

Dawn of a New Era

#Chapter 1: Back-to-School Season - Read Dawn of a New Era

Chapter 1: Back-to-School Season

Chapter 1: Chapter 1: Back-to-School Season

The sweltering summer days have mostly passed, and soon it will be back-to-school season.

Chen Shouyi locked up his bicycle and joined his group of friends, chatting and joking as they walked towards school.

"During this summer break, I signed up for a Martial Arts class. I feel I've made great progress, and I think there's a good chance I'll pass the Martial Artist Apprentice test by the end of senior year," the frail-looking Chen Shouyi declared loudly, patting his flat chest.

The short and chubby Zhao Yifeng chuckled and said sarcastically, "Oh, come on, who doesn't know each other here? Didn't you say last time on the phone that your mom signed you up for a math class and it made your head explode?"

Sun Xin chimed in from the side, "For people like us, hoping to pass the Martial Artist Apprentice test is just wishful thinking. We should just aim to get into a halfway decent college honestly."

Chen Shouyi's face stiffened slightly, embarrassed and defensive. "Who enrolls in just one class nowadays? This summer my schedule was packed every day, and I didn't slack on my martial arts either."

As if to reinforce his point, he continued, "In any case, I am determined to become a Martial Artist."

...

It's been nearly twenty years since Earth and the other dimension fused. Over these twenty years, both worlds have repeatedly engaged in large-scale wars trying to conquer one another, yet each attempt has met with disaster.

The main reason being that the rules of Earth and the other world are entirely different. Electronics and explosives malfunction in the other world, and the threefold gravity increase deters armies.

Similarly, when their deities and priests enter Earth, their Divine Power and magic dissipate quickly.

Up until now, several powerful deities have perished on Earth.

Only pure Martial Arts strength can traverse both worlds.

Since then, martial arts on Earth have developed rapidly, and becoming a Martial Artist to explore and conquer the other world has become a societal trend. Naturally, Chen Shouyi was influenced by this trend as well.

Unfortunately, he was born with congenital deficiencies, frail and sickly since childhood. Even though he gave his all, he couldn't keep up with others.

Chen Shouyi was secretly frustrated with his friends but didn't want to break off with them. He was neither academically inclined nor physically fit, lacked looks and a good family background, and had no presence in the class; these two were his only friends.

Perhaps due to their shared feelings of inadequacy, they found a rare sense of harmony.

After paying the school fees, Chen Shouyi quietly sat in the third-to-last row, eyes sneaking looks at the pretty figures around him.

Summer break had just ended, and it was still quite hot, so most of the girls in class were wearing light clothing.

They gathered in threes and fives, chatting incessantly, occasionally jumping around excitedly.

"Did you finish the summer homework?" Sun Xin asked as he put down his backpack.

"Of course I did!" Chen Shouyi replied, discreetly shifting his gaze back.

"Lend it to me for copying!"

"Three meals!"

"Just one, or I'll ask someone else," Sun Xin grunted.

"Fine, one meal. I want beef with potatoes!" Chen Shouyi decided to settle and took out his summer homework from his bag.

Watching Sun Xin bury his head in copying homework, Chen Shouyi felt a slight sense of superiority.

Then his expression darkened, realizing that he could only find any sense of superiority in front of his consistently low-ranking deskmate.

His performance was just mediocre, and in this ordinary third-rate high school's regular class, that kind of performance was only good enough for a college diploma at best.

The future seemed bleak to him.

In countless wild dreams, he would imagine himself in a luxury car, surrounded by bodyguards, with beautiful women fighting over him, yet he would look down on them, treating them as nothing.

Or he would envision himself as a powerful Martial Artist, with journalists flocking to him, microphones shoved in his face; he would remain calm, radiating confidence and speaking eloquently.

But dreams are just dreams, and waking up meant facing the harsh reality. This summer, he had put in a lot of effort, but saw little progress.

Sometimes the gap between a genius and an ordinary person is wider than that between an ape and a human.

...

The homeroom teacher Cao Lili, after giving birth last year, had her figure changed and she became increasingly nagging.

"Everyone is in their senior year now, so I won't say much. Those who understand already do, and those who don't should. The college entrance exam is an important crossroads in life, largely determining your future.

If we compare life to a marathon, the college entrance exam is the starting line where you truly enter society. If you gain an advantage at the start, you'll have an edge for at least the next while.

...

Of course, if you have a talent for martial arts, that's another matter, but that path is even harder.

Last year, including some students who entirely gave up on academics and took a year or two off, only twenty-one students passed the Martial Artist Apprentice exam and got into the Martial Artist Academy, even fewer than those who got into prestigious universities. Instead of investing a lot of energy into Martial Arts, you'd be better off studying hard and trying to get into a good school; at least there's a decent hope."

The martial spirit at Dongning Fifth Middle School wasn't strong. Those with talent were already picked up by other key schools at the primary level. After multiple screenings, those who ended up here at this third-rate high school were almost all the ones weeded out.

Not only did the school not have a Martial Arts class like Dongning First High School, but even the bi-weekly Martial Arts Class was often taken over by other subjects.

Listening to the homeroom teacher's motivational talk about college entrance exams, Chen Shouyi felt a sense of confusion.

In reality, he wasn't very firm on whether to go to college or the Martial Artist Academy. For him, passing the Apprentice test or the college entrance exam both seemed like distant prospects.

The entire morning, he was in a daze, not comprehending any of the lessons.

As soon as the bell rang for the end of class, Chen Shouyi quickly shook off all these wistful notions, and sprinted with Sun Xin and Zhao Yifeng to the cafeteria.

Compared to the public cafeteria, this small dining hall was clearly more upscale. On the first day after summer break, a lot of students still had some money. Even though they raced all the way there, there was already a long line when they arrived.

It took more than ten minutes before it was their turn.

"One serving of beef with potatoes."

"Same for me!"

"I'll have tomato scrambled eggs."

...

As Chen Shouyi stuffed his mouth with food, he criticized with his mouth full, "The chef must have changed this year. This beef is way overcooked, and the sauce lacks flavor. It's not as good as my dad's cooking!"

"I feel the same!" Sun Xin agreed. "When's the next time you're inviting us over to your house for a meal?"

"Like you haven't eaten at my place before. How many times have I invited you over? At least five times, right? Every time you visit, you end up staying for dinner," Chen Shouyi mocked.

"Why didn't we see your sister last time?" Zhao Yifeng interjected.

The moment his sister was mentioned, Chen Shouyi became highly alert: "She's away participating in the Ningzhou District high school martial arts exchange competition. Don't get any ideas about my sister."

If Chen Shouyi was just an ordinary person, then his sister Chen Xingyue was a genius. Currently, she's the top student in the Martial Arts class at the only key high school in the city. For her, the Martial Artist Apprentice test is no insurmountable barrier; she can easily overcome it.

His decision to not give up on martial arts was, in part, stimulated by his sister.

At that moment, a commotion arose in the cafeteria.

"Ding Liang is here."

"So that's Ding Liang!"

"I heard he passed the Martial Artist Apprentice test last semester, and the school even hung a banner!"

"Look at those impressive muscles; I want to squeeze them!"

Ding Liang strode into the cafeteria, his eyes straight ahead, his powerful muscles stretching his vest to the limit, drawing the admiring gaze and whispers of many girls.

Chen Shouyi couldn't help but feel envious.

What a bunch of shallow women.

One day.

I...

"Stop staring; it won't change anything! That's a talent you can't envy," Zhao Yifeng said quietly, patting his own chubby belly.

Zhao Yifeng's words were like a bucket of cold water, bringing Chen Shouyi back to reality.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2: Rotten Wooden Plank

In the afternoon after school, Chen Shouyi finally managed to shake off the suggestions of his two troublesome friends to go to the internet cafe, and rode his bicycle home alone.

"Dad, Mom, I'm back."

It was still early for dinner, not the busiest time yet, and there were no customers in the restaurant. Mrs. Chen sat at the cash register, pressing the calculator over and over, without looking up:

"Are you hungry? If you are, let your dad make you a rice dish."

People who run restaurants usually have dinner early, because during normal dinner time, it's often the busiest.

"Let's wait for little sister to eat together!" Chen Shouyi tossed his school bag down and said listlessly.

"Then don't just stand there, go to your room and do your homework!" Jiang Fen, Mrs. Chen, gave him a look and said with disdain.

"I don't have much homework today, I finished it a long time ago."

"Then help your dad clean the fish. With your grades, I've given up hoping for anything."

Chen Shouyi was used to being discouraged and had always been submissive, so he showed no reaction to these words and obediently ran to the kitchen.

While handling the ingredients, Chen Dawei chuckled, "Don't listen to your mom, go back to your room and read. Only one year until the college entrance exam, the chances for second-rate schools may be slim, but you might still be able to get into a third-rate school!"

"Who said your son is dumb? It's not that I don't work hard, but if I can't get good grades, what can I do?" Chen Shouyi couldn't help but mutter in complaint. This summer, he hadn't rested a single day, spending all his time in tutoring classes, yet his grades hadn't improved much.

He had always feared his mom the most, and these words he would only dare to say to his dad, but never to his mom.

As he spoke, he grabbed a fish, stunned it, and began skillfully scaling it.

"That's something to ask your mom; she didn't stay put during pregnancy, insisted on running around in the fields, and ended up falling and giving birth to you prematurely," Chen Dawei said happily, with a cheerful face.

Compared to the smart one, the second child, he preferred this silly son, who was just like him.

"So it's my fault!" Mrs. Chen, who was calculating accounts in the front, immediately raised her voice when she heard Chen Dawei: "Have you ever thought, during my

pregnancy, it was right in the middle of the harvest. If I didn't bring you water, would you all die of thirst?"

