

# DAWN OF A NEW ERA

## Chapter 1: Back-to-School Season

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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."

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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.

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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.

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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."

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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.

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"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.