll out of the practice hall. He glanced at the attributes below his vision.

Strength 2.43. Agility 1.21. Vitality 1.88. Intelligence 1.51. Potential 498%. White Cloud Secret Arts: Mastery (Level four). Explosive Fist Arts: Intermediate. White Cloud Combat Arts: Intermediate.

"All four attributes have increased by 0.01. This is too slow." He let out a breath. "The daily exercises and routines are no longer useful for me. Adding attribute points is probably more helpful."

He gazed at strength for three seconds, and it gradually changed. It increased from 2.43 to 2.63.

"I can add it again?" Overjoyed by the finding, Garen suddenly realized something was different. "Why did only increase by 0.2?" He carefully examined the other attributes. Only strength had increased by 0.2 while the others hadn't changed.

"What's happening?" He took a deep breath. "I may have mistaken the original stats..."

He didn't think too much about it and let his vision fall on Explosive Fist Arts. This was the move he was most dependent on. When he fought with Number Ten and later the psychokinetics, it was because of the absolute vibration and defense from this move that he had won.

The Explosive Fist Arts not only increased defense but also the effectiveness of attacks.

But after he gazed at it for a while, a few red symbols appeared gradually below the attributes bar as if explaining something. Garen glanced at it, and his facial expression suddenly changed.

"Attribute explanations?"

'After the special ability collected information regarding the arts, one attribute point could be used to increase the level of beginner level skills. Two could increase intermediate skills, while advanced skills required five attribute points. The advance criteria had to be met before the skill could be leveled up. The unavailability of leveling could be a result of lacking information.

Absorbing the same type of attribute over a period would develop resistance within the body. The effect on body condition would decrease.'

The rows of the symbols were easy to understand for Garen.

"No wonder attribute points would have less of an impact on the body's condition. I felt something was odd. It was okay in the beginning, but as soon as the ratio changed... The actual attributes decreased, just that I didn't notice. After the prolonged period, the decrease became significant enough. But it was only after it became as large as 0.1 that I noticed it."

His vision focused on the Explosive Fist Arts. A symbol gradually appeared behind this skill, which was the missing criteria to level up this skill.

'Five attribute points.'

Garen frowned. The last time the Explosive Fist Arts leveled up was because of the body quenching pill along with the attribute points. To increase the skill forcefully, it would require five points!

He only had three points remaining.

"If I knew this, I wouldn't have added strength." He smashed the wall in regret. "Only missing two points. I need to find a way! But I have to attend the conference in two days."

The practicality of the Explosive Fist Arts was remarkable. Garen spent over half of his effort on this skill. If he improved this fist art to a mastery comparable to his master's, his power would change significantly. If added with the fact that Garen's strength had already reached its limit, he couldn't imagine how powerful it would be if he achieved advanced mastery of the skill.

Garen carried his clothes when he left the White Cloud Gate. He stood outside in front of the rows of cars.

From a black car, Grace peeked her head out.

"Dale Quicksilver has new information."

"Oh?"

Garen opened the car door and sat down beside Cynthia. He glanced at Cynthia who was chewing on something. "What are you eating? It smells awful."

Cynthia smirked as she spat something black out of the car window.

Garen focused on Grace again. "What's the new information?"

Grace looked at him through the reflective mirror as she said cautiously, "After what happened at the Silversilk Castle, Dale Quicksilver and his companions left the province to Evenia Province's Blue Gulf City. The case is closed for now. A few of the Golden Loop's middle managers were arrested. They also received a request for help from the police department."

"Do you know what exactly it is?"

"I think it is because of Huaishan City. The explosion case that night along with the murder at the Dolphin Antique Store. Pennington Street is where the high-end communities are located, which makes this a bit trickier. An incident on this scale not only shocked the governor's office, it even angered the officers on the national level. So Dale Quicksilver and other famous detectives received an invitation to investigate this case."

Garen frowned slightly. "There are plenty of cases at Huaishan city, and murders are not that uncommon. Why did this one case trigger such a drastic response? There are many cases of homeless men that died in the alleys, but those don't seem to bother them at all."

Cynthia, who sat beside him, began to giggle. "You don't understand. The primary reason is that of the Silversilk Castle. The Golden Loops are too ruthless and cocky as they had the audacity to confront the police department. They even killed multiple police officers which caused a sequence of reactions. An investigation team was created to deal specifically with this case. The antique store murder had also happened during this sensitive period which stomped on the dignity of the provincial police department. It is no wonder then that they are furious over this. They're certainly playing with fire. However, the newspapers and magazines are more than happy."

"In this case... the place Dale Quicksilver went to is related to the antique store murder?" Gloom cast on Garen's face immediately.

"Yes. Based on the information from the police department in the other province, a similar murder had happened in a small town nearby. There an aged lady who also owned an antique store had went missing. It is rumored that she was connected with the old man from the Dolphin Antique Store. They were communicating through mail," Grace explained.

"Exchanging letters?" Garen's expression tensed. "Grace, I need to attend a martial arts conference in two days with my master. I need you to keep an eye on information from Dale Quicksilver."

"No problem."

"What about me?" With an uninterested expression, Cynthia leaned over. "Bring me with you, I can warm the bed for you." She pouted with her pink lips and smiled gracefully.

"I'm going to my master. You're in charge of protecting my family, is that okay?" Garen pushed her away as he had no energy left to waste time on these things.

"Wu... This is too heartless. This is the first time I am so proactive." Cynthia pretended to rub her eyes as if her feelings were hurt.

"Okay, that's enough." Garen was speechless. "Dale Quicksilver's ability to trace things is impeccable. Maybe he will find something I need. You have to keep a close eye on him."

"Okay."

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Two days later.

Wooooo!

With a deafening screech of a train horn, a dark red wooden train emitting black smoke gradually came to a halt at a terminal at Huaishang City.

Around ten people were scattered across the rectangular platform beside the train track. There were males and females, both young and old people. The majority of them carried a suitcase and covered themselves from head to toe with their jackets and trenchcoats.

When the train stopped, the conductor forcefully pushed open the door.

"Time to get on the train!" The white-bearded train conductor yelled. "Passengers at the ninth compartment get on the train. This is the train headed to Hela, don't get on the wrong train!"

The passengers waiting for the train began to board in a line.

Among them, there was a young and an old man that carried a red leather suitcase. They both wore black wool coats along with black cap. They were Fei Baiyun and Garen of the White Cloud Gate.

They blended in among the passengers.

Garen followed behind his master. He passed the white ticket to the conductor before grabbing the red leather suitcase and stepping on to the train.

At the point of entrance, the left side was a sealed train compartment, while the right was the exit.

"Why are you standing there? Our seats are inside, hurry up and don't block anyone." Fei Baiyun turned his head.

"Oh." Garen was distracted by the fact that it was his first time seeing such an ancient train, which slowed his actions. He hastened his steps to follow his master.

The compartment was a dark red color. The grains of wood were exposed inside the compartment. The entire train was made of this particular timber.

Four seats were divided into two rows, just like the individual rectangles that were scattered along the two sides of the train. The middle was a walkway.

The compartment was hardly filled with people. The master and student passed five rows of seats before finally stopping at the left side in the middle of the compartment.

There were already two people that sat there. A male and a female in their teens, and they were falling asleep. The two of them had certainly put some thought into how they dressed as both wore matching white shirts and pants. Judging by their facial features, they were brother and sister. Their hair was also identical silver white.

"Do you want to sit on the outside or inside?" Fei Baiyun glanced at the two people and pointed toward the seats.

"I'll sit on the inside," Garen said without hesitation and took the seat.

Fei Baiyun smiled and didn't say anything as he slowly sat down.

The two teens across them heard their voices and slightly opened their eyes. They kept their silence and then fell asleep in the same position.

Sitting, Garen carefully examined the two people across from him. He noticed that the girl's hands were covered with calluses and had short fingernails. They looked rough and coarse.

"Teacher, how long is this train ride going to take?"

"Not long, about three days." Fei Baiyun took off his hat and tried to pat away the dust.

"Three days..." Garen let out a light breath. He stored the suitcases one by one underneath the chair before leaning against the window without saying a word.

## Chapter 76: The Speechless Martial Adepts 2

The death of the old man, the dispute between the Golden Hoop and Dale Quicksilver, and the mysterious enemy who had used telekinesis had been attracted because of the old man. These matters appeared one after another, causing Garen to be unable to settle down recently to practice his combat techniques.

Compared to these matters, the inheritance issue on his uncle's side, the exchange gathering between dojos, and meeting the chairman of Manuyllton Corporation were just small matters.

The thing that Garen currently wanted to do the most was finding the true murderer of the old man, and at the same time, the ones who threatened his family. Unfortunately, the telekinesis users who appeared to stop him did not leave any clues. Now, he could only count on Dale Quicksilver's side to find out more about them.

"Are you still thinking about that matter?" Fei Baiyun whispered beside him, "Don't think too much about it. From now on, you need to adjust your condition. This exchange gathering is not just an opportunity for you to gain experience, but also a chance for you to know your ranking."

"My ranking?" Garen nodded, "Just as well, I also want to know what level I am currently at."

Wu...

The train whistled once more, and the sound of the wheels moving against the tracks gradually rang out. As the rhythm started to increase in tempo, the train carriage gradually moved forward with an increasing speed.

The train carriage was also slightly livelier after some passengers got on.

Garen recalled the data that his master gave him the day before.

They were going to Hela City, one of the famous exchange gathering spots for Martial Adepts within their province and its surrounding provinces.

This exchange gathering was conducted by a local Secret Martial Art sect—the Celestial Circle Gate. It was also one of the three strongest clans in the confederation.

More importantly, the Celestial Circle Gate had an influential position within the northern part of the confederation. The main reason they hosted the exchanged gathering was not just for creating an opportunity for interaction between disciples, but to establish a ranking between each sect.

And during the previous exchange gatherings, White Cloud Gate's ranking within the Secret Martial Art world was number seventeen.

The two of them were going there earlier to reserve a strategic position during the exchange gathering. Otherwise, if they went late, the students from the dojo might not even have a place to stay.

According to the data, White Cloud Gate was within the ordinary martial arts world. However, it was only an unremarkable sect within Secret Martial Art sects that truly possessed ancient inheritance.

The Mammoth Secret Technique was the foundation of White Cloud Gate. The other techniques: White Cloud Combat Arts, Explosive Fist Arts, or the fundamental wrestling techniques, were all just simplified versions of this Secret Martial Art. It was the most powerful martial art within the entire sect.

However, within the entire Secret Martial Art world, there were many sects with similar Secret Martial Arts. This type of Secret Martial Art was actually just a fundamental martial art for tempering the body. The training requirements were strict, the training speed was extremely slow, and the external prerequisites required were troublesome. It was only considered third-rate within the Secret Martial Art world.

As a result, White Cloud Gate was only considered a third-rate sect within the Secret Martial Art.

Garen recalled the exhortation from his master on the previous day.

"When we get there, you need to remember to listen more, watch more, speak less, and create less trouble. Our White Cloud Gate is situated in a remote location, and we're still quite powerful locally. However, we're only considered insignificant outside, so we can't rashly get into a dispute with others. Of course, there are many sects like us in the exchange gathering, so there's no need for you to draw back when you have to display your strength. We might not be able to win against Martial Adepts from powerful sects, but we can still compete for the ranking against small sects."

For some reason, after recalling this, Garen could not help but think about his senior sister, Rosetta. Garen looked toward his master beside him.

"Master, what happened when Senior Sister came with you previously?"

"Rosetta?" Fei Baiyun was originally recuperating while shutting his eyes. When he heard Garen's question, he slightly opened his eyes. "She was still young when she went with me, around the age of seventeen or eighteen years old... At that time, her foundation was firm, but her talent was ordinary, and I had no intention of teaching her true martial arts. However, Rosetta completely changed after she returned from the exchange gathering and became reticent. Her personality began to change as well, and her talent suddenly improved. In the end, I decided to impart true martial arts to her. It was really strange, but my guess is that she probably received some sort of stimulus during the exchange gathering. Then she started to truly work hard after she went back and exhibited her true talent."

Fei Baiyun patted Garen's shoulder. "You're different. Your talent is much better. You'll definitely receive a huge improvement if I hand the White Cloud Gate's Secret Martial Art to you. This is the true foundation of our White Cloud Gate."

"I will definitely not let you down!" Garen heavily nodded his head. However, he still felt that his senior sister had a weird personality. She always acted mysteriously and was difficult to locate. She would appear from time to time, but no one would not be able to find her when they wanted to look for her.

Fei Baiyun thought for a while and took out a white piece of paper from one of the interior pockets in his black overcoat. The paper was folded into a small square. He carefully handed the squarish paper to Garen.

"Since your Explosive Fist Arts has already reached the level of minor achievement, you've also fulfilled the basic requirement of practicing the Secret Martial Art. This is the chant. Once you've memorized it, swallow the paper. This is the true key to the Mammoth Secret Technique and must not be divulged to others."

Receiving the piece of paper, Garen did not expect his master to give something so important to him on a train.

"Practice it on a train? Should I really do that?" He found it slightly unbelievable. "Shouldn't I find a safe and quiet environment?"

"There's no reason why you shouldn't." Fei Baiyun chuckled. "Various requirements are needed in order for this to work. This piece of paper was specifically soaked in medication. If other people were to practice the chant written on it, they would only become handicapped. Without a sufficiently strong Explosive Fist Arts as the foundation, it's all pointless."

Immediately after, he bitterly laughed again.

"Actually, our martial art is nothing profound in the eyes of other sects. A lot of the larger sects probably have something similar, and the effects would only be much stronger. Only we would act so carefully and think that it is important."

Garen nodded and was slightly able to understand his master's helplessness and sadness.

He looked toward the young people in front and found that they were still sleeping. That was when he softly opened up the paper in his hands.

There was only a line of words written on the white piece of paper. It was a revision of the utilization method of the second level of Explosive Fist Arts, the Vibration technique. After the revision and combined with White Cloud Secret Arts, a fundamental change would appear in the body. That was the so-called essence of the Mammoth Secret Technique.

"It's that simple?" Garen blankly stared at the line of words. He was wondering how difficult and complicated secret it would be.

"It's that simple," Fei Baiyun replied. "Eat it."

Garen was speechless. He looked at the paper once more, then crumbled it into a ball and directly threw it into his mouth.

The ball of paper had a salty and astringent taste and was slightly bitter as well. After chewing it a few times, he swallowed it along with his saliva. Garen smacked his lips.

Just when he was about to speak, Garen suddenly discovered the Skill Pane at the bottom of his field of vision had suddenly changed.

White Cloud Secret Arts and Explosive Fist Arts were gradually blurring. The two skills immediately disappeared, and a new skill gradually appeared. There was a mysterious symbol behind that provided an explanation.

——Mammoth Secret Technique—— Greatly increases the toughness of skin and greatly increases explosive force. It is a strength type Secret Martial Art that emulates mammoths. There are two levels in total: White Elephant, Mammoth.

Currently, the state indicated behind the skill was White Elephant level.

"There's only two levels?" Garen was startled. "As the true secret technique of White Cloud Gate, there shouldn't only be two levels..."

"Your feelings are correct; there are only two levels. This is the true inheritance of White Cloud Gate. To put it bluntly, there's a lot of things that are only simple secrets. However, these secrets needed countless trials and errors to finally obtain the best result and combination," Fei Baiyun sighed and softly explained, "actually, Explosive Fist Arts does not have a so-called third level. The third level is actually the first level of Mammoth Secret Technique."

He patted Garen's shoulder. "Properly familiarize yourself with it. This time, go and take a look at other Martial Adept's. Look at their levels and their strengths, and you'll realize your current level. Don't be disappointed when you fail. As long as you don't give up, there's a chance for you to make a comeback!"

Garen solemnly nodded as well. If even Fei Baiyun—who was far stronger than him—was saying such a thing, then it was quite evident that there would definitely be many powerful opponents at this exchange gathering. Even Garen was starting to get worried as well.

"For Master to exhort in such a serious manner, the opponents are evidently not just ordinarily powerful. I definitely need to be careful."

Setting aside his distracting thoughts, Garen looked out of the train's window on his right.

Empty yellow paddy fields continuously flitted across his field of vision. The harvested paddy fields were filled with numerous tiny black dots as if countless wooden sticks were inserted into the paddy fields. Within the center of the open fields, there were bundles of straws stacked into piles. Once in awhile, farmers could also be seen transporting these piles of straws.

The grayish white sky had some dark clouds, and it seemed like it was about to rain. Two swallows flew across the sky as one chased after the other.

Garen felt his emotion was gradually calming down and once again looked toward his Skill Pane.

"I still have three Attribute points. Let's see if I can forcefully increase this martial art."

His line of sight landed on Mammoth Secret Technique.

Three seconds later, Mammoth Secret Technique slowly changed. It suddenly changed from White Elephant to Mammoth.

"It increased!" Garen's heart skipped a beat, and he carefully observed the changes in his body. Strangely, he did not feel anything from his body.

"It definitely increased! Why isn't there any changes?" He looked at his Potential Pane, and his Attribute points had indeed decreased by two.

"Could it be that it can still be increased?"

He looked at the Mammoth Secret Technique and noticed that it did not turn into a gray color, which meant that it could still increase. There was a symbol floating behind it as well, indicating that five Attribute points were needed to forcefully increase it.

Mammoth Secret Technique was actually just a crucial key that combined White Cloud Secret Arts and Explosive Fist Arts together. It was actually an overall harmonious adjustment to the body. This type of

adjustment was very strange, and even Garen was not able to understand the theory behind it. However, it was evident that this adjustment had not reached its limit.

With doubts in his mind, he looked toward Fei Baiyun sitting beside him.

"Master, does this martial art really have only two levels? What's next after these two levels? Is there a possibility of continuing to improve?"

"I don't know." Fei Baiyun shook his head. "However, reaching the master level of the Mammoth level is already very troublesome. The glorious period of Martial Adepts is before the age of twenty-five. After we reach twenty-five years old, our body's functions, spirit, and vitality all start to weaken, and we're unable to advance to the next level. Putting aside what's after Mammoth level, no one in the older generations of our White Cloud Gate was unable to reach major achievement before the age of twenty-five. So..."

"So, there's a chance to reach higher levels by reaching master level before our spirit and vitality begin to deteriorate?" Garen thought of something and continued.

"That's correct. The improvement of Mammoth Secret Technique is very difficult, only your senior sister has a chance. Four years ago, she was at the White Elephant level. Now, she has already reached the Mammoth level and is only twenty-four years old. She's our White Cloud Gate's greatest hope..." when Fei Baiyun mentioned Senior Sister Rosetta, a smile subconsciously appeared on his face.

## Chapter 77: Probe 1

Garen's heart skipped a beat. If his senior sister was only at the master level of Secret Martial Art, would it mean that he was comparable with his senior sister right now?

"However, why aren't there any changes to my body after combining them? In any case, I spent two Attribute points! There should at least be ripples even if I threw it into the water..."

This was what he was most confused about.

At that moment, the girl sitting across him opened her eyes and slowly woke up. She sleepily looked toward the master and disciple sitting across her and friendlily smiled toward them.

Garen smiled back at her.

"Are you going to Hela City as well?" the girl whispered.

"That's right, are you heading there as well?" Garen replied.

"That's right, why are you going there?" The girl brushed away her hair that was covering the side of her face. "With your age, are you going there to enroll?"

"Uh." Garen did not know how to respond. Could he just tell her that he was going to participate in a martial arts exchange gathering? It was actually forbidden to divulge the martial arts exchange gathering to outsiders since it was confidential.

Seeing that he did not reply, the girl smiled and assumed that her guess was right. From the looks of it, she probably assumed that Garen was a new student being sent to school for enrollment by his father.

"What about you? Are you going to Hela for a vacation?" Garen asked as his gaze slightly sized up the girl.

With long silvery hair coming down from her shoulders, the girl wore a white lace dress and gave off the aura of a magnanimous and refined lady. Her skin was fair and tender like it was coated with a layer of white powder. It was fine and smooth to the point where there were almost no imperfections.

The girl was like a young lady who went for an outing and gave off a very cultured and pure feeling. Even though she was not very pretty, this sort of quiet and graceful aura was abnormally rare.

Garen was reminded of Felicity who had just left Huaishan a while ago. She was different from the girl in front of him. If you judged her from her appearance, you would think that she was a haughty, dazzling, and beautiful young lady.

However, he was slightly baffled by the fact that the girl in front of him had coarse hands, which was completely inconsistent with her aura and the way she dressed.

"We're not going for a vacation. We're also going to enroll at the school. However, we're going there earlier to learn more about the local culture," the silver-haired girl smiled as she replied Garen's question.

Garen nodded in acknowledgment.

"Where did you set off from?"

"We started from Xining. Before you got on the train, we've been riding for over a day and a night." The girl covered her mouth and lightly yawned. "Oh... I am so tired. Even though I've been sleeping for so long, I still feel very tired."

"If you've only been sitting like this, then it would definitely be tiring." When Garen saw her yawning, he felt a little sleepy as well.

As the two of them had no other common topics to talk about, Garen turned his face over to look at the scenery outside of the window. A yellow beetle car was driving alongside the train at the same pace. The driver of the car was a man wearing an army uniform with aviator goggles on. He was glancing toward the train from time to time.

"That's the navy uniform of the Confederation. From the badge on his chest, this man should be a lieutenant in the Navy."

"Navy of the Confederation?" It was the first time Garen saw a regular military personnel of the Confederation, and he could not help but glance a few more times.

The train gradually surpassed the soldier's car, and Garen was feeling slightly tired just from watching the scenery as well. He looked beside him at his master and discovered that Fei Baiyun was sleeping soundly with his head tilted to the side.

Garen drowsily dozed off and slowly woke up after an undetermined amount of time.

The sky outside of the window had already turned dark, and the interior of the train carriage was slightly noisy. In the middle of the aisle, an attendant was slowly passing by while pushing a food cart.

"It's time to eat!"

Within the train carriage, there was a sparse amount of passengers. Some of them were yawning, while some stood up to buy food, and there were others that took out their own food to eat. Garen even heard children's voice yelling in a dialect that he did not understand.

The silver-haired boy sitting across of him had already woken, but he was not as friendly as the girl. He only faintly glanced at Garen and his master and did not converse with them.

His master, Fei Baiyun, was taking out a small sack that contained some cakes, bread, and two bottles of tea.

"This is dinner. Take it yourself."

Garen speechlessly looked at the cakes and bread that was crumpled together and almost could not differentiate between the two. He was completely without any appetite as he looked at it.

"Master... There's no reason for this... It's not like we don't have money..."

"What do you know!" Fei Baiyun glared at him. "This is something that someone had kindly made for me! It's not about the money!" as he spoke, he seemed to remember something, and a slight redness faintly appeared on his face.

Garen had a slight urge to puke... Looking at an old man foolishly smiling while blushing was indeed a little disgusting.

However, he still took a lump of cake that looked like bread and a bottle of black tea and placed them on his lap.

"Master's second spring..." He already knew who made the food. It was obviously master's lover.

He lowered his head and looked at the thing in his hand. Garen was still hungry a while ago but no longer had any appetite.

The silver-haired siblings sitting across of them were currently eating exquisite-looking buttery apple cakes while drinking coffee from a porcelain cup. The redwood lunchbox contained all kinds of pastries that were neatly arranged. There were red cherries, baked banana chips, pink cream, light yellow sponge cake, and a few pieces of vegetables as decoration.

Just based on the appearance, it was far superior to the thing in his hand.

As Garen looked at the lump in his hand once more, his appetite dwindled even more.

Fei Baiyun, the owner of a gigantic dojo that earned tens of millions per year, was currently eating such a wretched meal on the train.

Garen could not help but disdainfully look toward his master sitting beside him. He was stunned when he realized that his master had already finished the thing in his hands within a few bites and seemed to be choking as he guzzled the bottle of black tea.

As Garen looked at the soft and mud-like thing in his hand once more, he firmly decided not to eat it. He lifted up the bottle of black tea and drank a mouthful. Fortunately, the black tea was sweet since sugar was added and his hunger was satiated after drinking it. The only problem was that he had no idea how long that would last.

The sibling sitting across of them saw the scene and could not help but smile. Even the silver-haired boy was unable to continue pretending to be cold.

"If you don't mind, there's still some pastries in my lunchbox. Please try some," the silver-haired girl softly said to Garen.

"How could I do that." Garen was originally planning to sneak out and buy food with his own money, but he was immediately tempted when the girl pushed the lunchbox over and smelled the rich buttery aroma drifting out.

They only ate half of the contents of the lunchbox, while the other half of the exquisite pastries were left untouched. The exterior of the pastries was attentively wrapped with a layer of plastic paper, so he could directly pick them up with his hands and eat. It looked clean and hygienic.

"It's okay, as long as you don't mind. I can tell that you forgot to prepare your own food," the girl gently smiled and said.

Garen sneaked a glance at his master.

"Since it's the kind intention of others, just eat it!" Fei Baiyun speechlessly slapped Garen on the head. When he looked at the exquisite pastries within the lunchbox and compared it with what he ate just now, he was feeling slightly imbalance in his mind.

"Thank you so much."

Garen gave a hollow laugh and received the lunchbox. He lightly lifted up an almond cake and took a bite. It tasted very aromatic and had a very fluffy texture. There was also a trace of almond flavor mixed inside.

The pastries within the lunchbox that were as big as his fist were eaten by Garen within a few bites and were quickly finished. He was originally prepared to hand one over to his master, but Fei Baiyun was obviously embarrassed about eating something from a younger generation and benefited Garen.

He managed to finish all of the pastries in the lunchbox within ten minutes. The siblings sitting across him were dumbfounded as they watched him.

"It's much more delicious than what they sell on the train. Thank you very much." Garen placed the lunchbox on the small rectangular table between the seats and gently pushed it back. "Sorry, I couldn't stop after I started eating..."

He was already very hungry, and the pastries inside the lunchbox were indeed very delicious. It was the first time Garen had tasted pastries that were this delicious, and they were much better than the ones sold outside.

"Is it really that delicious?" A smile appeared on the girl's face.

"They're very delicious." Garen nodded. "They're so much better than the ones being sold outside. Could you tell me where you got them? I'll definitely patronize the store next time!"

"It's good that you like it..." The girl was obviously very happy as she lowered her head in embarrassment and said, "I didn't buy them. I made them myself..."

The silver-haired boy sitting next to her was pouting as he muttered, "What's so delicious about it, is there a need to exaggerate so much? Really... "

"You actually made them yourself?" Garen was slightly surprised. "How remarkable. With this kind of skill, you can open your own store."

"You're kidding!" The girl was slightly embarrassed after being praised.

The boy sitting next to her immediately rolled his eyes. "You think that it's delicious when it's only at this level? What a country bumpkin..." He was in a bad mood as he looked at the muscular and tall young man sitting across of him. Even though there was not much of a difference in their age, there was a sharp contrast when they sat together as the other party was at least twice as muscular as him. Also, the moment he got on the train, he was looking around like he had never been on a train before. When he was eating just now, he was eating so fast that it seemed like he had never eaten anything for over ten years.

On the other hand, Garen and the girl were vigorously chatting. The two of them had already changed topics from pastry tips to the books they liked and their topics were endless. Next to them, Fei Baiyun and the silver-haired boy were bored and began to doze off once more.

With nothing to do on the train, they could only take a nap.

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Two days later.

Hela City Train Station

As a screeching whistle rang out, the mahogany train gradually came to a stop.

With a loud bang, a conductor vigorously pulled open the door of the train carriage. "Passengers bound for Hela City, it's time to get off!"

Within the train carriage.

"It's time to get off." Fei Baiyun patted Garen on the arm and was the first to stand.

Garen quickly pulled out a red leather suitcase from underneath their seats and stood up.

"We're finally here. Are you getting off as well?" he asked the silver-haired girl. The both of them had become quite familiar after chatting a few days.

The sibling sitting across them had brought out a small, black leather suitcase as well.

"That's right. Actually, we went to Xining for a vacation, and we're going back home now." The silver-haired girl embarrassedly smiled.

"I already knew it." Garen laughed and said, "While we were chatting the past two days, you were obviously more familiar with Hela and knew little about Xining. Alright, let's get off."

"Alright."

The four of them left their seats and followed the sparse stream of passengers toward the exit.

## Chapter 78: Probe 2

There were already several cars waiting near the train station. The silver haired girl walked to a silver sedan and turned to look at Garen and Fei Baiyun and their huge luggage. She hesitated.

"Their luggage looks really heavy, so they must be new to this place. Should we give them a ride?"

The silver haired boy opened the car's door and curled his lips. "Up to you, but be honest with me, you seemed to get along with those two guys from the small town. Do you have a crush on that lubber?"

"Don't say that." The girl bluntly twisted the boy's ear. "So what if they're from a small place? They seem to be quite well mannered to me. And what crush are you talking about? Are you trying to embarrass your sister over some casual talk?"

"They don't look like students checking-in to me. They were hiding something from the way they talked, so they're probably just some countryside hillbillies here for work. These days a lot of people from the countryside come to the cities to do hard labor." The silver haired boy frowned as he lightly pushed away his sister's hand. "What's so interesting about talking to some guys from the countryside? You're just flattered by their compliments."

The girl thought so as well, especially since the two men were powerfully built and had rough hands. They had to have done a lot of farming work. But she was intentionally leaving out the topic about their family and occupation. And it was obvious that they were trying to avoid talking about it as well.

"So what if they're farmers? What would you eat and drink without them?" She pinched her brother hard again. She then turned to the two strangers. "Where are you headed? Do you need a ride? I'm a local at Hela, and I could introduce you to our town."

Garen and his master Fei Baiyun were both flattered. It was nice for the girl to offer, but they already had other plans.

Fei Baiyun blinked at Garen, telling him to deal with his own trouble. He hadn't interfered with Garen's and the girl's small talk on the train. He could see she was well educated, although he didn't expect for this to happen.

Garen was dragged out by his master and looked reluctant.

"Actually, it's fine, someone is coming to pick us up. But still, thank you very much for your offer."

The girl did not expect they would reject her, she nodded back. "Fine then, you guys take care. Goodbye."

"Farewell! Maybe we'll see each other on a train again next time."

"Yeah, we might." The girl laughed and winking turned around and got back to the car.

"What happened? You got rejected?" The silver haired boy gloated.

"How do you know?"

"I'm telling you, people like him have big egos. He won't accept help from a girl, especially a girl that he likes," the boy answered with confidence, sitting in the driver's seat. "Did he say he has made plans and someone is picking him up? Guys who want to save face all do that. Even if he doesn't have a ride, he wouldn't want to disappoint his beauty."

The girl speechlessly glanced at her brother and got into the car. "Yeah, yeah, you are the all-knowing saint, all right? Most intelligent man on earth. And, I'm not a 'beauty', don't try to give me a tall hat. Now drive, we should get home and rest. I'm really tired after riding the train for so long." She laid back in the passenger seat, her expression revealing her exhaustion.

The silver car slowly drove out of the train station, turned at the exit, and merged into the traffic outside.

Garen turned his gaze from the silver car and looked at his master.

"What do we do now, Master?"

"We wait," Fei Baiyun said casually. "The folks from the Celestial Circle Gate are coming to pick us up, so bring out your vigor and don't let our White Cloud Gate down. Even if we are a small sect, we're still the strongest in Huaishan City. If we lose our cool, Huaishan Secret Martial Arts get disrespected as well."

He looked at Garen. "You're not only representing yourself now, but also thousands of disciples at the White Cloud Gate and the entire Secret Martial Arts community at Huaishan. Your senior brothers and sisters have already graduated, so technically, you are the eldest senior brother at the White Cloud Gate. Don't lose our White Cloud Gate's prestige."

"Yes, Master!" Garen answered sincerely. He vaguely understood his main goal on this trip.

Fei Baiyun was treating him as the White Cloud Gate's next successor. He was treating him like a true heir to his mantle.

Garen adjusted his body form and lifted his spirit. He waited at the station with his master.

There were less and less passengers getting on and off at the isle. Soon, three young men came out of the entrance. They had great body forms and wore different clothing. The one who walked in the front had a hard-edged aura around him. He had blond hair and blue eyes, his expression cold.

The blond man approached at a fast pace and stopped in front of Fei Baiyun. The three of them bowed down and saluted.

"Is it master Fei Baiyun from Huaishan's White Cloud Gate?"

"Yes, I am Fei Baiyun, and you must be Jaden. Last time I visited you were still an apprentice to your senior brother. But after all these years, you now take charge of things on your own," Fei Baiyun smiled and answered politely.

"You are exaggerating, sir, I wouldn't say I'm 'in charge'. This way please, the driver is waiting for us at the exit," Jaden answered respectfully, lowering his head.

"Very well, lead the way." Fei Baiyun nodded, following Jaden and the other young men.

Garen strolled along behind his master. A handsome young man behind Jaden took a step back to walk in parallel with him.

"Senior brother, your luggage looks heavy, let me help you carry it," he whispered and reached out with his hand, clawing toward Garen's wrist.

His movement looked like he was trying to help. But in reality, his fingers were held together and fast like a thrusting sword, stabbing toward Garen's wrist silently.

Garen's heart skipped a beat. He knew this was the Celestial Circle Gate trying to probe his strength. Master must have noticed, but did not turn around. He knew this would happen.

The opponent was too fast, there was no time to react.

With a faint sound of impact, the young man's finger hit Garen's wrist. Both of them froze.

"So weak." Garen watched speechlessly as the young man blushed. "Is this for real? A mosquito's sting could be stronger than this."

The young man's face was completely red. He raised his head and gazed at Garen with astonishment.

Both of them were speechless.

Garen had no words. What should he say, "Wow I've heard so much about you, your finger strength is truly unmatched!"? He planned to say this before, but now if he said this, they would think he was sarcastically mocking them.

"So- sorry." The young man's face turned white and red. He walked up to Jaden and his shoulders began to shudder. He was crying.

Garen was out of words again. "I was the one that got hit ... Why are you crying?"

Fei Baiyun turned around and gave Garen a scolding stare. Garen looked back with an innocent expression.

"It's none of my business, Master... I didn't even hit him back. Is standing still and taking the hit a bad thing to do now?" Of course he couldn't say it out loud, but he was puzzled in his mind.

"Isn't this the Celestial Circle Gate disciple too fragile? ..." He looked at the young man again, suddenly seeing his long and slim legs together. There was no gap between them at all, and he had an amazing S curve around his butt and waist.

He looked again at the youngster's neck. The skin was white and smooth, and there was no Adam's apple.

"So he's a girl..." Garen realized. "Now I'm in trouble."

Sure enough, Jaden turned around and looked at him. There was fire in his eyes.

Garen straightened his face and back. He narrowed his eyes and stared back at Jaden, trying his best not to show any sign of weakness.

The group soon exited the station, and there were three cars parked to the right of the exit. They looked luxurious, and there were even decorative silver linings on them.

"Master Fei, would you please ride in the first vehicle. I will accompany your esteemed disciple in the second." Jaden respectfully opened the door for Fei Baiyun.

After settling down master Fei, he came back to Garen.

"Please."

"Thank you." Garen nodded, ready to get into the car.

"Your luggage is a little too big. It's not easy to fit in there, so why don't you let me help." As Jaden's voice came, his right hand turned into a white shadow, jabbing toward Garen's wrist.

This move was a lot faster than the girl's earlier, and it felt powerful too. His fingernails were emitting a sharp, knife-like aura.

Jaden's eyes turned cold. His fingers split up, the white shadow turning into five, and simultaneously grabbed toward Garen's wrist. There was no chance to dodge, Jaden's hand was like five steel knives slicing down.

Garen's face turned cold. His wrist suddenly swelled, and his skin and muscles instantly turned blue and dark. He was ready to take the hit without dodging.

Bang!

After a thud, Jaden felt pain in his fingers. But he acted like nothing had happened and took his hand back. He sneered and sat in the front passenger seat.

Garen looked down at his wrist. It had five distinct white marks. He felt a stingy pain as the attack had almost scratched his skin.

"Worthy of the the Celestial Circle Gate's name, this should be fun." Even though he did no use the secret arts to strengthen his body, his resilience at a normal state was extremely strong already.

Right now, the two were just trying each other out, and the first round was even.

"Looks like I have to keep working hard, a disciple from the Celestial Circle Gate is this strong. If I faced someone stronger from other places..." Garen thought as he entered the car with his luggage.

"Drive," Jaden whispered to the driver.

The luxurious silver lined black cars slowly accelerated. There were even two police cars in front of them, whom the traffic avoided dodging in both directions.

Three cars formed a line and drove steadily forward.

## Chapter 79: The Exchange 1

Sitting in the car, Garen glanced at the driver and Jaden sitting in front. Both were silent. It didn't seem like they intended to speak.

He turned to look out the car window. The buildings in Hela City were similar to those in Huaishan City, but taller. Some were even tens of meters tall, straight and boxlike, like huge pieces of stacking blocks. The shadows they cast were massive and black.

The motorcade seemed to drive from under the shadow of a building immediately into another. Garen could vaguely make out that there were external lifts on the sides of some of the tall buildings. They were those old-fashioned ones made of wood and metal with an extremely slow speed.

Pedestrians on the streets were fashionably dressed. Some girls and rich ladies even wore slightly revealing clothing, displaying their slim figures.

The motorcade kept going forward. Time passed. The buildings on both sides became less dense and older. The scene outside gradually resembled Huaishan City, and the pedestrians seemed to dress more modestly as well.

This was the first time Garen left Huaishan. Previously, he had thought it was one of the more modern places of this era. He didn't expect Hela City to be so much more developed than it.

The car slowed as it drove into this area. Soon it turned a corner into an underground carpark within a housing area.

The car gradually slowed to a halt, and the engine was cut off.

"We're here. Please step out," Jaden said in a low voice.

Garen nodded, pulled the handle and stepped out. He scanned the whole underground carpark—it was filled with silver-striped cars. There were a few still driving in, yet to park, and some with car doors open and the passengers standing around the cars taking in their surroundings.

The sound of car doors closing echoed around the carpark. His master Fei Baiyun stepped out accompanied by two Celestial Circle Gate disciples. Garen quickly walked over to follow behind his master.

"This way please." Jaden bowed respectfully, then walked toward the elevators in a far corner of the carpark.

A few Celestial Circle Gate disciples trailed behind, leading Garen and his master.

"What a grand display by the Celestial Circle Gate. They escorted us with police cars and sent so many disciples to receive the practitioners of Secret Martial Art from all sects," Garen said.

"This is normal. The Gate Master of the Celestial Circle Gate has several disciples who serve as senior officials in this province and a few other neighboring ones. He has a lot of soft power," Fei Baiyun explained softly. "You'll be directed to the student area later. Take care, don't get into trouble."

"Yes, Master." Garen nodded.

They followed Jayden into the elevator.

The inner walls of the elevator were made of mahogany. It was spacious inside. The floor was covered with a square black rug with "The Celestial Circle Gate" printed in calligraphy on it.

The few of them were silent inside the elevator. The movement of the elevator could barely be felt.

Ding...

The elevator announced its stop, and the doors slowly opened. Beyond the doors was a black corridor with stone floor and walls. Every few steps along the corridor, a disciple in a sharp black suit stood in attention, lending a sense of formality to the atmosphere.

The corridor was linked to others at both ends. From time to time, there would be people in all manner of dress passing through the corridor, escorted by the Celestial Circle Gate disciples. All of them went toward the left.

Jayden led Fai Baiyun and Garen into the corridor, then turned left into a wider one.

Garen walked along the passage. He could feel the cold hard stone surface beneath his feet. There was a faint scent of incense in the air.

He had a vague sense of excitement. It was his first time being at a grand event like this. Putting aside all else, just by looking at the two rows of disciples in black suits standing in attention—sharp and alert, with fingertips like sharp spikes, emitting a faint white glow—one could tell that they were not mediocre.

His master in front started greeting peers upon turning the corner. It seemed like he had met some close acquaintances. Fei Baiyun put his arm over the shoulder of a short and stout man and walked with him. They greeted each other affectionately.

Garen lowered his head and looked solemn.

He walked into a small hall with a circular fountain.

"Senior Brother, please follow me," a Celestial Circle female disciple walked over to Garen and politely said. She led him away from Fei Baiyun and the rest, toward a corridor on the right. Several disciples from other sects, like Garen, were led toward the same direction.

They followed the female disciple to the end of the corridor and entered a spacious square black hall which was filled with large mahogany round tables and chairs. A lot of people were already seated inside.

By a wall in the hall, a few clowns in colorful clothing were performing an act, attracting bursts of laughter from the crowd.

No one noticed as Garen walked in. The female disciple handed him a sign with 'The White Cloud Gate' written on it and left.

He found an inconspicuous corner to sit down and stuck the sign into the placeholder on the table. Full-length windows spanned one side of the hall. Even though Garen sat in an inconspicuous corner, but it was right by the full-length windows. He could look out down below.

He turned his gaze there. He saw the middle floor of the grey building opposite. There were three more floors below that. That meant that he was on the fourth floor. He could vaguely make out the Celestial Circle Gate disciples escorting people and constantly walking around in the building opposite. They entered another large hall.

"What a grand event..." Garen couldn't even begin to speculate how many similar large halls there were, but it was clear that this wasn't the only one.

Not long after he sat down, a muffled commotion seemed to come from the corridor's entrance.

"Beo is here..."

"It's Beo!"

"Such a big reputation. I'd like to see how great this so called 'one of the two stars of the South' is," a bald man sitting at a round table toward the front right of Garen sneered.

"One of the two stars of the South?" Garen looked up toward the entrance.

After a few seconds, a blue-haired youth wearing casual dark blue clothes walked in. He looked indifferent. His eyes, brows and hair were all blue, even his skin had a blue tinge to it, which gave him an ice-cold impression. The youth scanned the hall and walked straight toward the front-most table on the right. A group of people in white automatically stood up and gave him their place. They moved to an empty table at the back and sat down.

"Thank you," Beo calmly said, then sat down.

"I can't believe..." a middle-aged man said woefully. He was sitting with a woman of similar age to Garen's right.

Garen looked at the sign on their table. It read "Orthogon Sword".

The man who sighed had black hair, black eyes, white skin and a tall nose. He seemed to be of a mixed race.

Garen hesitated slightly, then poked his head over and asked, "Sir, who is this Beo? Why is he blue from top to toe? And they call him 'one of the two stars of the South'? Do you mind enlightening me?"

The middle-aged man was stunned for a moment, then a smile broke across his face. He glanced at Garen's sign on the table.

"I see you're from the White Cloud Gate. Our Orthogon Sword Gate is right by your dojo, we've heard of your sect. I'm Raydon. It's an honor."

Garen was stunned. He saw a room full of foreign people with all types of hair and skin colors speaking in a Chinese-martial-art-world tone. Even though they were speaking different languages, it still felt bizarre.

"I'm Garen, brother Raydon. Can you tell me more about the Secret Martial Art scene in the South?"

"Of course." The man looked like a talkative person. He came over and started explaining in detail about the whole Secret Martial Art situation in the South.

"Looks like you're a new disciple. I'll explain it to you in detail. The strongest sects in the Secret Martial Art world in the South are the Celestial Circle Gate and Crimson Sand Sword. I don't have to say much about the Celestial Circle Gate. They train in the Celestial Circle Fist. Their fingers are extremely powerful. You will see it in the next few days. Crimson Sand Sword is another large sect. They occupy two provinces in the South, but are slightly weaker than the Celestial Circle Gate. This Beo is currently the most outstanding disciple in Crimson Sand Sword, comparable to Andrela of the Celestial Circle Gate. It is rumored that he has trained in the Secret Martial Art of his sect to a terrifying stage. His true strength has almost surpassed their masters and elders."

"Surpassed masters and elders? Is it possible? This Beo doesn't look a day older than twenty-five. His true strength is that powerful?" Garen was slightly surprised.

"You should know, in the Secret Martial Art world, strong youths have the physical advantage. Experts who are a generation older can only rely on their rich experience. In order to achieve a higher level, if they don't do it in their youth, by twenty-five or so, they wouldn't have a chance after that. But before then, it all comes down to talent and effort. Andrela of the Celestial Circle Gate and Beo of Crimson Sand Sword are the type of geniuses who are not lacking in both. Coupled with the best Secret Martial Arts, it wouldn't be difficult for them to become powerful," Raydon lamented. There was a hint of envy in his eyes. "The body weakens with age. No matter how you maintain it, your true strength would start declining. Such is the law of nature. There is no way of resisting."

"You have worked hard enough," the middle-aged woman comforted Raydon, gently holding his hand.

Garen seemed to be deep in thought.

"So Andrela and Beo are the two strongest people from the South?"

"That I'm not sure of, but it should be the case." Raydon nodded. "It is a widely recognized fact that Andrela is the top Secret Martial Art practitioner in the South. Beo lost to him in the previous tournament. But from the looks of it now, he seems to have had a breakthrough. It's apparent that he is prepared to compete for the top spot again."

"There's going to be a good show then!" Garen said excitedly. "I haven't witnessed the true strength of a real Secret Martial Art expert. This is the perfect chance."

"You look quite young. I'm sure you're very talented. No wonder your master brought you here to gain experience," Raydon said with a smile. "But you may have gotten the wrong idea. Before they fight, we from the smaller sects would have to duel first."

"We have to duel first?" Garen was confused for a moment, then instantly understood. "That's right. If the strongest duel first, who would still want to watch us fight?"

"It's great that you can understand that." Raydon smiled and didn't say more.

Garen then asked about some common knowledge in the Secret Martial Art world.

There weren't many people in the Secret Martial Art world, but every one of them was at a strong level envied by general martial art enthusiasts. Not to mention, there was much sway and power involved behind every sect. With so many of them gathered in one place, even though it was the era of firearms, the government still had to increase the scale of security to be able to provide a timely response if and when conflict arose.

## Chapter 80: Exchange 2

Of course, martial artists couldn't fight against strong firearms. But the forces behind them, the combination of martial arts enthusiasts, their communities and their influence was still a force to be reckoned with.

The police cars clearing the way was primarily to separate the martial adepts from normal people. After all, some of them were monsters unaffected by small firearms.

Garen got to know more about the Secret Martial Arts scene from Raydon.

The Secret Martial Arts scene was divided into the Northern and Southern sects. The Celestial Circle Gate and the Crimson Sand Sword led the Southern sects while the Gramdon Sword Sect led the North.

It was unclear to them what the situation in Northern side was, but the Southern scene was very chaotic. Small sects came and went every decade. Even some middle-sized sects fell from power. Only the unshakable Celestial Circle Gate and the Crimson Sand Sword thrived on throughout the years.

The biennial exchange held by Celestial Circle Gate was less of a communication event for all sects and more of a show of power between it and the Crimson Sand Sword.

Inside the main hall, an opera show started after the clown performance, and after that was a diva battle which made all the men start howling.

Two divas with hot bodies walked on the stage and started fighting. Whoever lost would strip off a piece of clothing. The blood of male audience sitting below started boiling.

However, the Celestial Circle Gate had full control of the situation. The two ladies left the stage in their underwear.

A band immediately followed the fight, and a couple waiters started serving the guests with an appetizing soup.

People watched the show while waiting for their friends and sect members to gather. As time went by, there were more and more people inside the hall. From ten to twenty people in the beginning to around sixty later on.

After dinner, Garen and Raydon followed the Celestial Circle Gate's disciples out of the hall, they crossed the corridor and a garden and arrived at their respective rooms to rest.

The next morning, they were led to a practice ground for some morning exercises and flexing their bodies. Garen then returned to the main hall with the Raydons, waiting for people from the White Cloud Gate to arrive.

Raydon's Orthogon Sword Gate already had a female disciple there.

Garen was still by himself.

On stage, the performance from yesterday repeated. After breakfast, Garen waited until noon. Finally he saw his fellow disciples from the White Cloud Gate come in after a few Celestial Circle Gate disciples.

"Senior Brother!"

"Senior Brother, how are you here so early?"

"Good morning, Senior Brother."

Four young people wearing white training uniforms came to Garen in a line and respectfully greeted him.

There were two guys and two girls, their ages ranging from fifteen to twenty.

"I've been waiting for the whole morning. You guys are so slow." Garen stood up and smiled. "All right, sit down and get some food. Tomorrow is the main tournament event. You all have to reach your best forms and don't lose face for us all."

"Yes!" four disciples replied uniformly as they sat down around Garen.

Scenes like this had happened for countless sects over the course of a few days. People around them did not care for it.

The five disciples watched some opera. The main hall was filling up as more people from other sects came in.

The group was very patient, a disciple from the Celestial Circle Gate had come earlier to hand them the event schedule.

Garen had already watched the show yesterday, so it was boring watching it again. The other four were not paying attention either, showing great anticipation for tomorrow's tournament.

"This is an opportunity for the disciples to show off their strength. They have also formed a tournament ranking among themselves."

Raydon was sitting close to Garen, the two sects had pulled their tables together. As time went by, they were getting closer.

"There is a ranking for normal disciples and one for the Secret Martial Arts disciples. Of course the latter is the more important one, but a sect's overall strength is estimated by the overall rankings."

"Does the overall ranking include the masters?" Garen asked in a whisper.

"Of course, but what's different from the disciples is that the strength of older Secret Martial Arts masters is relatively fixed. They can't improve too much in a short period of time. Normally these masters only compete once in a few years, which is why the younger disciples are the deciding factors of the rankings."

"If that's the case, shouldn't every sect send out their best disciples to compete?" Garen was puzzled

"Naturally, but this ranking is not fully representative of a sect's strength. Some disciples have graduated from their masters, and thus, cannot come to this tournament.

Which is why the major purpose of this ranking tournament is to find out who is the strongest among the young generation of disciples. Even if it's rather inaccurate in estimating a sect's overall strength," Raydon explained.

Garen then understood. Fei Baiyun's other three disciples had already graduated. Therefore, they did not meet the requirements of this tournament. Bringing Garen to this tournament was probably also intended to enrich his experience.

Afterall, this exchange was held once every two years, so he could try again if he didn't make it this time.

The White Cloud Gate was already one of the bottom small sects. It wasn't easy to drop even lower.

After thinking this through, Garen started chatting with Raydon. The middle-aged man introduced some famous sects and gates to him.

Usually at Raydon's own gate, nobody could bear his nagging. Now that there was someone willing to listen to his chatter, it lifted his spirits. Words shot out from his mouth non-stop.

Garen sat there with him the whole day and learned many things about the Secret Martial Arts world.

The next morning, Garen led the four disciples from the White Cloud Gate and followed someone from the Celestial Circle Gate. They did not go back to the main hall, but rather headed toward a platform along the corridor.

The platform was circular, located in an open patio on the ninth floor. Four highrise buildings surrounded it, blocking the scenery.

The stage looked like a giant white concrete button in the middle of a dark well, strangely eye-catching.

The area around it was spacious, over twenty sects all had their own sections. They circled around the platform, surrounding it.

Garen sat to the left of the platform, near the entrance, with the other four disciples behind him.

He glanced around. All he could see on the four sides of the platform were people's heads. Each sect had only five people, other than the servicing disciples from the Celestial Circle Gate. In total, there were over a hundred people. All of whom looked very young.

The oldest he could see were middle-aged men and women. They were around the age of Raydon, less than forty-years-old.

The Crimson Sand Sword and the Celestial Circle Gate stood on opposite sides of the platform. Beo was in all blue, standing across a one-eyed man on the other side. Unlike Beo, the man was smiling with a mild and polite temperament.

Garen carefully observed that man. He was the strongest man from the Celestial Circle Gate, Andreia. He didn't look too exceptional, far from Beo's dazzling and intrepid appearance, but Garen could tell that the man was extremely self-confident, as if he could calmly face anything in the world.

Not only Garen, any disciples who were ambitious had their eyes on these two.

The chaotic platform settled down thanks to the organization from the Celestial Circle Gate's disciples.

A skinny elderly man with a long beard jumped onto the platform holding a big brass bell.

"The ranking tournament officially starts now. We will begin with the lowest ranks from last time. Which sect would like to challenge first?" His voice was not loud, but everyone could hear him clearly.

Garen took out a piece of paper which listed the rankings of the twenty-seven sects.

White Cloud Gate was ranked seventeenth.

"I'll go first." A man in black clothing jumped onto the platform. He ripped off his clothes and threw them off the stage. "Encore Fist Sect, Laffer Draco. I challenge the Knife Fist Sect!"

Just then, a flat chested woman rushed onto the stage. "Nola, Knife Fist Sect!"

Without any more words of greeting, they started fighting. Hitting back and forth, their forms and techniques looked rigorous, but their hits were shallow and soft. The impact sounded weak. Obviously, they both lacked strength, and their martial arts were focused on technique rather than strength.

No more than ten seconds later, the man in black was pushed off the stage. The sect he came from sent another disciple up the stage, which also got pushed down quickly. There was clearly a huge skill gap.

Normally, a match would not last a long time. The slightest mistake could be the deciding factor between people of a similar level. If they were close in strength, the result would depend on their current state of mind.

Garen sat in the audience and watched casually. The starting matches were only show matches between disciples without Secret Martial Arts.

Match after match ended on the platform. Some disciples with conflicts also used this place to solve their problems.

Soon, the White Cloud Gate was challenged by the eighteenth ranked Fighting Association. The challenger was a hot blond girl with blue eyes. She had just defeated her challengers from the nineteenth ranked sect. She had beaten four opponents all by herself and was still able to challenge the seventeenth ranked White Cloud Gate.

"Let me!" Behind Garen, a sturdy young man stood up excited. "Senior brother, can I go?"

The young man was middle of the pack among the four disciples. His Explosive Fist Art was not rank one yet, but his skin was still stronger than that of normal people. He was also very strong for his age.

"Simon, you think you can handle her?" Without master Fei, everything was up to Garen to decide. This was also an opportunity for him to solve problems on his own.

Simon nodded. "I watched her matches. Although her legs are well trained, her overall strength is weak. I just have to find an opportunity and take control of her lower body."

"Fine then, don't disappoint our White Cloud Gate," Garen told him. The overall ranking didn't depend on this match, but mostly on the Martial Adept disciples. Yet if they lost too many matches, it would still have a negative impact on the ranking.

"Got it senior brother, don't worry." Simon smiled, and saluted his three other friends.

"Get lost, we all know you only wanted to fight because she's hot." A girl waved her hand speechlessly.

Simon laughed as he earnestly climbed onto the platform and walked in front of the blond girl.

Bang! Bang!

The opponent straight up gave him two side kicks, hitting Simon's arm, and made a loud thud.

Simon stood steadily, his face showed a complacent smile.

"You are too weak!"