

## THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

### Chapter 101: Golden Bell Training Study, Study, and Study Again

“Impact resistance training consists of three levels: first, muscle hardness; second, bone density and toughness; third, the shock resistance of internal organs and the brain. Only when both the external and internal are trained as one can you achieve the indestructible body.”

“In addition, there are various techniques involving agility and reflexes, which allow you to dodge the moment the strike lands, or to use relaxed breathing to prevent the impact point from concentrating on a single area—thus neutralizing 99% of the shock and penetration.”

“Moreover, the highest-level skill is the cultivation of a sixth sense—an ability to foresee danger before it arrives. With this sense, one can avoid harm before it strikes, achieving a perfect fusion of mind and body, and remain undefeated forever.”

In the training room, under the supervision of Professors Luo and Ma, Su Jie began intensive training in a complete regimen of external hardening techniques: Thirteen Protectors External Training Golden Bell Cover Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Hard Qi Gong.

Odell had named this system the “Thirteen Protectors External Training Golden Bell Cover Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Hard Qi Gong,” which made sense. It included fierce roars like dragon cries and tiger howls and drew on the secret techniques of Shaolin’s Vajra Hard Qi Gong, among other traditions.

Su Jie stripped off all his clothes, leaving not a stitch.

Standing firm, his stance was as steady as a mountain. He imagined himself being struck by ocean waves, scoured by waterfalls, even charged by thousands of soldiers—and yet he remained unmoved.

He pictured himself calm and composed even as Mount Tai crumbled before him.

His muscles swelled across his entire body. His skin was covered with tiny bumps, like steel beads, giving him an intimidating, almost inhuman appearance.

“Now channel your breath and energy throughout your body. Imagine being slashed and stabbed by blades and spears across every inch of your flesh. Imagine yourself as an indestructible iron man. In external hardening, psychological suggestion is critical. It strengthens your defenses and stability. For Golden Bell, the suggestion is that you are encased in an impenetrable bell, fearless and invulnerable. For Iron Shirt, imagine yourself clad in iron armor, charging through all obstacles. The Thirteen Protectors’ approach is to envision yourself as a mighty general, armored and fearless on the battlefield. The deeper the suggestion, the deeper the mastery.”

Master Luo added, “Alright, time to begin the impact routines—self-striking. No one knows your body better than yourself, so once your training reaches a certain depth, it’s best to perform the massage and impact routines solo. This particular sequence was developed by AI at the Typhon Training Camp. While it differs slightly from Odell’s method, it is more scientifically refined.”

Smack smack smack...

On screen, a foreign man, also completely bare, moved with whip-like arms, striking his body in rapid succession—like a storm beating down.

Ordinary people can’t even reach their own back with ease, but high-level yoga practitioners are different; their bodies are as flexible as snakes. Some can even bend their heads through their legs and back around.

Su Jie had already surpassed that kind of flexibility. His arms were more limber than any yogi's.

Boom!

He inhaled deeply and suddenly exploded into motion—slapping, pressing, ramming, and pounding his body with both arms. Simultaneously, he let out roars and chants: sometimes a tiger’s growl, sometimes a dragon’s cry, sometimes a sharp “Yah!”, and at other times deep sounds like “Om,” “Ma,” “Mi”—similar to esoteric mantras from Tibetan practices.

If anyone else had been present, they might have been scared witless. It looked like a man violently self-harming, as though trying to shatter himself.

“Vocal training helps stabilize the internal organs and ignite energy,” Master Ma explained. “The Golden Bell is also called the Tiger Howl Golden Bell, and Iron Shirt is sometimes referred to as Dragon Roar Iron Shirt. These sounds, released during strikes, help push your power and tension to their limits. Traditional yoga and esoteric Tibetan practices also involve mantras and mudras. The sound vibrations strengthen the organs and deepen psychological immersion. If you imagine yourself as a wolf, then naturally, howling brings the image to life.”

Through relentless self-striking, Su Jie pushed his external training to a new level.

He had previously studied hardening methods with Odell and had understood the principles of sound generation.

However, all of that had focused only on skin, muscle, and bone—it had not penetrated to the internal organs.

Against high-level opponents, a well-placed penetrative strike could cause internal bleeding or brain trauma.

Now his training focused on stabilizing the internal organs, integrating the internal with the external. In particular, his brain's resilience was significantly enhanced.

This was not just martial arts—it was a complete fitness and conditioning system.

Master Luo had somehow obtained research from the Typhon Training Camp. Combined with his own knowledge, and further developed in collaboration with Master Ma, the system was tested and refined on Su Jie.

Aside from fetal posture sleep training, Su Jie had spent these days immersed in impact conditioning.

In the mornings, Master Ma dragged him to class for studies in psychology and Mayan physiognomy. In the afternoons, Master Luo taught him architecture and feng shui.

Ma was skilled in feng shui but excelled in reading people. Luo also read people, but his true strength lay in geomancy and architectural feng shui. Both had some medical knowledge as well.

One focused on individuals; the other on the environment.

Together, their teachings gave Su Jie broader insights.

But their teaching style was pure force-feeding—rote memorization crammed down his throat.

The material was hard to grasp in a short time, so the only option was to memorize now and digest later.

Zhang Manman studied alongside him, but she started falling behind. She simply couldn't keep pace with Su Jie.

The winter break soon ended.

Training with Master Ma and Master Luo also wrapped up.

That morning, during class, Ma summarized:

“Mayan physiognomy is the distillation of centuries of observation—it’s really just big data analysis in ancient clothes. When assessing someone, the first thing to observe is their presence. Powerful people carry themselves upright and composed, exuding a natural aura. Ordinary people lack that—they slouch, scatter their energy. Then you look at their face, head, limbs, posture, and physical lines to infer their occupation. It’s no different from how algorithms today track

browsing habits to target ads more accurately. Honestly, AI will surpass all fortune-tellers in the future. China's current supercomputers already lead globally. One hour of their computing equals billions of people calculating for millennia. In martial arts fiction, you have legendary masters creating peerless techniques—soon, AI will outclass them. As for fortune-telling? Algorithms will make ancient seers like Yuan Tiangang, Li Chunfeng, and Liu Bowen look like amateurs.”

Zhang Manman nodded. “Yeah, sometimes I casually mention something to a friend—without ever searching for it online—and next thing I know, I’m getting ads for that exact thing. Especially from Haoyu Group’s platforms. It’s spooky. That’s big data prediction for you.”

“Exactly,” Master Luo added. “Feng shui and architecture are the same—they’re rooted in magnetic fields, psychology, airflow, color, and environment. Heaven, Earth, and Man are one. The harmony between human beings and nature—that’s feng shui. Nature holds countless mysteries we can learn from. That’s the essence of this field. It’s an endless science. I’ve made instructional videos and case studies. Take them and study at your own pace.”

Master Ma also gave Su Jie a hard drive containing his teaching materials.

“Whether it’s physiognomy or feng shui, it all contributes to martial cultivation and personal growth. Curiosity is everything—discovering the unknown and pursuing truth is fun and refreshing. Like they say, ‘If I can understand the Way in the morning, I can die in the evening.’ But that journey must be rooted in physical strength. Without a strong body, all of it is useless,” Master Ma said. “Even great leaders have said that the body is the foundation of revolution, and health is the source of happiness. So whether you study physiognomy or feng shui, always keep your martial training and physical health as your focus. Don’t get lost in the weeds—extract what’s useful and move on.”

“I understand,” Su Jie replied, recognizing Master Ma’s warning not to get obsessed with these disciplines at the expense of martial practice.

All knowledge serves the purpose of sharpening the mind and strengthening the body.

This winter break had been incredibly rewarding. First, he incorporated fetal curling into his “sprawl-sleeping” method, allowing for deeper rest and even evoking a sense of life, death, and rebirth.

Second, he pushed his external training further—beginning internal and neurological shock conditioning. He absorbed and synthesized the core elements of Golden Bell, Iron Shirt, Thirteen Protectors, Dragon-Tiger Vajra, and the Typhon Training Camp’s research on traditional martial arts.

Of course, others couldn’t replicate this training—it required a baseline level of fitness that most lacked.

Had Odell taught him this from day one, Su Jie would’ve died within the hour.

It’s like teaching calculus to a first grader—you start with addition and subtraction.



Back at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, Su Jie had learned the basics—elementary school.

His independent training at Starshine Combat Fitness Club was middle school.

Learning softness from Ma’s crystal ball and tai chi from Old Chen? High school.

This winter break’s training? University-level.

He had finally systematized all his prior skills.

He hadn’t yet broken through to the “Living Dead” stage, but his foundation had deepened, his skills had advanced, and his physical condition had significantly improved.

While other students spent winter break relaxing, gaming, or taking tutoring classes, Su Jie was in a special tutoring class of his own—one taught by Professors Luo and Ma, whose instruction no one else could rival.

## Chapter 102: The Xu Family Crisis

"Su Jie, you're leaving already? You haven't even finished learning from Master Ma and Master Luo!"

That day, seeing Su Jie packing his bags to return to S City, Zhang Manman couldn't help but ask.

"They've already taught me the essence of physiognomy and feng shui. But I can't grasp it all at once—there's too much to digest. Trying to absorb more now wouldn't be productive. Besides, I've already taken a month off," Su Jie replied.

In terms of regular attendance, Su Jie was definitely not a model student. By the time he reached his third year of high school, he was frequently taking extended leaves—sometimes disappearing for a month at a time.

His homeroom teacher had gotten used to it. As long as his grades didn't slip, she turned a blind eye.

Moreover, after speaking with his parents, the teacher, Chen Juan, knew that Su Jie was learning other valuable things outside of school, which gave her peace of mind. After several exams, she realized Su Jie had completely mastered the high school curriculum and was already self-studying university-level courses. In class, there really wasn't much left for him to learn.

"Aren't you going to explore B City a bit more? I know it pretty well since I used to come here often. How about I show you around?" Zhang Manman offered.

"Sure. I plan to apply for college here anyway, so it's good to get familiar with the area. It'll be convenient to get back too—just a two-hour flight," Su Jie nodded.

Traveling from B City to S City took only two to three hours by plane, with over a dozen flights daily. It was almost like taking a bus. Both were international metropolises with excellent transportation.

"Huh?" This time, it was Zhang Manman's turn to be surprised. "I've invited you out a few times in the past few days, and you kept turning me down, saying you needed to study. Why the sudden change of heart today?"

"Really? I don't remember," Su Jie was momentarily stunned, then recalled she had indeed brought it up more than once.

Seeing that Su Jie wasn't pretending, Zhang Manman laughed. She didn't know exactly why, but ever since she met Su Jie at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, she had felt he was an incredibly disciplined and regimented person.

After spending some time in Master Ma's courtyard with him, she became even more certain—he dedicated nearly every second to learning. Back then, she had other matters to attend to and didn't stay long.

Now that they were both studying and living together here, she had a firsthand look at how intense Su Jie really was.

He woke up on time, practiced martial arts, ate, studied, trained again in the evening, and then went to sleep.

Every single day, without deviation. Practically down to the second.

She felt like Su Jie was a machine—some sort of cyborg, or an AI in a human shell.

She had seen plenty of academic overachievers, but none had the kind of precise structure and discipline that Su Jie exhibited.

He never lost focus. