

Mystical 91

Chapter 91: The Way Back 1

Quickly catching up to the carriage that had already pulled ahead, Garen jumped onto it.

The two black carriages rapidly ran in parallel on the winding road. The noise of rolling wheels and horse hooves hitting the cement road sounded especially crisp in the quiet surroundings as if these were the only two carriages around.

With a calm expression, Garen sat next to the driver.

"This exchange was plotted by our enemies and was a mission against the Southern Twelve Gates as a whole. Our opponent could instantly expose each Gate's internal weakness and combine this with attacks from the outside. They were able to assemble forces from so many different backgrounds..." Garen then thought about his fight against Sylphalan, "Why did it have to be last night? All combat forces have now been eliminated, so they must be planning to overthrow the Southern Twelve Gates ..."

He became even more cautious.

"With this situation, the hidden masterminds behind this mission will not let us slip away that easily. However, covered by the military forces, our allied gates are running in different directions and the enemy men would have to split up to chase us as well."

Garen closed his eyes, stopped thinking, and started meditating. In the end, all he could do right now was fight with whoever was in his way. The clowns from earlier were just an appetizer and the real trouble had yet to come.

Having mastered the White Cloud Gate's secret arts and transcended to a level no man had ever reached before, he knew his own strengths very well. As exaggerated and powerful as it sounded, even he was not sure of what he could do.

Garen could only compare himself to the competition he had met recently.

The only person who could rival him right now would be Celestial Star Gate's Tenstar Ni. Garen could feel a subtle, yet dangerous, aura from him.

As Garen traveled on the carriage, he organized his thoughts and prepared his body for the next storm.

The other disciples were feeling much more secure after Garen had returned. Carrie was in charge of caring for Fei Baiyun, who was still in a coma. She frequently wiped away sweat from his brow.

"Collin, do you know who our biggest rival is?" Garen suddenly asked.

"It would be the Fighting Association. Their president has held a long grudge against Master Fei for many years, so he won't let this opportunity slip by!" Collin seemed worried.

"Fighting Association..." Garen was not worried about the Fighting Association, but concerned about the powers behind them. After all, most of Fighting Association's forces had been wiped out and the rest would not pose a threat to him.

On the side of the road near the outer edge of the city, an old man with a silver beard and hair stood beside a window on the second floor of a small hotel as he waited for the approaching carriages.

"Looks like the Fighting Association couldn't stop these three gates, so we'll have to do it ourselves."

"It can't be helped." In the shadows behind him, a woman with a pale face answered in a low voice. "A small sect like the Fighting Association didn't have anyone strong to begin with. They were all second to third class fighters and barely able to make a name for themselves. What did you expect from them?"

While dressed in a black suit, the lady played with a small dagger in her hands. Her suit did not have a left sleeve and her exposed arm revealed a tattoo of a huge spotted python on her pale skin. The dagger twirled and cut through the air, making swoosh noises.

"Any word from the other squads?"

The old man nodded. "We just learned that of the ten squads that went on the mission, three of them were unsuccessful. One of them failed because Eastern Pole Gate's master woke up and struggled with his last bit of strength to fight off our men. In addition to that squad, the squads that faced off against White Cloud Gate and the Lucene Brotherhood also failed. The Lucene Brotherhood's master was seriously injured, but his second eldest son showed up. This young man had arms harder than steel and he was so fast that bullets couldn't hit him, so he must have mastered the secret techniques of the Wind of Lucene and the Lucene Steel Fists."

He paused to take a breath and continued, "White Cloud Gate's senior disciple Garen has mastered the gate's only secret technique, the Mammoth Secret Technique. His strength is on par with his master when his master was young."

"Are they both Grade E?"

"I'm sure." The old man nodded.

"Are we going to stop them ourselves?" The woman was starting to doubt herself.

"No need. We can wait and let others deplete their energy first. Only in times of hardship like this can one see the true strengths of a sect. Just look at the Lucene Brotherhood and now the White Cloud Gate. We should remain patient. What if some other strong force was to intervene? Then we'd be in real trouble." The old man sounded like he was speaking to the woman, but also talking to himself.

In the woods across from the road, it was completely quiet without the chirping of birds or insects. Behind some tall bushes and thick tree trunks, the faint sounds of breathing could be heard.

There were countless men hiding in this forest by the road.

This was the last stretch of road before reaching the city.

Sitting next to the driver, Garen raised his alertness while everyone in the carriages lowered their heads and hid behind the sides. Fortunately, the sides of these carriages were more than a meter tall and more than enough for them to hide behind.

Garen knew that they would be safe once they were inside the city. After all, those people did not dare to kill in public. This was the best place for them to strike.

"Protect yourselves with pistols and jump off immediately if the horse gets shot," Garen warned with a whisper.

"Don't worry senior brother, we can handle the minions!" Collin responded.

Garen shook his head silently. Two silver carriages were coming toward them and each had two or three passengers. The driver of the first carriage had a sharp gaze, was well built, and looked like a normal driver from his appearance, but Garen could sense danger from him.

The carriage behind them seemed to have a normal family. The father was handling the horse, his wife sat next to him, and two adorable young girls laughed and chatted while sitting in the cart behind them. Wearing white ballet dancing dresses and stockings, the girls looked around the age of 15 and must have just left a dancing class.

Garen frowned slightly. This distance...

The two carriages greeted each other. The driver in the first carriage glanced at Garen, but did not make a move and drove the carriage right past them.

Garen felt a sense of danger from the driver and thought they would attack. To his surprise, they did not do anything and just passed by. His body tensed up and was ready for any attacks.

As the first carriage drove past them, all Garen could hear was the sound of horse hooves hitting the road.

After a few seconds, the second carriage approached them. Knowing that the people from the first carriage were not enemies, Garen let out a relieved sigh.

Shoo!

He heard an abrupt, but soft noise. Opening his eyes, Garen slammed behind himself with a backhand.

Snap!

"Mmph."

The woman who had jumped at Garen from behind was hit by Garen's slam in mid-air. With a crackling noise, she fell like a broken stick of wood as her waist bent back at a 90-degree angle. Blood spilled everywhere as the woman landed on the road and fainted from the pain.

Sneering, Garen jumped off his carriage to chase after the carriage behind them.

The carriage wasn't traveling very fast and the driver was trying to accelerate, but Garen had already caught up and he struck the horse in the head.

Bang!

The horse fell right as he hit it and the carriage came to a stop. The carriage's other horse was startled, pulling at the carriage in a frenzy. Garen slapped the head of this horse, causing it to fall to the ground while frothing at the mouth.

The two remaining men looked malicious and both jumped at Garen with trench knives since they knew there was no way out. These two were extremely fast as they zig-zagged their way to Garen. One aimed at Garen's cheek and the other stabbed toward his waist.

The two trench knives were like slithering snakes as they punctured the air and stabbed toward Garen. The edges of the knives glowed blue, showing that they were obviously poisonous.

"If the knife cuts into your skin, you are dead!" The two men had the same thought, putting all their might into this attack. The poison they put on the blade was called spider venom No. 9. There was no cure for this venom and one drop of this mixed poison could kill a man in 10 minutes.

The knives were just about to hit Garen when he suddenly opened his mouth.

"Roar!" A thunderous roar came out of his lungs. This sudden roar startled the two attackers, slowing down their attacks.

"Double Shot Form!!"

Garen's arms instantly shot to his sides. A terrifying explosive force erupted as his arms inflated like two giant pythons before smashing into the two men's chests.

"Chh, Chh!"

With their chests penetrated like kebabs, the two men stood paralyzed. Garen twirled his arms and threw them onto the road.

After killing the assassins, Garen strode toward his carriage. As he passed the carriage of the family, the four family members were still stunned. The two yellow horses were horrified by Garen and recoiled, neighing out of terror.

"Ahhh!" The lady on the carriage screamed aloud, but her husband quickly covered her mouth. The two daughters were petrified when they saw Garen, crawling deeper into the carriage and closing their eyes.

Garen glanced at them, then walked past them with an unperturbed face.

He had to use more effort on these men than the people from before. These two men were much stronger, close to the level of Golden Hoop Number 10 that Garen had met before.

Garen's merciless, kill on sight method frightened the hidden enemies. The first ones to strike were always people who fought with their lives on the line, yet Garen dealt with them like trivial matters.

Chapter 92: The Way Back (2)

Jumping back into the carriage, Garen's expression turned serious.

"The minions wouldn't dare to challenge us now. If we run into more trouble, our opponents will be the ones that are hard to deal with, so you guys should be careful."

Collin and the group nodded behind him.

"What about Senior Brother Rampas?"

"I can't take care of them forever. Some matters they will just have to face by themselves. I'm not their nanny." Garen replied casually. He looked calm and peaceful. At times of emergency it was very important to be level-headed, but strike down at the opponents swiftly and mercilessly, acting like it was only a breeze. This was meant to frighten the hidden enemies.

If someone were to attack in a situation like this, then the opponent must be very strong! A lot stronger than the enemies from earlier.

The two carriages moved one after another and strolled closer to the city.

The woods on the sides of the road were becoming less and less dense; occasionally they could see small houses. More farmers and passersby could be seen on the sides of the road. Farmers carrying a basket filled with fruits were calling for buyers.

Not far from where the carriages were, they could already see the taller buildings inside the city.

"Almost there... As soon as we get into the city, we shouldn't face any more attacks! Now is the best time for them to strike!" Garen was feeling even more alert.

Suddenly, a red-haired woman came out of nowhere and blocked the way of the carriages.

She had an attractive face, and a silver rapier was hanging by her waist. She stood in the middle of the road without speaking a word. However, as she stood there, the horses were startled and started neighing out of terror, and the carriages subsequently stopped.

"She's an expert!" Garen thought, squinting his eyes.

"Where did all these strong enemies come from? I've never even seen them before!" Collin bit her lips as she complained, "I've done research on all the top martial adepts, but these people today are..."

Garen hopped off the carriage and walked to the front.

"You are here to cut us off too?" As he walked within ten steps of her, he could feel a sharp and cold aura pinching his face. His sight followed the aura and gazed upon the woman's rapier hanging on her belt; it was emitting a cold and fierce blue light.

The red-haired woman drew her rapier with a ruthless expression. Her movement was very strange, starting slow but gaining speed as she pulled. Finally, with a crisp sound the sword left the scabbard.

"Don't blame me, I owe someone a favor. Remember the name of your killer; I am Seacroft, it is your honor to die under my Weeping Sword."

"Seacroft? Weeping Sword?" Garen frowned his eyebrows. He could feel the opponent's strength was close to his, almost reaching his own level. The blood sphere in his chest was a symbol of reaching this level.

Anyone who was close to this level had mastered at least one secret technique; they were very hard to deal with.

A martial adept at this level had surpassed Fei Baiyun's levels, and thus a regular faction wouldn't have enough influence to ask for her favor. Garen closely observed the enemy; she was about thirty years old. Anyone who was over twenty-five had no chance of improving any further.

"If you..." Garen heard a sharp and loud screech and was unable to finish his sentence.

"WEAAW!!"

The screaming noise was strange and unsettling like the weeping of a baby. Seacroft's rapier flashed as she thrust it toward Garen's left chest. The unsettling noise was coming from the vibration of the weapon.

The rapier was extremely fast. Just as Garen heard the noise he saw a silver stripe coming toward him; in the blink of an eye it was already at his chest. Unlike prior times, the sword's cold and sharp aura pierced through his clothes, making his skin grow a small patch of goosebumps.

The strange noise had affected Garen's reaction, slowing it down and making him unable to block the attack. Garen kicked up some sand and rubble toward the opponent as he felt the pain on his chest.

Both of them backed off after the first contact, and similarly stood still and observed their opponent. Seacroft's face was scratched by some small rubbles, while Garen's shirt was pierced open and a small red dot could be seen through the big hole on his shirt.

Without any words, the two charged at each other once again.

The silver rapier turned into a silver snake, twirling and thrusting against Garen's fists.

The rapier hit Garen over and over again, leaving small red dents all over his body. However, it still couldn't pierce through Garen's skin. On the other hand, Garen's fists were easily dodged by Seacroft. The difference in their speed was too big.

The two continued to battle in circles, exchanging positions several times over a few seconds. The Weeping Sword frequently let out ghost-like screeches. Along with the irritating noise, every time the

sword screeched its speed and strength increased, and every time Garen would counter the attack by kicking up sand on Seacroft's face. As the battle went on, he was getting better at using his techniques in combat; he was a lot more experienced than before. He occasionally let out a war cry to awe his opponent, and Seacroft flinched and slowed down for a moment as Garen shouted, almost getting hit by his fists. She broke into a cold sweat.

Slowly, Garen became familiar with Seacroft's routines and used to the Weeping Sword's screeching noises. He was having a good flow while using the Four Big Forms in his combat; all his movements seemed natural, but with a hint of the Four Big Forms.

"Step Form!" Garen suddenly charged towards Seacroft. However, she dodged out the attack, and Garen moved past her, leaving his back open to his enemy.

"That's my chance!" Seacroft saw an opportunity and took it. She leaped forward with Weeping Sword vibrating and thrust it at Garen. Suddenly, she saw a backhand elbowing from Garen; the strike was fierce like an arrow, filled with explosiveness.

"Shit!"

Her expression changed. Because her body was still in the striking movement, it was too late to change directions. She did not expect Garen to combine his techniques together and set up a trap for her. Not that she hadn't been careful enough, but Garen's attacks had always been true and to her face, so she didn't think he would use a fake move to lure her in.

In the heat of the moment, Seacroft decided to use her secret technique and the ghastly screech turned into a scream. She pulled up the rapier and blocked with it in front of her body.

Garen was expressionless. He had immersed himself into this battle, and although he felt clumsy using the Four Big Forms before, now he was becoming more and more skilled. He could easily use the most fitting form during battle, maximizing its effectiveness and lethality. This was truly a wonderful feeling.

His right elbow clashed into Seacroft's rapier.

Pow!

Garen felt a pain in his waist. His elbow tilted and was only able to scratch the rapier by the tip, but the impact still sent Seacroft flying a few meters back. She stumbled with her face pale, barely standing still by supporting her body with the Weeping Sword.

Garen glanced at his waist, a long copper bullet was stuck inside his skin.

"There's a sniper!!" He suddenly realized. Then, he felt something moving between his eyebrows. Someone was aiming at his forehead, so he quickly slanted his head.

Boom!

Another loud gunshot, and a blazing bullet instantly flew past Garen's cheek.

Seacroft had caught her breath, and began another round of attacks with her sword.

Garen had to deal with her attacks while constantly watching out for the sniper's shots, so he couldn't use his full strength. However, his Four Big Forms were becoming more and more consistent and natural, and his moves followed one after the other marvelously.

"I have to finish this fight as soon as possible!" He knew he couldn't waste time on this. Had he been by himself, there wouldn't be much trouble, but he still had to take care of the younger disciples.

He used the Shot, Dash, Swing, and Step Form consecutively. It was his first time using Four Major Forms in just two seconds. He felt his Qi clogging inside his body, and his old belly injury started hurting once again.

Step Form lifted another wave of sand and rubbles onto Seacroft's face, forcing her to step back.

"Die!" Garen reached for his foe's throat with his hand. He was faster than ever before. He created an opportunity at the cost of deepening his injury. As long as he could finish her first, it would be easier to take care of the snipers later.

Peng!

Another bullet stroke hard onto Garen's neck, tilting his body and knocking him off balance. Garen's hand barely missed Seacroft's neck, leaving only two blood trails on her face.

"Damn it!" Garen was furious, both times he was about to finish her off, the sniper interrupted him.

He inhaled deeply, instantly inflating his lungs. The skin on his chest turned blue and dark under the ragged shirt.

A thunderous war cry.

Seacroft's ears went numb from the loud noise and she became paralyzed.

Garen took this opportunity and leaped onto her. Dodging out two bullets, he grabbed her head and smashed it against the ground.

Seacroft's head cracked open like a watermelon. The Weeping Sword dropped out of her hand and onto the ground. Garen picked up the sword, stood up in a backflip, and started sprinting toward the sniper's direction.

He could see him on the second floor of a red building; a bald man was packing up his sniper rifle and preparing his escape.

Garen leaped up to the second floor of the building. His hand pierced through the man's chest, and pulled the ribs and flesh inside. In a disturbing noise, the man's chest was torn open. He screamed like a pig.

"Boss! Help!!" He cried in terror.

Garen smacked the man's head with his palm. The screaming abruptly stopped and his body turned limp and lifeless.

Following the direction of the sniper's call for help, he saw another man standing at the corner of the room. He was also bald and had a sturdy body, while his eyes were red like Garen's. The man was breathing heavily. He was obviously part of the attack earlier since he also had a sniper rifle in his hand.

Garen's fury eased down after he killed the sniper. However, upon seeing another sniper in this room, he sneered and rushed toward him.

Shoo!

A stripe of silver light crossed in front of his body.

"Tenstar Ni!" In an indomitable rage, Garen shouted, "Don't push my limit!!"

A long and slim sword separated Garen from the bald sniper. Tenstar Ni stood on the side with a face of mockery, staring at Garen.

"I'm sorry, you can't touch this man either."

"You are courting death!!" Garen couldn't hold it anymore. His muscles swelled as he grew from 1.7 to over 2 meters. The clothes on his chest burst and flew in all directions. Garen was topless. His muscles turned dark and blue as his veins stood out on his skin like coiling black snakes. His body was even bigger than back on the tournament.

Tenstar Ni's expression changed.

Chapter 93: Tenstar Ni 1

A punch!

Garen's right arm darted forth like a slithering python, aimed at Tenstar Ni's head.

Murderous thoughts emerged in his mind.

After he had transmigrated to this alternate reality, he had been pretending to be a teenage boy with his adult conscious. He had been under the influence of depression. Training in martial arts gave him a chance to unwind. Every time his strength grew, so did his sense of security.

However, old man Gregor's death made him feel helpless and realize how weak he was. As soon as he achieved great improvements with the secret arts, he met Sylphalan and almost lost his life. This raised his sense of crisis once again.

He didn't plan to provoke the Celestial Circle Gate, but he didn't expect them to side with his enemies flagrantly. At this moment, Garen's depressive emotions erupted like a volcano.

The blood sphere inside his chest released countless hot streams that circulated throughout his body.

Bang!

His fist smashed into the wall, sinking deeply in it.

Tenstar Ni dodged aside with a serious expression. His sword swirled to make a silver light curtain, blocking possible attacks, and he jumped back with a backflip.

Bam!

Suddenly, a cloud of rubble and sand sputtered all over his face. Several rocks smashed into his nose, slicing open a few bloody wounds.

"Go!" Tenstar Ni closed his eyes in the dust. He raised his left hand and a strand of silver light flashed out from it.

Clang!

A short dagger bounced off Garen's chest, with no effect. Seeing that, Tenstar Ni pulled the dagger back into his hand by a thin thread tied to the hilt.

"Heh!"

Garen leaped forward. His right arm still had a fistful of gravel, so he hiked his hand to throw another wave of dust at his opponent. At the same time, his palm smashed toward Tenstar's chest with a Shot Form.

His dark blue hand stretched out with inhumanly sharp nails. As the hand moved, a sharp howling filled the air. This howling sounded singular, yet layered, resembling the howling from a mammoth.

Tenstar Ni's expression changed again. He raised his hand to block the dust and lifted the sword with his other hand. In this situation where he could not clearly see the attack, his sword flashed as he hacked at Garen's hand.

Thud!

The sword cut onto Garen's hand and made a thud noise, but it couldn't stop Garen's palm from advancing.

Tenstar Ni gritted his teeth, his face flashed with a blue aura, a clump of dark muscle emerged on the back of his sword hand, the clump was shaped like a cross shaped star¹.

Swoosh! The sword stabbed three times in an instant, and in the fraction of a second, turned ninety degrees and stood up, slashing directly at Garen's hand.

Zing!!

The hand and the sword came in contact. Surprisingly, the sword could not leave a single scratch on the dark blue palm, and thus was bent into a curve.

Garen's showed a ruthless expression as he slammed his feet against the ground!

The stomp blasted sand and debris into the air.

The sword broke into two pieces with a cracking sound, while Garen's hand pressed down the weapon pieces into Tenstar Ni's chest.

With a heavy thud, Tenstar Ni groaned and flipped over. After rolling for about ten steps he finally jumped back up.

Three bloody marks appeared on Garen's right palm; the skin and muscle around the marks were completely scraped off, vaguely revealing the bones underneath.

He clenched the hand and felt a sharp pain in the center of the palm. There wasn't much bleeding though, since the blood soon clogged, forming a protective layer around the wounds, preventing the flesh from getting in contact with the air.

"This isn't what the Mammoth Secret Technique looks like!" Tenstar Ni hatefully roared. His face flashed red as he spoke; it was a sign that he was seriously injured.

Tenstar Ni backed off quickly while taking out a small paper bag from his pockets and dumping all the medicinal containers inside his mouth.

As soon as he gulped down the medicine, he turned around and staggered away.

"Still trying to escape!"

Garen followed up closely using Dash Form. He stomped down on the ground with a Step Form, forming a small crater on the ground as his speed suddenly increased and he leaped forward at Tenstar Ni.

As soon as he started the chase, his eyes were blinded by a burst of flashing light as two daggers came flying to his face.

With the impressive speed from him dash forward and the daggers flying at him on the opposite direction, Garen had no chance to dodge. Adding up the speed of these daggers combined with his own, the lethality of the enemy's attack was at least doubled!

A sense of danger never experienced before took over him. The reflection of silver lights grew larger and larger in his pupils.

Garen could only close his eyes and try to lower his head. At this moment, a stream flowed up to his eyebrows from the blood sphere in his chest.

He didn't expect the injured opponent to hide his ultimate skill until now, turning the tables and putting Garen in great danger.

"Die!" He furiously threw the Weeping Sword forward.

The two daggers slashed onto Garen's eyebrows and immediately hit the bone on his forehead. They were only able to cut two blood marks on his eyebrows.

Tenstar Ni's face went pale when he turned around and saw his attacks were not effective.

He knew his strength wasn't enough. His full might was only able to cause a small injury to the enemy. He tried everything and still got badly injured, and all of the damage came from a single hit.

Combining his full strength and Garen's momentum from sprinting, he should have been able to put an end to this fight. However, he didn't expect that...

"How do I fight him..." He whined mutely, "I shouldn't have pissed this freak off in the first place! His Body-hardening Technique is ridiculous! I can't hurt him. All that trouble only scraped off some skin.

As he turned around he saw Garen throwing a silver sword at him, and along with it came a screeching noise. Tenstar Ni was scared to death. The cross-shaped muscle plumped up again as his right arm turned into a shadow, smacking behind him.

He blocked the Weeping Sword and sent it flying. The sword sunk deep into the wall beside him, leaving only the hilt to be seen.

However, the huge counterforce shook his body and slowed him down. Garen saw this opportunity and quickly leaped forward, grabbing Tenstar Ni's shoulder.

A grey powder sprinkled onto Garen's face in a puff; it was the medicine Tenstar Ni used to heal himself.