"Who's blaming you?" Chen Dawei paused for a moment as he was cutting meat and quickly said.

Chen Shouyi squeezed out a schadenfreude smile.

In this household, where yin was strong and yang was weak, his mom had the highest status, and her words were the most effective. His dad could only rank third; ahead of him was his sister, and of course, he was the least important.

"Ouch!"

Seemingly too happy and too sad, Chen Shouyi accidentally applied too much force while scaling the fish and cut his finger, causing it to bleed profusely.

"I've told you not to do it long ago, quickly go wash it. The band-aids are under the coffee table in the living room upstairs." Chen Dawei quickly said, glancing once.

With his hand injured, Chen Shouyi naturally couldn't continue, so he quickly washed his hand and slowly went upstairs.

Their house was a self-built street-facing building, with living quarters upstairs and a restaurant downstairs. When it was built, this area was still a rural suburb. Over the years, as the city expanded, this house had become more and more valuable.

He went upstairs, found the band-aids, and just as he was sticking one on, he heard his younger sister's sweet voice coming from downstairs.

Hearing the difference in how his mom treated his sister compared to him, Chen Shouyi secretly pursed his lips.

What a brown-noser!

Though he seemed to protect this younger sister outside, their relationship had never been too good in reality.

From childhood tussles over toys, snacks, and affection to competing over grades and awards as they grew up.

His sister's existence always made him feel worthless, like a walking piece of trash.

The saddest part was that when he was young and couldn't win in fights, he could still make her cry, but now, even that had become impossible.

Now she was already a prospective Martial Artist Apprentice. Even if she let him use one hand, she could still crush him.

"Brother, mom said you got hurt scaling the fish!" Soon, his sister Chen Xingyue came upstairs, smiling brightly.

Chen Xingyue, with her ponytail, fair skin, looked charming and spirited.

But only Chen Shouyi knew how devious this sister really was.

"It's nothing, just a small cut!" Chen Shouyi tried to maintain the dignity of an older brother and said calmly, detecting a hint of glee in her expression.

Chen Xingyue didn't press further, took the remote control, and turned on the TV.

"As we all know, the alternate world is a world ruled by gods. Its society is still in an uncivilized stage, similar to the period between the Stone Age and the Bronze Age in early human history, but recent explorations by pioneers indicate that the alternate world is undergoing dramatic changes.

Now, famous sociologist Professor Luo will provide a detailed commentary.

..."

The alternate world programs had always fascinated him, so Chen Shouyi settled down on the sofa to watch enthusiastically. After a while, he turned his head and asked in confusion, "Why aren't you doing your homework today?"

Chen Xingyue stared at the screen, expressionless, "I've already been admitted to the capital city Martial Arts Academy."

"What!" Chen Shouyi turned his head in shock, stammering slightly, "You... you've already passed the Martial Artist Apprentice exam."

"Not yet, but soon. My teacher estimated that with another month of practice, I can pass the exam."

"But..."

"There are thirty direct admission slots this year, three are allocated to first-year students, and I'm one of them." Chen Xingyue interrupted before Chen Shouyi could ask.

This calm and matter-of-fact tone almost made Chen Shouyi choke.

The Martial Arts Academy and the college entrance exams are staggered, with spring admissions, which means his two-year younger sister would graduate high school half a year earlier than him.

"You haven't told Mom and Dad yet?"

"Of course, such important news should be shared in the evening!" Chen Xingyue said.

Chen Shouyi retorted with some annoyance, "Then why are you telling me first?"

"Because you're my big brother, obviously I should tell you the good news first!" Chen Xingyue couldn't hold it anymore, her face breaking into a wide smile.

What an annoying sister, her heart is probably as dark as coal.

Chen Shouyi, feeling defeated, tried hard to control his facial muscles, which threatened to twist into a grimace. He clamped his mouth shut, fearing that if he continued listening to her, he might implode.

He stared intently at the television, but the program that had engaged him so much earlier now seemed utterly dull. Thinking about his bleak future, he could no longer sit still. He grabbed his backpack:

"I'm going to study."

"Dinner's ready soon!"

"I'm not eating... uh, bring it to my room later."

Once in his room, with the door shut, Chen Shouyi let his dejected expression show. Why were the girls in his class so adorable, yet his sister was so insufferable?

This was blatant showing off, rubbing salt into his wounds!

He took out his math textbook from his backpack, but with his mind so disturbed, he couldn't concentrate at all.

Pushing the math book aside, he walked over to the display cabinet in his room, hoping to change his mood.

The display cabinet served as both his bookshelf and his collection space. In addition to various reference books and anthologies, it housed many items with an otherworldly style, which were his favorites.

Bronze axes, leather shields, several stone tablets engraved with mysterious totems, a few wooden plaques in bizarre styles, all emitting a vibe of the Barbaric Wilderness.

Yet, these were all replicas bought from craft stores, easily recognizable even to an amateur like Chen Shouyi.

The bronze axe's material was clearly a product of industrial metallurgy, the shield leather was tanned cowhide, and the totems on those stone tablets bore no trace of age, while the stone itself was common granite found all over Earth.

But not everything was a replica; among them, there was one item Chen Shouyi suspected to be an authentic artifact from an alternate world.

This was a rotting wooden board.

Its color was dark, its appearance poor, almost decayed with holes everywhere, as if eaten by termites. This indicated it was likely a supernatural artifact of extraordinary origin and immense value.

Upon arriving on Earth, the supernatural forces within decomposed rapidly, causing the material to erode quickly.

It had become a truly rotten wooden plank, and even if thrown on the ground, an untrained eye wouldn't bother picking it up.

In fact, that's exactly how it was, Chen Shouyi found this rotten plank while passing a demolition site and instantly cherished it as a treasure.

He opened the cabinet and took out the rotten wooden board.

Under the corrosion of this universe's rules, the inside was already riddled with holes, yet he could still feel its material was extremely hard, faintly indicating its original extraordinary nature.

On its mottled surface, several mysterious patterns could be vaguely seen.

He had studied them before; they were narrative drawings, like many ancient Earth murals, depicting significant developments in some alternate world civilization.

The first time the people of that world used fire.

The first time they used writing.

...

In the top left corner of each drawing was a mysterious and complex emblem, each different. As an avid watcher of alternate world explanation programs, Chen Shouyi knew these were symbols of deities from those worlds, and not just one god.

Sadly, it was of no use. No matter how mysterious, objects that ended up on Earth would become ordinary.

He gently caressed the board, letting out a sigh for the umpteenth time, wishing this thing had real supernatural powers.

Imagining himself holding the board, countless brilliant lights shining upon the earth, he couldn't help but chuckle idiotically.

Chapter 3: Chapter 3: Book of Knowledge

Who in their youth hasn't fantasized about a miraculous encounter? Especially when this thing probably used to be a genuine supernatural artifact.

At this moment, Chen Shouyi did not notice that the finger he had stopped from bleeding with a band-aid had a thin stream of blood slowly seeping through the gaps, as if being drawn, toward the wooden board.

The moment the blood made contact.

The wooden board emitted a faint glow, as if eager to vanish without a trace.

Simultaneously, Chen Shouyi's brain felt like a bell's thunderous ringing, his body shuddered, and he collapsed limply to the ground, unconscious.

...

Uncertain how much time had passed, he felt as though he had traversed a long darkness, and in a half-dazed state, light appeared again in his eyes.

He gradually regained his senses, opening his eyes. As soon as he did, he instinctively gaped, his eyes widening in disbelief.

In front of him was a circular space with a diameter of about thirty meters, equivalent to the area of two school basketball courts. The edges of the space were filled with countless swirling gray mist, taking on various shapes, even including the mist beneath his feet.

This discovery startled Chen Shouyi, but he quickly realized there was no danger. It seemed some invisible force was supporting his body, allowing him to walk here as if on flat ground.

After a few tests, he soon relaxed.

The place was permeated with some kind of illusory aura, not only from the mist but also from himself. His body appeared transparent, and his clothes seemed like they would soon dissolve into mist.

In this space, it wasn't just mist. The most striking feature was the small, semi-transparent tree over a meter tall at the center, which was the only thing besides him that could be considered alive.

For some reason, seeing that tree gave Chen Shouyi a sense of blood connection, as if the tree was him, and he was the tree.

The tree was lush and full, its branches spreading widely. Through the sparse mist at his feet, Chen Shouyi seemed to see countless slender twisted roots extending endlessly into the distance.

It was then he noticed that each leaf on the tree flowed with countless images.

Just a slight focus on these images rapidly filled his mind with a flood of information; it was a memory from thirteen years ago.

Stunned, he gazed at the thousands of leaves with flowing phantom-like images: "Could these leaves represent all the memories I've had since birth?"

In that moment, an unfamiliar fear sprouted in his heart, the alert and awe of a human when their own memories are intruded upon.

But this fear quickly faded, and soon Chen Shouyi was overwhelmed by the curiosity within.

He gradually discovered a pattern: the lower the leaf, the older the memory. Memories he had completely forgotten, which he could no longer recall, were clearly displayed here, showing every second of his past experiences with meticulous detail.

He even spotted, at the very bottom, vague yet warm and comforting memories from before he was born.

His face could not hide his amazement; the discovery before him far exceeded the limits of his imagination.

Among the leaves seemed to grow fruits of various sizes, some unripe, some slightly red. Each time he focused, information automatically manifested in his mind.

He found that these represented all the knowledge he had learned since birth.

The largest among these fruits was "Chinese Language," which appeared in his proficiency level as "Mastery," about the size of an apple. As his daily-used mother tongue, it appeared slightly red, standing tall among the other fruits.

As for the rest, not only were they several times smaller, but most were immature, carrying a raw greenness.

He looked at the marbles-sized Physics, Chemistry, Biology, and even smaller Mathematics, English.

Chen Shouyi couldn't help but blush slightly.

Next, with a certain hopefulness, he took a long time carefully distinguishing, finally finding his Martial Arts knowledge on an insignificant small twig.

The Thirty-six Forms of Body Refinement was as tiny as sesame seed, rated as "Beginner," while "Enter Tranquility to Cultivate Self" was even smaller, only as large as a pinpoint, rated as "Uninitiated," hardly noticeable without a closer look. All the messy Swordsmanship from his summer Martial Arts class also stood here, all uninitiated.

Fortunately, with Chen Shouyi's level of shamelessness, he didn't mind these at all now.

"If the leaves and fruits represent memories and knowledge, then what does the trunk represent?"

He looked at the trunk, and this time the information response took much longer than before. Just as Chen Shouyi was about to avert his gaze, the next moment, a complex flood of information frantically surged into his mind.

After a long while, he finally organized this information, his eyes shining with wonder.

It turned out this tree was originally named the Book of Knowledge, crafted from the heart of the primal World Tree by the powerful deity God of Knowledge from another world. During the first invasion war when the other world and Earth merged, this deity attempted to enter this world in person but ended up falling.

His divine artifact, the Book of Knowledge, consequently drifted to Earth.

During the struggle against the world's rules here, the power of the Book of Knowledge disintegrated, and its Divine Power dissipated.

Normally, its power should have faded away long ago, rendered mundane.

However, its essence was inherently powerful, and its abilities were unique, particularly with advanced analytical and computational functions. It gradually found a rare breather

during the resistance against the rules and instinctively, or perhaps even willfully, quickly aligned and adapted to this world's rules.

Name: Chen Shouyi

Attributes

Strength: 10.4 (10)

Agility: 10.4 (10)

Constitution: 10.3 (10)

Intelligence: 10.3 (10)

Perception: 10.3 (10)

Willpower: 10.0 (10)

Knowledge: Chinese Language (Mastery 5); Physics (Proficient 12); Chemistry (Proficient 11); Biology (Proficient 10); Mathematics (Proficient 8); English (Proficient 5); Computers (Beginner 6); Cooking (Beginner 5); Thirty-six Forms of Body Refinement (Beginner 5); Enter Tranquility to Cultivate Self (Uninitiated); Swordsmanship (Uninitiated); Archery (Uninitiated)

Energy Accumulation: 1.2

Chen Shouyi felt that the mere hundred or so words in his mind seemed to summarize his entire seventeen years of mediocre life.

But now everything was different!

The information just now allowed him to fully grasp the usage of this "Book of New Knowledge." Presently, it had only one remaining function: the optimization of knowledge.

He glanced at all the knowledge he possessed and chose the Thirty-six Forms of Body Refinement.

"Optimize!"

As soon as the words were spoken, 1 point of his Energy rapidly drained away, leaving only 0.2.

The next moment, his spirit wavered, like entering a dreamland, surrounded by a realm of gray mist, only him practicing the Thirty-six Forms of Body Refinement repeatedly.

From the initial clumsiness to gradual fluency, over time, his movements began to subtly change, some useless moves were discarded, while others saw slight adjustments.

Seemingly more in sync with himself.

Unsure how much time had passed, perhaps hours, or maybe days, at some moment, he finally awoke from the dream.

Chen Shouyi quickly recalled, surprised to find his memory of the Thirty-six Forms of Body Refinement incredibly clear, every detail vivid in his mind.

As if he had truly practiced them countless times.

Just as he couldn't resist testing them out in this space, the space suddenly shook, and faintly a voice seemed to echo from afar, ethereal and empty.

...

Chapter 4: Chapter 4: A Brother's Pride

"Brother! Brother! What happened to you?"

"Wake up, I promise I'll never intentionally annoy you again."

"Please wake up!"

"Brother! Brother... Dad! Mom! Come quickly, my brother has fainted."

Chen Shouyi opened his eyes, and the first thing he saw was his sister's tear-stained face. His eyes widened with shock, and he quickly sat up from Chen Xingyue's embrace: "What happened? How did you come in?"

"Brother, did you know you just fainted?" Chen Xingyue said regretfully, tears streaming down her face.

Chen Shouyi then remembered that before merging with the "Book of Knowledge," he was standing, and after entering the space, he ended up lying horizontally.

After figuring everything out, he looked at his sister, who seemed different today, and suddenly realized she wasn't that annoying after all.

He flexed his thin arms to show his strength, saying something he didn't believe himself: "Don't say that, how could I faint? I'm in great health! It's just the first day of class, and I didn't quite adjust, feeling a bit too tired."

To emphasize his point, he added, "Basically, I was just too tired."

Instinctively, he didn't want his sister to know about the Book of Knowledge.

Unfortunately, no one believed his explanation. After his parents rushed over, the situation escalated, the restaurant quickly closed, and he was immediately taken to the hospital for a full-body examination. Naturally, they found nothing wrong, not even a trace of the Book of Knowledge.

This made Chen Shouyi completely relieved.

On the way back in the car, Chen Shouyi mumbled, "I told you I was fine, but still insisted on going to the hospital."

"Shut up!" Mrs. Chen said with a displeased expression, "How do you know you're fine? How could you faint just like that? We'll go to a big hospital in Zhonghai City next time to check again."

"I think Shou Yi is a bit malnourished. Look at how skinny he is — when I go out with him, I'm embarrassed to say I run a restaurant," said Chen Dawei, who was driving.

Chen Shouyi awkwardly touched his ribs. This incident made him realize he should never enter the Book of Knowledge during the day again.

...

It was already 8:30 when they returned to the restaurant.

At this time, it was naturally impossible to continue doing business.

The Chen siblings helped Mrs. Chen and Jiang Fen clean up, while Chen Dawei went back to the kitchen to cook a large table full of dishes.

Looking at the bowl filled with meat dishes, Chen Shouyi didn't speak and just buried his head in the food.

"This is for you!" Chen Xingyue quickly placed a piece of rib in Chen Shouyi's bowl with a slight embarrassment, turning her head to the side.

Chen Shouyi felt a bit touched, realizing his sister wasn't always that annoying.

"Siblings should get along like this. All that quarreling before was not right. Your brother is weak and doesn't do well in studies. In the future, you should help him more and not always provoke him," Mrs. Chen said, feeling gratified at the heartwarming scene between the siblings.

"Mom, I know!" Chen Xingyue said, her face blushing slightly.

Chen Shouyi's heart felt complex, unsure whether to be happy or sad, wondering if this was how useless he seemed in his mother's eyes.

But compared to his brilliant and talented sister, he did seem quite ordinary. From a young age, he never achieved any remarkable results; his last memory of receiving a certificate was back in kindergarten.

Back then, every kid got several certificates.

"Dad, Mom, I haven't told you the good news yet!" Chen Xingyue held it in for a long time before she couldn't anymore and exclaimed.

"What good news?" Chen Dawei put down his wine glass, looking expectant.

"I've been directly admitted to Beijing Martial Arts Academy!"

"What?" Mrs. Chen exclaimed with joy, "My good daughter, why didn't you say earlier? We should have gone to a nice hotel to celebrate."

"Tomorrow isn't too late," Chen Dawei said with a smile.

Nowadays, martial arts have become a trend. Even as a Martial Artist Apprentice, one can easily secure a middle-upper-class income in many martial arts training institutions and schools.

Not to mention entering the prestigious Beijing Martial Arts Academy, where a significant percentage become government-funded Martial Artists.

"Don't bother, Dad and Mom. Even if I weren't directly admitted, I'm confident I'd pass the Martial Artist Apprentice assessment this year. Let's celebrate then," Chen Xingyue said confidently.

...

The parents were filled with joy and gratification!

Chen Xingyue was beaming with excitement!

The dining table was filled with a cheerful atmosphere.

Chen Shouyi forced a smile, saying insincere words of blessing. The food that he previously found flavorful now tasted like wax.

After dinner, Chen Shouyi took a shower and returned to his bedroom.

He lay in bed, tossing and turning, unable to sleep.

After a while, he suddenly sat up, lost in thought for a moment, then suddenly remembered something. He quickly jumped out of bed, took a stance, and began practicing the optimized Thirty-Six Moves of Body Refining.

In twenty years, martial arts have developed rapidly, and various body refining methods have emerged. The Thirty-Six Moves of Body Refining was introduced by the Martial Arts Bureau, combining the training methods of warriors from other worlds, traditional martial arts training, Indian Yoga body refining, and human biology research, to eliminate what's inferior while keeping the superior, resulting in a standard body refining method.

Now it's the third version, proving to be more effective than the previous two versions.

Don't be deceived by his skinny figure; he is naturally slim.

In reality, his muscles are perfectly arranged, tight like intertwined steel wires, with an eight-pack that can be seen without flexing.

Compared to twenty years ago, his physical quality could easily qualify as a national first-level athlete.

For instance, his strength, though his attributes only show 10.4, he can bench press 110 kg and squat nearly 200 kg.

His 100m sprint speed is 10.20 seconds.

However, compared to the Martial Artist Apprentice assessment standards, with a male 100m sprint under 9.5 seconds and a bench press of 200 kg, he really falls short. And that's just the physical fitness. There's also the more challenging cold weapon assessment.

...

Following memory, Chen Shouyi began practicing, and after the knowledge was optimized, it became incredibly clear, like a steel imprint, engraved in his mind, as if he had practiced it countless times before.

From the initial unfamiliarity, he became more proficient on the second round, and by the third round, he executed it smoothly without much adjustment.

He quickly noticed the differences in this version optimized by the Book of Knowledge. It seemed to engage all the muscles in his body and required a lot more effort.

Originally, he could do ten rounds in one go, exhausting all his strength.

However, now he felt exhausted after just four rounds.

Furthermore, when the motion speed increased, and the positions were seamlessly connected, his body would experience a tingling sensation akin to being electrified. This feeling was quite peculiar, like a heat flow spreading throughout, warming his body.

Sweat continuously dripped from his body. As Chen Shouyi gritted his teeth and completed the fifth round, his strength was entirely depleted, and he could no longer support himself, plopping down onto the ground.

He called for the Book of Knowledge, and soon his attributes flashed in his mind.

The Thirty-Six Moves of Body Refining had progressed from (Beginner 5) to (Beginner 12), an increase of 7 points.

In the darkness, his eyes shined brightly. He couldn't help but clench his fists, only this could suppress the urge to shout out and vent.

"Now with the Book of Knowledge, I will eventually become a genius like my sister."

In the spirit of an ambitious youth, even his physical exhaustion seemed to lessen, and after resting for a while, he dragged his weary body to stand up, clenched his teeth, and practiced three more rounds until he couldn't move a finger. Only then did he lay down on the bed, too exhausted to bother showering again, and as soon as his head hit the pillow, he fell into a deep sleep.

PS: Begging for recommendations, asking for bookmarks! Everyone, please give some encouragement.

Chapter 5: Chapter 5: Lunging Thrust with Sword

Early next morning, Chen Shouyi opened his eyes and stared blankly for dozens of seconds before he finally recalled yesterday's strange encounter.

Though he was fully awake, after a night's rest, everything felt like a dream, and he experienced a strong sense of unreality.

He cautiously tested, calling out to the "Book of Knowledge."

It wasn't until the illusory attribute panel flashed in his mind that he completely breathed a sigh of relief.

"This is real, not a dream. I am truly different now!"

Silently chanting a few phrases, his chest seemed to be filled with overflowing power, and his entire body was charged with boundless energy.

At this moment, he noticed the energy on the panel had increased. After optimization yesterday, only 0.2 points of energy were left, and just after one night's sleep, it increased to 0.24.

Perhaps in a few days, he could optimize again.

He reached out for the phone on his bedside table and checked the time; it was only five-thirty.

At this time, previously, he would have continued to sleep for a little longer, until enduring until six-thirty when his mom would wake him up, and he would rise reluctantly and groggily.

But at this moment, he was completely awake.

He quickly sat up in bed.

"Ah!"

In the next moment, he felt sore muscles all over his body, but this soreness brought a smile to his face.

As a rule, someone like him, who practiced the Thirty-six Body Conditioning Forms several times almost every night, rarely experienced excessive lactic acid secretion. The only reason for this condition was that the practice involved many muscles that had never been exercised before.

This was undoubtedly a good thing, indicating that the optimized Body Conditioning Thirty-six could more thoroughly exercise the body's muscles than the standard version.

He gritted his teeth and endured the soreness, walked into the bathroom, and took a shower.

After showering, while brushing his teeth, Chen Xingyue walked in wearing pajamas; her eyes half-squinted, and she looked drowsily towards the toilet, ready to undress to use the bathroom.

Seeing this, Chen Shouyi quickly coughed.

Chen Xingyue instantly opened her eyes, looked at Chen Shouyi, her gaze sharp with a subtle presence, until she realized it was her brother, and then instantly returned to her original expression, exclaiming, "Brother, you're so annoying, you scared me!"

Chen Shouyi was actually scared by her, his heartbeat still pounding under such formidable presence, he felt like a harmless little white rabbit before her, as if he could be crushed at any moment.

Fortunately, she was just his sister, giving Chen Shouyi enough psychological advantage to quickly collect himself and retort, "You blame me for this; couldn't you check before entering the toilet?"

"Who told you to be so lively today, waking up so early. And really, you're just in your underwear in front of your own sister and don't feel ashamed?"

Chen Shouyi subconsciously glanced at his underwear, his chest tightened, feeling momentarily speechless.

His sharp-tongued sister, who seemed more obedient and cute yesterday, just one day later revealed her true colors.

Ultimately, the tongue-tied Chen Shouyi could only respond with a cold huff, quickly finished brushing his teeth, snorted, and returned to his room.

...

"Dad! Mom! I'm off to school."

While grabbing the morning buns Mrs. Chen bought, stuffing them into his mouth, he pushed his bicycle and headed out.

"Be careful on the road!"

"Got it!"

After devouring the four meat buns, he still felt hungry, thus had to buy five more midway from a snack shop to finally feel full.

...

Sun Xin entered the classroom, already complaining, "You weren't here yesterday, really pissed me off. I finally reached the gold rank, but got matched with grade schoolers, now I'm dropped back to silver."

Chen Shouyi kept reciting English, casually saying, "What's there to be mad about, it's just a game, just climb back up again."

Mrs. Chen was strict; he seldom played games, nor had the conditions to do so, like his family didn't even have a computer, and even his phone was an old model discarded by his parents, only capable of browsing the internet and making calls, to prevent him from going astray.

"You have no common ground with you," Sun Xin said frustratedly, at that moment discovering something "Huh, today why so diligent, got stimulated."

Compared to him usually, Chen Shouyi although diligent, wouldn't go to such lengths, conversing with him yet multitasking, reciting English words.

"Now it's senior year, if I am not diligent, it'll be too late!" Chen Shouyi replied without turning his head, he was filled with energy, and he was motivated.

Whether passing the Martial Artist Apprentice examination or getting into college, he had to achieve at least one goal.

Sun Xin chuckled, put down his backpack, unconcerned.

He had heard such words from Chen Shouyi plenty of times, each lasting only three minutes of enthusiasm, before reverting soon enough.

...

Afternoon, at Dongning No. 5 High School's basketball gym.

Dozens of rubber human figures were neatly lined up in two rows.

One by one, boys and girls in school uniforms, holding wooden swords, continually executing thrusts against the human figures.

The sound of "pop pop" was constant.

A robust middle-aged man in sports attire walked amongst the crowd, occasionally correcting the actions.

The cold weapon examination for Martial Artist Apprentices required archery as a must, while the choice of short-range weapons wasn't confined to swords; any weapon like a knife, sword, spear, or even a dagger could be used, but swords were predominant, and coupled with their class's PE teacher being skilled in swordsmanship, their Martial Arts Class cold weapon training exclusively taught swordsmanship.

Chen Shouyi seriously executed thrust after thrust, leaving the human figures swaying precariously.

The models' upper body was structured like a human, yet with no feet, standing on a semi-spherical base filled with several tens of kilograms of metal, resembling a roly-poly toy, impossible to topple regardless of force.

"Every standard lunge thrust represents the synergy of all body muscles."

"Don't use brute force for lunge thrusts; it's not about being bigger or better. Truly experience your power output, see if your muscles synchronize, and find the rhythm of muscle synchronization."

"From the pressing of the left foot on the ground, up the legs and buttocks, to the waist, to the chest, then the arms and fingers, see if every muscle is exerting force, and if every joint is involved in power output."

"The human body is full of levers, how to use the least force to leverage the greatest power, amplifying force layer by layer from the base to ultimately burst through to the sword tip!"

"If everyone's 'quiet meditation, refining oneself' has reached a certain level, achieving this step will be relatively easier, if not, incessant practice is the only way."

The PE teacher's discussion on thrusting requirements was often repeated, Chen Shouyi could already recite them fluently.

In the internet age, knowledge was inexpensive; with a slight motion of your finger, you could gather a heap of teaching materials, videos, and texts.

But knowing versus achieving were worlds apart, and nearly impossible, the majority including himself couldn't perfect the lunge thrust, the most fundamental swordsmanship move.

Entry into swordsmanship proved extremely difficult, numerous individuals with qualified physical conditions were ultimately barred at this juncture.

As for "quiet meditation, refining oneself," that was even more challenging, Chen Shouyi struggled even with achieving mere quiet meditation, let alone sensing "refining" the body amid a chaotic mindset.

Yet compared to others' relatively smooth movements, Chen Shouyi's muscles seemed so rigid it was pitiable.

Nonetheless, he continued to seriously execute thrusts, earnestly feeling the body's exertion, striving to align his moves closer to the standard.

Luckily, he found solace in Sun Xin's even clumsier attempts nearby, and Zhao Yifeng at the front.

A class quickly concluded.

The trio gathered once more to return to the classroom.

"I'm exhausted! This Martial Arts Class is incredibly boring, I'd rather be in lecture." Zhao Yifeng panted complaining, his plump face glistening with sweat.

"You should lose weight," Chen Shouyi glanced, unable to resist saying, "Girls don't seem to like overweight guys."

"Speaking as if you have someone who likes you," Zhao Yifeng retorted.

Chen Shouyi: ...

Chen Shouyi remained inconspicuous in this class, like a transparent figure, except for endless chatter with his two endearing friends, he was often quiet and reserved, sometimes even blushing when girls greeted him.

"What do you think a woman tastes like." Nearby, Sun Xin curiously chimed in.

"That's easy, just spend some money." Zhao Yifeng replied sleazily, "I know a decent place, quite safe. Want to go together one day?"

"I'll pass, I'm not going to such places," Chen Shouyi quickly declined in fear.

He absolutely dared not go, the thought of such places leading him to envision sexually transmitted diseases, then police, and then disappointment from parents along with disdain and ridicule from his sister.

Particularly at the end, imagining that scene made him couldn't help but shiver.

Perhaps, the end of the world would be much like this.