The powder smelled spicy and pungent. Garen's movement slowed down, as he knew it would irritate his eyes. He closed them and whipped his hand forward with Swing Form.

However, it was too slow and the Swing Form missed the target.

Tenstar Ni did a backflip and landed a few meters away, but his face was even paler than before. It seemed the use of his cross-shaped muscle technique expended a vast amount of energy, and combined with Garen's smash to his chest, Tenstar Ni's condition was terrible.

"Garen of White Cloud Gate! Just wait, I'll kill everyone around you!" Tenstar Ni's malevolent voice came from afar, he turned around and staggered away. His movement looked unnatural, but that didn't slow him down.

Garen was rubbing his eyes, which were still blurry from the powder and tears. At that moment he couldn't clearly see the opponent.

However, as the voice came, he sneered and smashed his hand into the ground, breaking the rocks and dirt into gravel. He grabbed a handful of small rubbles and fiercely threw them toward the direction where the voice came from.

His arm swelled in an instant, and his hand sent the rubbles flying in an instant, with the pebbles screeching in the air.

Poof! Poof!

As soon as the bang was heard several bloody holes appeared on Tenstar Ni's back and he fell on the floor.

"Retard! I really wouldn't know what to do if you didn't make a sound!"

Garen grinned hideously and rushed over under his blurry vision, catching Tenstar Ni by his hair.

"Senior Brother will avenge me!" Tenstar Ni knew he couldn't escape. He roared as Garen held his hair and smashed his head down.

Bam!

To Garen's surprise, Tenstar Ni's head was fine. However, as he tried to pull him up he tore his scalp off by the hair. The scene looked horrific and bloody.

Tenstar Ni quickly climbed forward like an invertebrate mollusk, exhibiting his robust vitality.

Garen chased up and stomped hard onto his back.

Step Form!

Bang! Crack!

Two sounds echoed together as Tenstar Ni's spine broke into pieces. He struggled with all his force to turn around and spit an arrow of blood onto Garen's face.

This arrow of blood could have killed a common person, but it was completely ineffective to Garen. He closed his eyes and felt a warm liquid on his face, nothing else.

Garen wiped the blood off his face, aimed at Tenstar Ni's head, and used another Step Form.

"Roar!!"

The neighing sound of the mammoth lingered in the air.

Boom!!

A deep crater appeared on the ground. Brains, bones, and blood mixed together, and along with some blue messy hair, they turned into a slimy blend.

Garen's right foot and ankle were covered in this mixture. He lifted his foot and started searching on the torso. He found another pack of medicinal powder, two more silver daggers—both threaded with a thin line—, a string of keys and some money.

As he collected the loot, he opened his eyes as much as he could. The tears had washed away the medicinal powders in his eyes, and although it still felt uncomfortable, he was able to see clearly again.

He looked around and didn't see a trace of the bald guy.

"Escaped huh?" He looked around. He was standing in an open ground behind the two-story building. The building wall was covered in fractures and holes from the fight.

It was completely silent inside.

He took a deep breath and looked around to check if there were other enemies nearby. Suddenly, a child's weep came from inside the building, but something soon muffled the noise. He could faintly hear the horrified breathing of a woman.

Obviously, a family was still inside, but they dared not make a sound, afraid of getting silenced as witnesses. They kept quiet to pretend no one was home.

At this distance, a normal person could not have heard the noise. However, Garen's senses were several times sharper, so of course he could hear everything.

Shaking his head, Garen looked at himself. His shirt was gone, a line of bullets were stuck at his waist, there were two wounds on his eyebrows and three on his right hand.

He gripped the bullets in his waist and pulled them out hard. Streams of blood gushed out from the wounds but stopped almost immediately. The blood clogged into a membrane and covered his wounds.

Chapter 94: Tenstar Ni (2)

Apart from external injuries, Garen felt some internal bruising as well as a tearing pain. It was clear that he had strained some muscles and injured himself. Most importantly, the blood and Qi orb in his chest had been considerably reduced and had depleted significantly after healing and temporarily enhancing his defense.

Garen vaguely felt that the blood and Qi orb was overused, it might completely disperse with no way to restore it. This hypothetical situation would cause a drop in his level of attainment and his body strength could be greatly diminished.

Ever since he attained the Qi and blood orb, his all aspects of his ability had markedly increased. He did not have Attributes to enhance his physical qualities, but his explosive force, defense, reaction speed, comprehension, and so on had undergone significant changes. Even though there were no direct changes to his Attributes, his actual strength had increased by at least one level.

"Looks like I have to use this thing carefully..." Garen's body gradually shrunk as he reverted to his original state. He took the torn black overcoat from Tenstar Ni's body and put it on. Even though it was ripped, it was better than nothing.

Garen took a last look at the body on the ground and let out a sigh of relief. He relaxed his body completely and started to recuperate.

Tenstar Ni was undoubtedly an expert on par with Garen. The true strength of normal experts would not even hurt Garen, let alone threaten him, but Tenstar Ni managed to do it. If not for the effect of the Qi and blood orb, Garen would have been severely injured even if he managed to kill Tenstar Ni.

Tenstar Ni's Secret Martial Art was very strong: it was able to not only increase one's speed, but explosive force and strength were enhanced to a terrifying level as well. When this explosive technique was used, Tenstar Ni could even effortlessly break through Garen's defensive Explosive Fist Arts Body Hardening Technique

If not for the fact that this explosive technique could not be used continuously—it seemed that every time Tenstar Ni did, there would be some backlash damage to his body—it would have been hard to predict the winner of this battle.

"I've really fallen out with Celestial Circle Gate this time. There is still the Eldest Senior Brother of Celestial Circle Gate and number one expert of the South, Andrela. Even his junior brother Tenstar Ni was already so powerful. Andrela... I'm afraid I'm no match for him yet."

Garen estimated their true strengths and started to be more fearful of the Celestial Circle Gate.

"Celestial Circle Gate sent snipers, then sent a series of experts in defensive striking. In the end, Tenstar Ni even directly intercepted me and continuously impeded me. His intent was likely to get me agitated so that I would start the fight and give Celestial Circle Gate a reason for a direct intervention. Otherwise, they would have broken the rules if they intervened when they had already expressed a neutral stance. But if White Cloud Gate started it, then they could cover their face with another layer of fig leaf."

"How hypocritical..." Garen sneered. "Looks like you never would have expected Tenstar Ni to die by my hands. If it was not for his own stupidity and vocal provocation, I would probably not have been able to kill him in the end."

Celestial Circle Gate was different from other common sects. Even on the surface, they had many experts. Coupled with the number one expert of the South, Andrela, and countless other hidden strong powers, they were a huge force to be reckoned with. Even if Garen had a strong self-confidence from his special ability, he felt heavily pressured by having them as his opponent.

He was not sure how many more experts Celestial Circle Gate had that were the same level as Tenstar Ni, but if they sent two more, he would not be able to survive.

He was the strongest person of the Southern Twelve Gates, far and away stronger than other students and disciples. Some sect masters were also likely weaker than him. Even with such true strength, it was already so difficult for him to face a somewhat famous disciple from Celestial Circle Gate. There was obviously a gap in their level of martial arts: he had trained in the Secret Mammoth Technique to an unprecedented level, yet barely scraped a win against Tenstar Ni.

Garen had subtly peaked: he had reached the upper limit of this Secret Martial Art.

Although the outcome of combat was not purely decided by the level of the Secret Martial Art—it still depended on willpower, strategy, response, and other factors—martial arts definitely played a large part in it.

Disciples like Tenstar Ni definitely had not attained the level of Qi and blood orb, but they still vaguely managed to temporarily achieve the true strength of that level with special methods. The Secret Martial Arts and Secret Methods of Celestial Circle Gate could produce this effect. Garen was dismayed and did not know how many more experts Celestial Circle Gate had that were at that level.

"Enough thinking about this matter. I'll just head back first. There is no time to consider all these things now!"

Garen quickened his pace and went back the same way he previously came from.

Click!

As he walked out of the shadow of the building, Garen was stunned.

In front of him, dozens of black submachine guns were pointed at him. Not only that, Garen felt a dozen people focusing their gaze on him from afar: the gaze of snipers.

Not far away, there were green armored personnel carriers which were shaped like quadrilaterals. Imprinted on the sides, there was an insignia of a black and white striped flag with a black bird spreading its wings on the white stripe.

This was the national flag of the Yalu Confederation!

Garen did not dare to move a muscle mainly because of the gaze of the dozen snipers.

The bullet from the sniper earlier had proven that these powerful rifles could break his defense and cause him a certain amount of harm. If there were a dozen more submachine guns at such a close range, Garen was not sure he would survive.

In the dense hail of bullets, the wounds from his broken defense would be ripped wider and even he could not escape that reality. It was impossible for a human being to outrun a bullet.

He quickly scanned the soldiers with submachine guns in front of him. They wore dark green uniforms and round steel helmets, which were also painted green. Each of them was heavily armed from head to toe, with a bullet belt strapped diagonally across their bodies and a grenade bag at their waist.

"What should I do!?" A variety of measures flashed across Garen's mind in an instant, but being surrounded by so many guns, it was impossible even for him to successfully escape.

"Eldest Senior Brother! Run, quickly! They want to kill you!" Among the few people being held hostage in the distance, Collin suddenly shouted.

She had hardly finished her sentence before Garen suddenly felt a piercing pain between his brows. A chilling sense of danger filled his body and there were goosebumps all over his skin.

Someone wanted to kill him!

The Qi and blood orb in his chest bubbled. Nearby, Garen saw a military officer in a dark green uniform with a cruel expression on his face holding up a huge, heavy duty, jet-black sniper rifle and steadily aiming it at him. His hand was already on the trigger ready to shoot!

Without the slightest hesitation, Garen kicked up a cloud of dust and sand without warning.

Rat tat tat tat..!

The sound of submachine guns firing filled the air.

Within seconds, countless guns started firing. The intense barrage muffled all other sounds.

Garen stood squarely in place and was stunned to see that the federal soldiers had fallen in front of him.

Teams of soldiers in brown uniforms surrounded all of the soldiers in green uniforms.

Compared to the soldiers in green, these soldiers in brown uniforms were obviously better trained. Their every move was calm and precise: there were no unnecessary actions. Each of them had strong Qi and blood and their actions were sophisticated. They were heavily armed and were clearly battle-hardened veterans.

Next, Garen looked at the sniper military officer in the distance who was lying face down on the personnel carrier. His head was now bent to the side and blood was slowly flowing out from the gunshot wound at his temple.

"Commanding officer of the Sixth Brigade of the South, Caesar Leon, is alleged to have committed treason, traded in important national intelligence, sold federal arms, privately used military force for personal gains, and so on. He has now been found guilty and shall be sentenced concurrently for these multiple crimes. He was arrested in the name of the highest command in the South, but the commanding officer and his guards did not show repentance and have now been executed by firing squad. All Sixth Brigade soldiers, put down your weapons and await further instructions."

Calm and collected, the clear voice of a man came from the distance.

Garen looked toward the direction where the voice was coming from.

"Yo, Garen! Long time no see." The flaming red hair of Golden Hoop Number 6 fluttered as he smiled cheekily. He was wearing the neat brown uniform of a military officer and black leather gloves. On his right shoulder, a silver patch clearly indicated his rank.

Silver on black with four stripes and a dot: it was the rank of a colonel.

Garen let out a long sigh of relief.

The soldiers around him started to clean up the bodies and opened up a path.

Garen walked straight towards Golden Hoop Number 6 until the two stood one meter apart.

"I haven't even repaid you for the time you helped me out with my sister's matter. Now I owe you one more," Garen said while somewhat embarrassed.

"What a coincidence then. I have something I need to trouble you with. If you help me out, I'll count it as one favor repaid. How's that?" Golden Hoop Number 6 asked jokingly.

"What trouble? However, I will have to recuperate for a while first."

Golden Hoop Number 6 took a look at Garen's sorry state and injuries. "Of course I will wait until you have recovered. I'm in no hurry either."

"Then no problem!" Garen agreed.

"Come on, I'll arrange a car to send you all back. It's unwise to stay here for too long. Celestial Circle Gate has a huge influence here. I can only remove one of their assistants."

"Sir, we discovered the body of Tenstar Ni from Celestial Circle Gate out back," a military officer reported after walking to Golden Hoop Number 6.

"Oh?" Golden Hoop Number 6 widened his eyes in shock, then looked at Garen with a half-smile.
"You're good, you!"

Garen smiled wryly and said, "Please stop saying that. I almost died. Did I give you more trouble?"

For some reason, he vaguely felt that the brown uniformed soldiers around him were looking at him in awe.

Golden Hoop Number 6 realized it too, and smiled.

"We practitioners of martial arts, regardless of our characters and personalities, will easily become impulsive due to the continually abundant and strong Qi and blood within our bodies. You have no idea how a military unit with stronger physicality and true strength will cause more trouble. Constantly having a strong power in the body without being able to use it develops into a mentally repressive grievance, so they will easily become impulsive. Since you've killed him, that's that. Celestial Circle Gate won't fall out with me for such a small character anyway. You have been too inhibited, so this release is also a good conditioning."

"Stronger people will have problems after being mentally repressed for too long?" Garen had a weird expression. He vaguely recalled Eldest Senior Sister's insane look.

"Indeed so. Of course, there are those with strong spiritual attainment who are able to disregard such situations, but they are a rare minority." Golden Hoop Number 6 turned around and said, "Come on, let's talk on the move."

Garen nodded. "Let me explain to my Junior Brothers and Sisters first."

"Very well."

Chapter 95: The Return 1

In a small building by the road, an old man and a girl stood by the window inside a dark room and looked down through the opening in the curtains.

"They are people from the Special Forces. Why are they here?" the white-haired old man asked confusedly. "Who is that military officer?"

"I've seen him once at a banquet. I think he is Colonel Su Lin of the Special Forces. Rumor has it that he's a useless playboy who only got a firm standing in the army because of his parents. Why is he here instead of in Hotel Pleasant fooling around with women?" the pale girl asked, equally confused. "Looks like he's a friend of that Garen. Does he intend to buy a hatchet man?"

"A playboy giving up pleasure activities to lead a troop to this suburb for a rescue mission? Looks like they have a close relationship," the old man said in a low voice.

"I know about Su Lin's situation. His parents spoiled him. Whatever he wanted, they would find it for him by whatever means necessary. He has an elder brother managing the family business who is also very fond of him. He is considered the darling of the Mobius family, but he did not live up to expectations. He didn't apply himself to anything and only knew how to indulge in pleasure-seeking activities," the girl said sarcastically in a hushed tone. "I didn't expect White Cloud Gate to be involved with this guy. They should consider themselves lucky."

"It's great that the power of Celestial Circle Gate has been curtailed slightly. We put in so much effort, but they only want to contribute a little. It's so unfair." The old man started smiling.

"But this Garen has concealed himself well. Su Lin's character has always been arrogant, so spoiled that he doesn't allow anyone to disobey him. He's very difficult to get along with. It's unexpected that he would be able to hit it off with this Garen. Su Lin is famous for being imperious and domineering." The girl looked at Garen and Su Lin downstairs as they chatted happily then boarded a black car under the protection of bodyguards and left. The other White Cloud Gate disciples, along with the disciples from two other sects behind them, boarded other cars and left together.

"Come on. White Cloud Gate is temporarily safe and it's even protected two other sects. It's impossible for us to act here." The old man turned to move away from the window.

"Wait! What's that?" the girl suddenly shouted in a muted tone. Her gaze was fixed on a body being carried out from behind the distant building. "Is...is that Tenstar Ni? It can't be!"

"What?!" The old man raced back to the window and looked down. The body of Tenstar Ni was being carried into a car by a few soldiers.

In that instant, a chill went down their spines and they exchanged a look.

Tenstar Ni was dead!

"It seems that we have underestimated this Garen from White Cloud Gate..." the old man spoke slowly in his baritone voice. "Fortunately, we didn't go down there. Otherwise, we might not have been able to come back alive."

"The strongest man from the Southern Twelve Gates... is indeed extraordinary! He is already eligible to be ranked as a Grandmaster of Combat," the pale girl murmured. She pulled out a rolled up map from her front pocket and gently opened it. "I'll make a note of it now!"

On the white map was an enlarged image of all of the nearby provinces. There were already a few red dots marked at different spots on the map. The pale girl bit her index finger until it bled and forcefully imprinted a blood mark on Galantia Province, which contained Huaishan City.

"I can't believe that we managed to witness the entire process of a Grandmaster of Combat breaking through the limits of the human body during this trip. The time spent can now be considered worthwhile," the old man said as he started to get slightly emotional.

On the yellow-green plains, a winding pale yellow road stretched into the distance like a long, thin piece of yellow ribbon.

A black motorcade rolled along on the road. The motorcade consisted entirely of black luxury sedans. Delicate patterns decorated the car bodies while some protracted sections even had extensions of elegant hollowed floral ornaments.

There was even a hook-like dark golden ornament erected on the hood of the second black car: it represented the number "6."

There was ample space inside the car and two youths sat in the rear passenger seats. The youth on the left had flaming-red hair and a handsome face. He wore a brown military uniform with a colonel-rank insignia, was fiddling with a lighter in his hand, and had the temperament of a frivolous playboy. The aloof and serious military uniform seemed mismatched on him.

The other person had purple hair and dark red eyes. He wore a loose white shirt, his face was calm, and he exuded an aura of peace and serenity. His eyebrows were a strange reddish-black since his original black eyebrows had been replaced by two scars. This added a sense of mystery to him.

These two fellows were Golden Hoop Number 6 and Garen traveling on their way back.

Garen turned to look out the window at the yellow-green plains that flashed past. A breeze was blowing and the grass rippled like creased waves. "How should I address you?" he suddenly asked.

Golden Hoop Number 6 snapped the lighter shut. "Just call me Su Lin. To be honest, you and I, we really... uhm, what's that Eastern phrase? Have serendipity! Yes, serendipity. Actually, I didn't intentionally help you the last time. It was by chance that I encountered that incident and it just so happened that I was in a temper, so I dealt with it straightaway. This time, I was busy with another matter when I heard about your situation, so I decided to help you out while I was at it. What's this, if not serendipity?"

"I thought you would say you rushed over deliberately to help me." Garen shook his head and smiled. "You're really honest."

"Honesty is my virtue." Golden Hoop Number 6, Su Lin, chuckled. "This time, White Cloud Gate should be in big trouble right? Need my help?"

"We're indeed in big trouble, but it's a relatively small matter. The main problem is my Senior Sister..." Garen's expression turned grim at the thought of it. Eldest Senior Sister had always been kind to him. Although she had a strange temper, he didn't expect her to betray the sect.

"Regarding your Eldest Senior Sister, I do have some news. She has gone to Behemoth Gate." Su Lin stopped smiling and whispered, "Behemoth Gate... that's a really vexing organization. Even though both your Methods and Secret Martial Arts share the same namesake, their strength is unimaginably powerful."

"Behemoth Gate?" Garen pondered. "Are they as powerful as Celestial Circle Gate?"

"Roughly the same." Su Lin frowned. "The background of Celestial Circle Gate is too strong. They have many alumni disciples in the upper ranks of the federal army and the government. As the strongest sect in the South, there is even a special full brigade in the Confederation specifically trained and led by them."

"An entire brigade..." Garen's head throbbed. He knew the meaning of "brigade." A complete brigade had at least tens of thousands of well-trained soldiers. This was a relatively strong force even in the context of the entire Confederation. Let alone a "special" brigade.

Su Lin took a look at him and continued, "Additionally, many alumni of Celestial Circle Gate have joined the National Security Division. They have plenty of experts like Tenstar Ni."

Garen narrowed his eyes, carefully masking the shock he felt.

Su Lin continued regardless, "But fortunately you have finally reached a new level." He suddenly smiled. "Not everyone can attain the level of Grandmaster of Combat. Congratulations, Garen."

"The level of Grandmaster of Combat?" It was the first time Garen had ever heard of it.

"Yes." Su Lin glanced at the female soldier driving. "This is now an open secret. Your master was probably worried that you would be distracted by this status. That's why he didn't want to tell you."

He paused, then continued, "A so-called Grandmaster of Combat is a martial arts practitioner who is able to train their physical body to the extent of the human limit. Everyone who has become a Grandmaster of Combat possesses tempered skills, a strong body, and represents the extreme pinnacle of humankind. Every Grandmaster of Combat has a quality that they excel at, just like how you are exceptional in your Strength and Defense."

Garen was silent for a while. "If what you say is true—that I have entered the level of Grandmaster of Combat—why is it that against experts at the level of Tenstar Ni, I can only handle one at a time at best?"

"That is because you haven't properly solidified. In the examples of Grandmasters of Combat that I know of, each and every one of them has a tough physical quality and vitality. Their ability to recover is shocking and the true strength that they wield is far beyond the limit that a normal human being can achieve. Simply put, Grandmasters of Combat are top experts who are one league ahead of average martial arts practitioners and represent the extreme limit of the human body's advancement," Su Lin answered formally. "If my estimation is correct, once you return, you will enter an explosive growth phase in the enhancement of your true strength."

Garen slowly nodded. What he did not say, however, was that he was already experiencing this enhancement. During the process of fighting his way over here, he had sensed his body become easier to control and using his skills felt more natural. Occasionally, a flood of combat experience would instinctively surface and he would land a phenomenal strike.

"In that case, you should know a few experts at this level?" Garen asked in a low voice.

"Indeed I do. There are 42 people who can be considered Grandmasters of Combat and these are only the ones on-record. There are probably more off the record, but there should be about 80 people in total. They are the strongest group of people in the entire Confederation! Normal firearms have no effect on them and only especially powerful firearms can harm them."

"80 people... How many people are there in the Confederation?" Garen didn't expect there to be so many more peak experts.

"The result of last year's population census was 160 million people. In other words, combined with the older generation of Grandmasters of Combat, you are one in two million. But don't fret, among these 80 people, more than 50 are senior people from the previous generation. They are advanced in age, most of them have retreated to a life of seclusion, and no one knows how many of them are still alive. The active individuals are the Grandmasters of Combat who have emerged in the past 50 years, which total to approximately 30 people. And that's the amount when you count everyone on- and off-record."

Su Lin held the lighter, then repeatedly lit it and put it out again. "Based on the information we have gathered, there are probably 10 Grandmasters of Combat scattered throughout the 13 provinces of the Confederation. Five are from Celestial Circle Gate representing the Southern Alliance and five from the Northern Alliance. It's evenly matched, but I have a feeling that this has been deliberately decided by both parties in conference. It's too much of a coincidence that both sides have the exact same total of five people."

"Five people huh?" Garen started contemplating. "By my count, these five people should be from Celestial Circle Gate and Crimson Sand Sword. What about Andrela?"

Chapter 96: The Return 2

"I don't know. I haven't seen him in full force, so no one knows his exact ability. But, compared to Tenstar Ni, he should be at the Grandmaster of Combat level. You have to be careful. He is still a novice, so he isn't considered a Grandmaster of Combat yet. Also, there are at least two or three Grandmasters of Combat within the older generations of Celestial Circle Gate and they are a force to be reckoned with. With Tenstar Ni's age, he was one of the hopefuls to become a Grandmaster of Combat. Unfortunately, you killed him." Su Lin sympathized

"If he didn't die, I would have died." Garen was speechless as he remembered the last fight with Tenstar Ni. If Tenstar Ni had not been so foolish and had ignored his big mouth, Garen would not have had to kill him. Fighters at this level were not ordinary people that would be severely hurt after one punch. The resilience they possessed meant that they were well trained to take hits. Their stamina was also incredible. If they were to advance another level...

A slight tension gripped Garen's head, but it was more of an odd blood boiling passion. It was the expectation of facing a worthy opponent. Martial artists, especially novice practitioners, all possessed a fervent passion for combat.

Although Garen had a lot less training time compared to regular martial artists, he was no different. His passion for the arts was as feverish as anyone else.

From the first moment that he chose the path of martial arts, he did not want to use his special ability to expand his social presence. Instead, he chose to push himself to the limit and become a true martial artist. He wanted to witness the peak that the human body could achieve and challenge to those limits. Fortunately, he had the aid of his special ability.

He knew his capabilities better than anyone else. He was neither gifted nor talented. Without his special ability, it would have been difficult to enter the martial arts world in the first place. Since he was a normal and ordinary person without any talents, he had to stay dedicated. It was impossible for an individual to achieve excellence in everything and separated effort would only result in overall mediocrity. For example, take two geniuses at the starting point. If one only focused on science while the other studied everything and anything on a whim, the difference would be obvious after a short amount of time.

As for the one in a century type of genius that could master anything, if that kind of talent only focused on one subject, the heights that could be achieved would be unimaginable. The truth was that with the waves of scientific advancement around the world, subjects were being separated into finer areas of study and it would be nearly impossible to master everything. From the start, Garen knew the type of path he wanted to take.

"Are there any Grandmaster of Combat level fighters near me?" Garen recollected his thoughts and asked with his voice lowered.

Su Lin retracted his lighter and gave it a thought. "There is one. Beside Galantia in the Eliza Province, there is a Grandmaster of Combat called the White Eagle Holy Fist, also known as Palosa. He lives in seclusion at the Skylark Mountain Waterfall. If my father didn't mention it once, I would not have known that an older generation Grandmaster of Combat lived there. The toxic gas and miasma are so thick that normal people would not be able to enter Skylark Mountain. Even the herb gatherers are not willing to venture to this vast and sparsely populated location.

"There are no others?" When Garen heard this name, he knew that this person was an older generation Grandmaster of Combat that was indifferent to worldly fame and fortune. The chance of conflict with him would be minuscule.

"There are none. The majority of the Grandmasters of Combat are concentrated within Celestial Circle Gate and Crimson Sand Sword. The heads of Celestial Circle Gate and Crimson Sand Sword are both older generation Grandmasters of Combat, but I don't know about the others."

"Do you know the background of Behemoth Gate?" Garen changed the topic to ask.

"Behemoth Gate is a nefarious organization that secretly recruits and trains young talents. They are mysterious in nature and I don't really know too much either, but they are certainly not weak by any means. You have to be careful." Su Lin turned serious. "After you go back this time, you'll have to

reorganize the internal structure of White Cloud Gate and take control of the situation. Although Master Fei did not suffer a serious injury, this injury will impact his martial arts due to his old age. White Cloud Gate will be dependent on you."

"I know." Garen nodded.

Galantia Province Huaishan City.

Among the forests in the rural areas, the dense and green trees had already recovered from the misery of winter. The morning sunshine pierced through the leaves and illuminated the ground. With the moist air and tiny drops of dew, the forest emitted a refreshing vibe.

Deep within the forest.

A square and dark looking courtyard rested quietly within a circle of trees. Green colored vines covered the black stone tiles.

The courtyard was enclosed by a few two story buildings and slanted stone stairs led up to an entrance on the side. The stairs were a shade of black with moss slightly peeking out from the top corner. The passage of time was evident.

A bald man with a beer belly stood on top of the stairs. Fat protruded out of his face. He wore a black suit with a white shirt hanging on his shoulder and his hands were on his waist as he took deep breaths. It looked like he was performing a morning routine.

It was evident that he did not cleanly shave as stubble covered his face and neck. The hair from his sideburns connected to his beard and it was impossible to differentiate which was which. While the man was doing this morning routine, a short-haired man slowly strolled up from the stairs.

"Mr. Bouvini." The man walked beside the bald guy and greeted him with a lowered voice.

"Mhmm, do you have any news?" The bald guy shook his upper body and seemed like he was exercising his waist.

"All the other shareholders support your attempt to take command. It's just that a few key assets are only known by Dojo Master Fei. The dojo's relationship with the governor would make this difficult to handle," the man reported in an undertone.

"I heard that the White Cloud Gate lot safely escaped from Celestial Circle's territory? They are on their way back?" the bald Bouvini asked.

"Yes. I don't have the exact intel as no information has leaked. It is believed that the military has intervened and suspended any information. It's believed that Dojo Fei was unconscious during the competition and will not recover within a short period of time. Even if he manages to recover, his power will drop by a few levels because of his age," the man hastily explained. "Mr. Bouvini, this is the perfect opportunity. If this opportunity slips away, it will become impossible to control White Cloud Gate's assets."

"The other three shareholders have the same intention?" Bouvini asked in an undertone.

"Yes."

A thoughtful expression appeared on Bouvini's face. "Then go prepare first. We have to welcome the dojo's triumphant return."

"Understood, I'll get right on it." The man thought about it before reaching a sudden realization. He nodded and left.

Three days later. In the morning.

In front of the gate of Huaishan City's White Cloud Dojo, a fleet of black silver wave cars came to a gradual stop beside the road. The scene caught the attention of pedestrians and they occasionally

peeked over. This kind of luxurious sedan was difficult to come by in Huaishan City. Now there suddenly was a fleet of five such cars, which garnered even more attention.

The car doors opened one by one. A simple stretcher transporting the comatose Fei Baiyun was carried out from the back. Collin and Simon carefully guarded the stretcher as it traveled toward the gate. Garen and Golden Loop Number 6 Su Lin exited their car. They raised their heads to look at the overhanging banner that named the dojo.

"We are finally back." Garen let out a long sigh of relief.

"Senior Brother Garen."

Rampas's voice sounded from the other side.

Rampas and delicate girl walked over.

"We are finally back in Huaishan. It's also time for Seven Moon Gate and Circling Dance Gate to depart. We are grateful for Senior Brother's help this time, so here is our contact information and address. If there is anything in need of us, we will do everything we can!" He passed over a slip of paper.

"Wait a moment. How are the two masters doing?" Garen took the paper and looked behind the pair of disciples. On two other stretchers, the two unconscious gate masters rested.

"The military doctors have examined them and it's not a big problem. The unconsciousness seems to be the result of a special technique, so they just need some time before they naturally wake up," Rampas explained. "Also, we have a contact in Huaishan City and we can arrange our own transportation. There is no need to worry about us."

"That's good. In that case, so long." Garen nodded.

"Goodbye Senior Brother Garen." Rampas gestured before he left with his disciples.

"Senior brother Garen, if you encounter any issues, don't forget about the Circling Dance Gate. I am Marianne!" The delicate looking girl smiled sincerely before also carrying her master away and departing in the other direction with her fellow disciples. This group met up with a few other female disciples that had heard the news ahead of time and had already been waiting.

Garen retracted his gaze. As he was about to head into the dojo, Su Lin suddenly whispered to him, "We just received intel that the strongest gate out of the Southern Twelve Gates, Murry Iron Chain Gate, was destroyed by Andrela." With a serious expression, Su Lin said in a lowered voice, "The Celestial Circle Gate heard that Tenstar Ni was killed, which angered their management. So they immediately retaliated and Murry Iron Chain Gate became the victim. Andrela took the lead and officially intervened in the incident where the Southern Twelve Gates were challenged. They eliminated Murry Iron Chain Gate from top to bottom."

Slightly shocked by the news, Garen responded, "No wonder. Celestial Circle Gate has had the intent to take over the Southern Twelve Gates for a long time and this incident was only an excuse. What about the Crimson Sand Sword?"

"Crimson Sand Sword is not reacting right now. It looks like they made a pact with Celestial Circle Gate." With a frown, Su Lin said, "This is going to be problematic, very problematic. I haven't managed to come up with a conclusion, so the hidden killer might be someone else."

"Who is it?"

"An emerging organization called the Black Mark Association. It's rumored that they are in an alliance with Crimson Sand Sword and Celestial Circle Gate to end the separated situation in the southern area. They want to form three leading gates to focus their forces against the northern area."

Garen was silent for a moment before he spoke, "You can go back now. I'll take care of this on my own. I already owe you a lot, so I'll handle it this time."

"On your own? Can you handle it?!" Su Lin asked petulantly.

"You don't have to be involved in this situation," Garen said emotionlessly. "There are no other solutions right now. Since Andrela will be here eventually, there is no way I can avoid this. My master is here and so is my family."

Su Lin stared at Garen fervently, as if meeting Garen for the first time, and it took him a while to open his mouth.

"You are afraid that you are going to cause me trouble? With just these words, I am your friend! Don't worry, my troubles are far greater and bigger than yours. If I am by your side, not only would you have to be afraid of the Grandmasters of Combat that can strike at any time, but the assassination organization might also cause you trouble. Are you afraid!?"

"You really want me to answer with the arrogance that I am not afraid?" Garen was flabbergasted. "That with a background as fearsome as yours, my problem were bigger than yours? No one would believe me if I said something like that!"

Su Lin shook his head and led the way. He opened the dojo's door and walked in. "Let's talk inside. My problems are far greater than yours."

A bitter smile appeared on his face.

Garen immediately followed.

Chapter 97: Crisis and Secret Methods 1

In the next ten minutes, Garen arranged for the doctor and nurse to take care of his master, calmed down the slightly frantic disciples and trainees, and finally let the juniors go to rest. He then asked one of the disciples to find a quiet room to discuss everything with Su Lin in detail.

The place they were led to was decorated with wooden furniture which gave it a classical vibe. Redwood walls and floor, a wooden table and chair, even the tea cups were made of redwood.

The two of them sat down across from each other. Two wooden cups, with steam rising slowly from them, were placed in the middle of the redwood table.

Garen gently touched the missing edge of the wooden table.

"This time, a lot of the disciples have left. Plenty of places look torn down which are obvious signs of the time when senior sister left. Now the elder senior brother is gone, too, and senior brother is prohibited from leaving. The entire gate feels empty and deserted... But that's fine, let's not talk about it. Tell me about what is troubling you."

Su Lin grabbed the tea cup with a bitter smile. "This is why I need your help. To be honest, when I found you in the first place, I had the intention of looking for a bodyguard."

"I don't care about your intentions. The fact that you helped me out twice cannot be understated." Garen interrupted him to stop him from talking. "Tell me about your troubles. I can't believe that with the force of the organization they can't protect you?"

"Golden Loop possesses force only on paper. I've gotten into a conflict with an assassin organization, and one of the strongest ones in the world, Duskdune Shura." Su Lin's face was distressed. "As to how I got into a conflict with them, I don't even know myself. All I know is that starting from next summer, they will officially take action."

"Duskdune Shura? Are they powerful?" Garen asked in an undertone. "I'm not familiar with these things, you know."

"Let me make a comparison for you. Imagine them as disciples from the Celestial Circle Gate with mastery in weapons, special techniques, combat mastery, assassination, plus they never fight in the open and always look for an opportunity to deceive. I'm not afraid of them myself, but I'm worried about my family. They don't have the ability to defend themselves and can only rely on the protection of others," Su Lin said with impotence clear in his voice. "I've used all kinds of excuses to find impeccable protection for my parents, but it's just not enough for my sister."

"Does this Duskdune Shura have any Grandmasters of Combat?" Garen took a sip of the tea, not feeling frightened by the information.

"Yes." Su Lin looked at him. "It's an elite Grandmaster of Combat that has successfully assassinated ten other Grandmasters of Combat. The organization's leader is called Duskdune Shura. One of the top two elite fighters in the most recent documentation. Based on it, he is also part of the Immortal Palace Alliance."

Garen's hand shook slightly, and the tea almost spilled out of the cup.

"It's the Immortal Palace Alliance again." He originally thought that this organization was strong but secretive, yet they reappeared again.

"Let's not worry about Duskdune Shura for now. That can all be taken care of in the future. The most crucial task is to be ready for the Celestial Circle Gate, or else I would not be able to survive this year, let alone the next one."

"You are right." Su Lin tasted the tea, and his eyebrows furrowed into a frown. "The tea is quite nice, but whoever made it definitely didn't possess skill."

He raised his head to look at Garen.

"The Celestial Circle Gate is indeed powerful. However, everything must follow the same rule. Their force is not powerful enough to break it."

"You are implying?" Garen locked his vision on Su Lin as he asked with uncertainty.

"I'll use the name of the military to let my dad announce that you'll be my sister's Wushu teacher," Su Lin answered calmly.

"Wushu teacher. That's two birds with one stone." Garen's expression turned peaceful as well. "My guess was also similar. Not only does it preserve the White Cloud Gate, but it also achieves what you wish for."

"However, before this, my father would need to personally pressure the Celestial Circle Gate. This cannot be done in an instant and will take around ten days. You'll have to stay strong during this period."

"Ten days?" His head lowered, Garen stared at the teacup on the table.

Within it, the slightly red tea gradually spread out in waves to the edges of the cup. "Good, I also want to know how powerful the renowned top fighter from the south is."

"Confidence is good." Su Lin smiled.

The two of them sat quietly on their seats without speaking a word. They silently thought about their next steps.

Knock! Knock! Knock!

Someone was tapping on the door.

"Come in."

Garen looked in the direction of the door.

It gently opened. Collin, who had changed into a white outfit, came in and stood beside Garen.

"Senior Brother, Bouvini, who controls the assets, is here."

"Bouvini?" Garen quickly recalled this person's identity. "Tell him that I suffered a severe injury and will require healing in peace. Please ask him to take care of master's assets."

"Ok, Senior Brother." Collin nodded as he curiously peaked at Su Lin who sat across from him.

"In this case, I'll leave as well. I need to head back to take care of the problem with your identity and convince my father as early as possible. It would help in alleviating the severity of this incident. However, this will only be a temporary solution to your conflict with the Celestial Circle Gate. You killed the talent of their younger generation. With how those older guys act as if they're on top of the world, they will not let you go unscathed."

"I know, even if they want to resolve the problem, this incident was a detrimental hit to their reputation. It cannot be easily concluded for that alone." Garen was fully aware of the situation he was in.

"I'll head back as soon as possible."

"I owe you for this." Garen bowed at Su Lin.

"Don't worry." Su Lin smiled and gently stood up, leaving quietly.

"Lead Mr. Su Lin on his way out," Garen notified the disciple at the door.

"Yes."

Kacha.

The door gradually closed.

Garen let out a long sigh. He sat on the chair when all of a sudden a mixture of emotions overwhelmed him.

"I originally thought that I was just leading an exchange gathering. After it, I would come back and continue searching for the old man's cause of death. But to my surprise, the Immortal Palace Alliance and the Celestial Circle Gate are connected somehow. There is no way that this is all a coincidence that the moment I was attacked, my master was also injured. The Southern Twelve Gates are in a dangerous situation right now.

"The Celestial Circle Gate... The Immortal Palace Alliance... An organization of psychokinetics... An organization of martial adepts... How is everything connected?"

He felt like he was about to be drawn into a whirlpool of complexities and troubles.

The Celestial Palace Gate was creating a force to eliminate the smaller gates. The Southern Twelve Gates were the first victims, and soon the other gates would be in dire danger as well.

Garen slowly stood up. He walked to the empty part of the room and gently made a standard White Cloud Combat Arts move.

Time passed minute by minute.

Gradually, his furrowed eyebrows began to relax. His spirit echoed the blood flow within his body as it cycled around. He felt calm.

"All the time, I've been reactive in dealing with the unexpected incidents that kept occurring. I've been flowing with the tide, unable to do what I want."

His whole body began to shake as if he was a tumbler. Left and right, front and back, as he kept on swaying.

"I have a genuine interest in martial arts, so I'll have to put all my effort into it. The Celestial Gates, Andreia, Sylphalan."

Garen didn't know how everything came falling down to where it was now. All of the incidents weren't caused by him, but he was a casualty caught in the middle of a landslide.

Sylphalan from the Immortal Palace Alliance was because of the old man, while the Celestial Circle Gate was because of his master at the White Cloud Gate. Without realizing it, he was suddenly surrounded by powerful enemies.

"The Celestial Circle Gate won't allow the Southern Twelve Gates to have any force of resistance left." Garen knew it well. "The crusade on the Southern Twelve Gates is inevitable now. I just don't know how involved Andreia is in all of this."

His body came to a sudden halt as if everything paused.

Peng!

A crisp but deafening sound.

Garen's right fist thrust forward, and a white trail appeared in the air. It was the mark left by the screeching streams of air.

He remembered the combat techniques he used. The wrong and ineffective moves were being gradually eliminated, and only the practical combo moves remained.

He suddenly recalled the explosive move he performed at the beginning in the Celestial Circle Gate's ring.

One single move to defeat the challenger, and also injure the Grandmaster of Combat and himself. Though, the opponent's injury was much more critical.

At that moment he only thought about unleashing all of his power. The blood qi ball in the middle of his body automatically flowed out and formed all his power into one. It then exploded into an unbelievable amount of power.

He was in a state where instinct and anger mixed together and using his body, in an instance, they gave birth to a new move.

He tried to relive that moment.

"If I could master this power so it would be at my command, my sudden explosiveness would increase to another level."

Garen closed his eyes and stood in the middle of the room. His hands continuously moved to mimic that explosive move.

The screeching sound of wind breaking echoed through the air. His speed continued to increase. So did his power.

Suddenly, his right arm pushed forward.

Clap!

It made a sound similar to hands clapping.

In the direction his palm pushed toward, the curtains flew back as if a gust of wind had just passed by.

Garen stopped with a look of disappointment.

"Still feels like something is missing compared to last time. Unfortunate. I wish there were more Antiques of Tragedy."

The Antiques of Tragedy were still his best assurance of improvement.

Within a year and a half, he successfully trained from a novice martial adept to the level of a Grandmaster of Combat. His power couldn't be undermined.

He had mastered the White Cloud Fundamental Secret Method to perfection. In other words, with his explosive fists' level, it was the highest level anyone had ever achieved. There was nowhere to advance further.

The White Cloud Gate wasn't like other powerful gates that possessed more Wushu moves. Mammoth Secret Techniques could only be considered as third tier at best.

"With my current ability, I'm no match for Andrela. The difference was obvious. Even if both of us are Grandmasters of Combat, the secret methods we use are drastically different."

Garen pondered as he chugged the tea.

"There are only two ways: the Antiques of Tragedy or a stronger secret technique. With my special ability, as long as I meet the criteria, I could learn it easily."

His eyes brightened as he thought of something.

"Learn easily. Since the White Cloud Gate's Fundamental Secret Method cannot meet my needs, I'll find an even lower tier secret method. Perhaps below the third tier, the even worse fourth tier, the lowest tier secret method. With my physical condition and experience, I could easily meet its requirements! Within a short amount of time, those fourth tier secret methods could improve my combat techniques significantly!"

Chapter 98: Crisis and Secret Martial Arts 2

Garen made up his mind. He remembered seeing low-level Secret Martial Arts in the library of the White Cloud Dojo. Although he didn't see too many of those, it would be enough for him.

No matter how weak a secret technique was, there had to be something special about it.

Garen opened the door and walked towards the library. He did not see many people around in the Dojo; the place was no longer busy. There were only about seven or eight people wandering around, and he could still see the blood stains on the floor.

Garen didn't really care, and he headed straight to the library. It took him several minutes to reach the entrance and notice that the old bald man, who guarded the gate, was already gone. He could see the signs of the fight from the walls, and he knew the Elder was fraught with grim possibilities.

Garen was a bit relieved after he found the method to improve, but he became depressed again after seeing the scene before him.

He entered the library, and everything inside was still well organized. Although Senior Sister betrayed the White Cloud Gate, she did not touch any of the low-level Secret Martial Arts since she probably had already read everything in the library.

He closed the door, lit an oil lamp, and started to check the books on the shelves. It only took him several minutes to find all the low-level Secret Martial Arts. Garen put them down on a desk that was used for making copies and sat down. He kept the oil lamp on the side for light.

There were four books on the desk:

Iron Body, Dark Iron Palm, Lark Blade and Flame Fist.

Those Secret Martial Arts were common and almost all the Dojos had them. They were usually taught to the normal disciples, but the White Cloud Gate had the Explosive Fist Arts as the basic and the four low-level Secret Martial Arts were just kept in the library as part of the collection.

The four Secret Martial Arts were very similar to the Red Hand Fist Garen encountered before. They could not be put into skill combos, and it would take him a very long time to master them, so the benefit wouldn't justify the cost.

Although they were put in the library, disciples read them just for fun. Secret Martial Arts like the four could be found anywhere, and they were just like the Iron Tunic that was in almost all the martial arts novels.

Garen grabbed the Iron Body and opened it:

'Iron Body can increase one's body defense. It is an average Secret Martial Arts that can be learnt by taking hits while maintaining a special way of breathing. It is easy to learn, but it takes a long time to master. Five years to complete the Level One Mastery, 10 years to complete the Level Two Mastery, and 15 years to master it. If one could master the Iron body, his body would become as hard as iron, and he would be able to resist small caliber pistols.'

Garen read through the instructions, but did not find them important and quickly finished the book. It was short, and the training method did not need to be paired with drugs. There were no complex techniques involved, and the person did not need to be talented. The only requirement was the will to handle all the pain during the long training years.

The most important thing in this whole book was the special breathing technique.

Garen remembered everything quickly and put the book down. "That's why it's called low-level Secret Martial Arts..."

He then finished the other three books, and all of them required a lot of time for one to master. Disciples needed to spend at least five to seven years on the Level One Mastery of those arts. Even more so, Flame Fist required eight years for the Level One Mastery. It had four levels in total, and the required time doubled for each level, which meant it would take 64 years for one to finish the last one.

"One won't become any stronger if he can't master one Secret Martial Art before the age of 25. No one is going to spend 120 years to master the Flame Fist. No wonder no one touches these low-level Secret Martial Arts..." Garen wasn't too happy with what he found, but he still finished all four books.

He did not realize it was already afternoon.

Garen closed his eyes, and he could clearly see the skill bar of the light red statuses. He thought for a second, and slowly the four low-level Secret Martial Arts' names appeared on the skill bar:

Iron Body: Not Started.

Dark Iron Palm: Not Started.

Lark Blade: Not Started.

Flame Fist: Not Started.

Various signs appeared behind the four Secret Martial Arts, and those signs told Garen about the requirements for each of them. Only Lark Blade required relatively high Agility, but it was still within the range that a normal person could reach. Garen could easily meet the requirements of all four.

"The Lark Blade is an Agility Secret Martial Art and requires external support. It doesn't fit my style. I guess I will start with Iron Body."

He wanted to use his special ability to see if he could speed up the training process.

Garen's special ability could boost up his learning speed significantly. He tried studying history the last time he applied potential points to Intelligence, and he could easily memorize everything he saw. As long as his Intelligence was high enough, and there were no external restrictions to it, he could learn the subject at an incredible speed.

He wanted to try it on the Martial Arts. It would be very helpful for him if it worked the same as when he was studying.

The Level One Mastery of the Iron Body required the special breathing technique from the book. Garen needed to imagine himself as an inflated balloon, and once his skin turned grey, he would be able to start the Level One Mastery.

Huff.

Garen slowly inhaled as the book said. He needed to inhale once and exhale nine times in a specific rhythm.

It would take him 20 minutes to finish one set of inhaling and exhaling.

He stood up and started practicing the special breathing technique beside the desk.

The first time he could feel his muscles and skin tighten, and they also became denser. Garen was excited about the change and decided to start the second try right away. His muscles and skin tightened again.

His skin turned red on the third try, and he felt like it was extremely tight.

He tried the breathing technique six times in a row and felt relaxed after the last try. His skin's temperature was very high, and he felt like he'd just left a hot bath.

He closed his eyes and looked at the Iron Body skill:

Iron Body: Level One (Two Levels).

"I knew it! It changed!"

Garen opened his eyes and tore off his collar. He could see his skin turning darker. Although its hardness hadn't reached the level of metal, he believed he would finish the Level One Mastery after a bit more training.

"It's valid!" Garen hit his chest with his fist.

Bam!

Besides the normal sound of flesh, there was the sound like hitting a piece of metal.

"It's definitely working. I wonder if I can reach the next level."

Garen tried to use the special breathing method again. However, nothing happened after more than ten tries. He knew he needed to do the hit training and that the breathing technique alone would not do much, but he just wanted to give it a try.

"I easily learned the fundamentals after I fulfilled all the requirements, but why can't I apply the method to the basic combat techniques and the basic sword skills... Wait! I already knew the basics of the skills when I was trying to level them up, which means this ability only works when I try to learn the Level One Mastery of the skills or fundamentals. Maybe it only works with the theories that only need to be memorized?"

Garen recalled the days when he was learning the identification skill with the old man. He had studied it step by step, and his ability had only worked with the first book he read. His identification skill did not level up after finishing the other books.

His identification skill never leveled up after that. Although he studied a lot and acquired a good amount of knowledge, that skill was still at the first level.

"I'm probably correct about this."

Garen was now sure about his guess. His special ability could only help him quickly learn the basics after the requirements were met, which was still extremely helpful when he used it on Secret Martial Arts.

No matter how weak a Secret Martial Art was, it would still be much stronger than any regular martial art. He could easily finish the Level One Mastery of any of the Secret Martial Arts, and those skills would definitely be useful to him.

Garen decided to use his ability to learn more Secret Martial Arts since he wanted to know what would happen after.

"I'm not sure if Iron Body will help me become stronger, but I can try it later," Garen thought and started to prepare for the Dark Iron Palm.

He did not need any external support to learn the Dark Iron Palm. All he required was to learn a special stance and support it with his consciousness. It was a skill that gathered all the venom in his body into his palms, and then allowed him to use it to poison opponents.

It would take Garen some time, but he started the Level One Mastery with ease. He used the special stance he learned from the book and supported it with his consciousness.

After about two hours, he felt like his hands were paralyzed, and it meant that the venom in his body had gathered into his fingers.

Apparently, the Level One Mastery of the Dark Iron Palm would not do too much for him. He only needed to gather all the venoms from his body into his palms. The more Garen practiced the skill the more venom he would be able to handle.

The technique only had two levels just like the Mammoth Secret Techniques.

The next one he decided to learn was the Flame Fist, which was different from the other ones. Garen could feel the actual effect of the skill, but the feeling was weak, and Iron Body progressed much faster.

It was dark outside when Garen practiced several more times, and most of the disciples had already gone back home. Garen did not eat anything besides breakfast and just stayed in the library the whole day.

"Andrela will be here in ten days. I hope I'll be able to finish the Level One Mastery during that time," Garen said in a light tone.

He had three different Secret Martial Arts.

He needed to do the strike-resistant training for the Iron Body, and he would be able to finish the entry level after that. The other two needed time and he wasn't sure if he could finish all the Level One Masteries before Andrela came.

But he was still satisfied with the results. Compared to normal people, his learning speed was already extraordinary.

Chapter 99: Seven Moon Gate

"Since the inception of martial arts, I must be the first one that has trained multiple secret methods at once. A secret method would at least take a couple of years to train and master. The secret method is also martial arts which means that without practice its power would deteriorate due to loss of familiarity. It's similar to going against the tide. Without a day of practice, three days of effort may go to waste. Without my special ability that can consolidate and reinforce the training results, it would be impossible to train other secret methods.

"The body's adaptability is like this."

He raised his head and scanned the roof's edge and the starry night. A bright crest hung in the night's sky as the moon cast a veil with its light.

"It would be better if I don't go home now, in case something happens in the near future, and my family will be worried." Garen made up his mind to stay at the dojo.

The news of his return didn't leak out as only a few select individuals knew about it.

He gently let out a sigh.

The hallway in front of the Dojo's library was pitch black and silent.

He strolled along the hallway. He had only taken a few steps when he saw a shadow sitting by the right wall.

He walked closer to take a better look.

"Grace?" Garen was surprised by her presence.

The shadow was Grace in a professional office assistant attire. Her graceful legs were covered by a thick layer of stockings and closed together. She was curled into a ball as if she was in a chilling weather.

She subconsciously opened her eyes when she heard the voice and looked at Garen in front of her.

"Garen you are done." Weakness transmitted through her voice. She tried to stand up, but her legs were sore. She lost balance and almost fell.

Garen caught her still in the air, feeling the fragility of her body. It was burning.

Grace grasped onto his body with force.

"Why are you waiting here?" Garen asked gently. "Manuyllton Corporation's intelligence gathering is impressive. I just got back, and you already know. When did you come here?"

"Afternoon..." Grace's voice dimmed, and she sounded frailer.

Garen reached a hand to touch her forehead. It was burning.

"You have a fever. There are doctors and nurses with the master. I'll take you there for a checkup. It shouldn't be a big problem."

He lifted her by the waist and strode to the room where his master rested.

The dojo was silent. There was no indication of any light, either. The massive dojo appeared hollow and void.

It was a short walk before they reached the room at the corner. A nurse was carrying a bucket of water from the room.

The dim yellow light slipped out past the edge of the door. Simon's silhouette was dozing off beside the bed.

Garen carried Grace and with a lowered voice asked, "Ms. Nurse, could you please find some cold and fever medicine for my friend?"

"No problem." The nurse was an ordinary girl with small freckles on her face, and she agreed without hesitation. "But don't bring her into the room. The patient in there has not yet recovered, and he may catch a cold."

"Okay."

"Put me down!" Grace began to resist Garen's hand. Her legs kicked, and her face had a vivid redness to it from the fever, which confused her senses.

Garen shook his head speechlessly as he waited for a while at the door. The nurse he spoke to found another one to arrange a room for Grace. Only then, could Garen find some time and walk into his master's room.

Simon drooled as he had fallen asleep with his head slanted to the side against the back of the chair.

Garen gently closed the door, but the sound was low enough that it didn't even wake him up. He walked over and tapped on his shoulder.

"Wooo." Simon slurped up the drool in a hurry. "Se... Senior brother!" When he saw Garen walk in, he was shocked and hastily stood up.

"Your arm is still in a cast, why are you not getting any rest? Go back to your room and sleep!" Garen told him with a stern face while trying to keep his voice steady.

"But the dojo master..." Simon wavered.

"I'll be here," Garen said. "Master hasn't woken up yet?"

Simon's face dimmed. "No, not even once. He has been like this since we returned from the Celestial Circle Gate."

"He wasn't injured that seriously, what's going on?" Garen frowned with his eyebrows raised.

"I don't know, the doctor said that the dojo master's body is fine. They just don't know why he is unconscious," Simon replied with an undertone. "The dojo master is going to be okay, right? Senior Brother?" A worrisome expression appeared on his face.

"It's going to be okay, I am here, right?" Garen patted his shoulder. "Go rest now, I'll take care of him."

"I have only been here for a bit, Collin was here before." Simon laughed feeling a little embarrassed.

"To be fair, you don't have to stay here with me," Garen suddenly said. "You are just regular trainees."

"You don't have to say that! Senior Brother, we have already made up our minds, and we are going to stay at the dojo. Regardless of the results, the dojo has given us too much. This is Collin and I's choice. Carrie is different from us because she still has her parents and brother, so we convinced her to go back. Senior Brother, you won't blame us for this decision, right?" Simon calmed as he expressed his thoughts.

"Of course not." Garen didn't know what was the best thing to say at such a moment. "You guys don't have to do this much."

"Don't worry, Senior Brother." Simon smiled. "Collin and I are free from worry. It's the dojo master that has taught us everything. I'll go back and rest now, the master will depend on you now."

"Mhmm, you can go back." Garen nodded.

He watched Simon slowly left the room and closed the door.

Garen was deep in thought.

Compared to Senior Sister Rosetta, the normal core students were more like master Fei Baiyun's disciples. During the dojo's crisis, they didn't choose to leave but instead stayed with the dojo to fight together.

It was in critical times like this, when the dojo had almost fallen apart, that trust could be garnered.

Garen silently sat on the chair Simon had used and looked at the master lying in bed.

"Master, although the dojo is facing the most difficult situation since its inception, there are still some disciples that are worth fighting for and protecting. This is your luck, and our luck."

Despite being here for only one year, he felt a blood connection with Fei Baiyun who had taught him everything he knew. Fei Baiyun spent all his effort to provide him with the best route for growth. Even with Manuyllton Corporation's incident, he personally stepped in to solve the issue for him.

This time only Grace came. The bodyguards and Cynthia were all gone without a trace. The Corporation had clearly seen that the tide had turned and recalled them. When a ship is sinking, this is the obvious choice.

"If we can go through this crisis together, you shouldn't disagree with Collin and Simon becoming real disciples, right?" This was his last sentence before letting out a long sigh and closing his eyes to rest.

Fei Baiyun was still sleeping in bed with faint hints breathing. Maybe he had heard what Garen had said, maybe not.

Due to the secret methods' teaching rules, only disciples could learn.

Fei Baiyun had already announced that he would not teach any disciples. So Garen decided to teach himself. The best candidate was second senior brother Farak, but he was out there trying to assassinate senior sister Rosetta without any information.

Although he was confident in second senior brother's abilities, Garen was afraid that external forces would be involved.

For the longest time, the difference between the second senior brother and senior sister was minuscule at best. But he had been going easy on her as his force was too explosive without constraint. Thus, he would often lose against Rosetta. It would be different in a life and death situation.

Fights between martial adepts of the same level were also dependent on the feeling that day.

He sat in the master's room almost until the next morning. Only when a new nurse was about to come in to switch in, did Garen finally leave to train the secret methods.

He walked around the dojo and gained a better understanding of the situation.

Due to the riots in the gate, the majority of the core disciples had left. The lower level students were sent home on vacation. The sub-gates only had people to look after the door. Collin and Simon were the only ones left in the gate.

Only the core disciples knew the crisis the gate was facing. The majority of other students were not aware of the situation. Based on dojo master Fei Baiyun's reputation, most of them thought that everything would be normal after some time passed. They didn't know how severe the situation was.

The dojo that had been once filled with over a thousand people now only had less than ten remaining.

Not including Garen, Collin and Simon, only a few workers that had been here for years stayed.

Garen strolled into the dojo while the passing rooms and hallways spoke of the emptiness of the once prosperous White Cloud Gate. Only desolate air and marks of prosperity remained.

Garen left the dojo and ate breakfast at a store nearby. He then ordered some food for the people remaining and asked for it to be delivered to the dojo. He then returned to the Martial Coliseum on the second floor, where he started to train The Iron Body secret method. It only required one more level which needed an external force to aid the training.

The Martial Coliseum had a small room with heavy iron balls hanging from the ceiling. They were meant to train against hard hits.

This was because the White Cloud Gate's basic Explosive Fist required this condition.

He stood without any robes in the middle of tens of iron balls. They were the size of a human head, and Garen even added spikes on top of them.

The dense iron balls were like urchins that surrounded Garen in the middle.

He inhaled and exhaled before starting to follow the Iron Body's breathing method.

After a complete cycle, he began furiously pushing the iron balls around him.

Dang! Dang! Dang!

The sound of collision echoed within the room.

Following immediately after, were the sounds of spikes hitting against Garen. The clanking noise rang like metal impacting another piece of metal.

Garen's skin began to darken to a black color, at the same time as it gained a metallic sheen.

The countless metal balls swung in the room and collided with his body. They would then get pushed back from the force of his body and come back even stronger.

Every metal ball weighed more than ten pounds. With the added force, the force of the collision was at least over 100 pounds. The spikes made the area of collision decrease, which meant that the force Garen's body received drastically increased.

He only felt a tingling sensation that made him want to scratch the place hit. But he knew this was normal.

He practiced until noon before taking a break to eat. Eat, rest, train. Eat, rest, train. He repeated the same routine again, and again, and again.

Chapter 100: Seven Moon Gate 2

Two days passed by in a glimpse.

Finally.

Dang!

An iron ball with a spike smashed against the side of Garen's face. However, the crisp metal clanking noise made it sound like the ball collided against a piece of indestructible metal.

Joy flashed across Garen's eyes as he forced his way out through the waves of iron balls.

"I'll have to trouble you for a bit."

Collin stood courteously at the corner of the room with a black metal spear in his hand. The spear was as thick as a person's arm and as long as three metal spears, its tip piercingly sharp.

"Let Grace go first," Collin said, nodding.

"That works too." Garen didn't seem to be bothered.

The two of them walked out of the practice room and into the empty Martial Coliseum.

Grace was waiting in the middle of the room. She had an assault rifle in her hand. After Garen came out, she looked worried. "Garen, are you sure this is okay?"

"Don't worry, let's start." Garen nodded. "Remember to wear a bulletproof vest."

He had asked Grace to find an assault rifle to test his body's defense. His originally strong body's condition would require testing to determine its strength after training the Iron Body Technique.

Although Grace had seen Garen's impeccable physical defense, it was an assault rifle she was holding. The bullets shot from this type of weapon were powerful, piercing and in no way comparable to pistol bullets. She still had her doubts in her mind, but it was for helping Garen to train, so she listened to him.

She wore a full set of bulletproof clothing, with helmet and gloves, while Collin was asked to hide in a small room nearby.

She raised the assault rifle and aimed directly at Garen.

"Should I start?"

"Begin firing."

Garen took a deep breath, and his muscles began to tighten. His entire upper body expanded by a full size as if he was a barbarian with a giant's blood from the legends. He towered over the 170 centimeter tall Grace.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

The rapid firing echoed through the Martial Coliseum.

Garen's body exploded with tiny sparks, but they faded in a blink of an eye. The bullet impacts made the sound of metal striking metal.

"Puuuuushhhh!" Garen thrust his palm forward.

He swiped his palm in front of him. The clanking sound was fiercest there.

The noise of bullets colliding came to an abrupt stop.

Grace stared hysterically at Garen, standing not far from her. He calmly extended his hand and faced the ground. A couple bullets dropped down, bouncing lightly up and down.

In the White Gate Martial Coliseum.

Garen stood naked in the middle of the Martial Coliseum.

Collin and a group of hired men held onto the black spear with the tip pointed directly at his abs.

Ahhhhh!

They thrust the spear at Garen at full strength.

They marched forward with the same rhythm as they used all of their strength to push the black metal spear forward. Their speed increased as they got closer and closer.

Dang!

The spear's tip collided directly with Garen's abs in a manner of striking a metal block.

Garen's entire body shook as he retreated two steps backward before quickly regaining his balance. He pushed back against the group of eight people.

The vibration he created forced the men to drop the spear. It almost hit their feet as it fell down.

It was fortunate that Collin managed to grab the spear and slowly put it down.

The men stepped back. They looked at Garen with eyes full of terror, as if he were an alien.

"Congratulations, Senior Brother!" Collin exclaimed, seeing that Garen's abs were perfectly fine.

"Senior brother's strength is impeccable! He can definitely beat Andrela's ass to the ground." Simon laughed hysterically.

Garen shook his head speechlessly. Simon's arm had not yet recovered, but his audacity and cocky attitude had already returned.

Grace calmly walked over to wipe away the sweat off of him before giving him some salt water to replenish his body.

Garen took the cup of water and downed it clean. He saw what had happened to him and felt something odd.

"Ok, rest for a little, and then find more people in the afternoon. You guys will attack from all directions."

"Understood."

After seeing everyone's pressure alleviate, Garen was certain he'd achieved his goal. Everyone was under high duress and fear when they heard the Celestial Circle Gate was invading. But now that he displayed the unbelievable amount of force, it would ease the enormous amount of pressure everyone was holding and calm their minds.

Although he had officially mastered the entry level of the Iron Body secret method, he didn't know how much his defence had actually increased. Weapon damage differed, and even between assault rifles, there were significant variances in damage among the different models.

The assault rifle Grace managed to get was obtained through a network of connections, hence its power was limited. Since those people weren't part of the military, the assault rifle would be different from ones they encountered on the way back.

"It's disappointing that the progress in Dark Iron Palm and Firestream Fist is limited. Looks like it'll be impossible to master them in a short amount of time. Dark Iron Palm requires the build up of toxins, whereas Firestream Fist's progress is simply too slow. I must think of other ways."

He pondered, standing in the same spot.

"It would be ideal if there are secret methods similar to Iron Body."

He placed his thoughts someplace else as he approached Collin on the side. With his voice lowered, he said, "Oh, the Twelve Southern Gates are closest to the Circle Dance Gate and Seven Mood Gate. The Celestial Circle Gate is going to be an uphill battle, you guys have to train hard. If you have any questions, just ask me. In the afternoon I plan to visit one of the two Gates and see if I can find something useful from their Wushu collections. Do you know which one of these two Gates has a wider collection?"

The group quieted down after hearing that the subject took a serious turn. Grace led the men away, so they wouldn't interrupt the conversation, and used the time to pay them for the services.

When they heard the question, both Collin and Simon looked troubled.

"Senior Brother, we are only disciples, and thus, do not have a lot of encounters with these Gates," Collin replied with her voice lowered. "I only know that the Circle Dance Gate is farther away. The Seven Moon Gate is located in the Skylark Mountain at Dinah City, which is near us. The Seven Moon Gate is also renowned as the Seven Moon Corporation. They are a conglomerate that's known for real estate, heavy metal, crafts and multiple other areas. I am not too sure about the other things."

Garen's eyebrows rose slightly when he heard the response. "Do you know something more, Simon?"

"I... hehe." Simon touched his nose and didn't respond, only laughing awkwardly.

"I know something about the Seven Moon Corporation," Grace, who just came over, said. "It has always looked for books to add to their collection. When I was at Manleyton Corporation, I've been notified several times about their purchases of related books. They won't disappoint you."

Garen nodded. "I will make a trip to Dinah City in the afternoon with the address they provided. Perhaps I will find something useful. Also, the White Cloud Gate's base is basically non-existent. We better move

until second senior brother comes back. If there is any danger after I leave, you guys flee in different directions, so it'll be difficult to trace you."

Although he knew that if the White Cloud Gate base was captured, it would be detrimental to the reputation of the Southern Twelve Gates, for the safety of everyone, Garen carefully told everyone to abandon it.

"Understood, Senior brother, you don't have to worry," Simon responded. The sentence sounded odd as Collin pinched him.

"This is a conflict between the martially adept. You guys are in a different situation compared to me. I killed Celestial Circle Gate's Ni Tenstar, so there is no way it'll be easily resolved. But the rule is that conflicts stop at the family level, but they will only bother me with the rule. As long as I don't hide, my family will be okay. If you guys hide, they will not make trouble with your families. If you must run, do so immediately. After I leave, you guys go hide somewhere with the master. Is that okay?"

"No problem! I can take care of this, I have a mansion in the rural area that's vacant. I can move everyone there." Grace nodded as she responded. Everyone agreed.

Garen carefully explained to Collin and the group what was the safest way to handle certain situations. He then answered some questions they had in the Martial Coliseum, and only after that put on some clothes and left the dojo. Even Grace, who wanted to follow was refused. He would have more flexibility going alone.

The truth was that White Cloud Gate's true power consisted of only six people, the four brothers along with Master and an elder. All the others were considered mercenaries and had no loyalty, and were a negligible force.

Now, Master was unconscious, the senior sister had betrayed the Gate, the second senior brother's presence was unknown, and the third senior brother was prevented from leaving the house to join the conflict in the Wushu world. The elder had also disappeared without leaving any trace behind. The entire White Cloud Gate was left for Garen alone to defend.

Master's friends were all people from the Southern Twelve Gates. All of them were in deep water themselves, so none could have the freedom to lend a helping hand.

The Celestial Circle Gate had clearly indicated they would target White Cloud Gate. Andrela along with his companions were already on their way. Perhaps the Sixth Golden Loop's Su Lin would waste some of their time, dealing them for a few days, but Andrela would arrive at Huaishan City in a matter of a couple days' time regardless.

Garen adjusted his body's condition, recovering to full power. The first thing he had to do was ensure that everyone else had settled to avoid the problem in his backyard. Then he would head to the remaining Twelve Southern Gates to assist them.

He would have greater flexibility if he traveled alone as he would be able to assist other Gates in a hurry. They would concentrate all their forces to defend against the Celestial Circle Gate.

Of course, searching for lower tier secret methods was also one of his intentions.

Seven Moon Gate. Skylark Mountain's Peak, where Seven Moon corporations headquarters were located. There was the address left by Rampas when he left, and it was the destination of Garen's trip.

The fortunate thing was that the Seven Moon Gate was only a two hour drive away from Huaishan City. Although close, without this incident, the Seven Moon Gate might not have established a connection with the White Cloud Gate.

This ancient Gate was far more powerful compared to the White Cloud Gate. The former master in charge was not the strongest within the Gate. In contrast to White Cloud Gate, within the Seven Moon Gate, there were three people at the level of Fei Baiyun! They had a countless amount of disciples, and were far stronger. They were at the top of the pyramid in the entire Galantia province, and ranked second among the Southern Twelve Gates.

Garen guessed that the reason Andrela came was to target the Seven Moon Gate. He alone would be enough to deal with their conflict. Compared to a behemoth like the Seven Moon Gate, the White Cloud Gate was simply too weak.

All of the Southern Twelve Gates received a detrimental blow.

Even before reaching Dinah City, Garen spotted powerful martial adepts rushing to the mountain peak.

It was likely that the weaker Gates in the Southern Twelve Gates were seeing Seven Moon Gate as the last battleground and concentrated all their forces there. They wanted to use the Seven Moon Gate to preserve themselves.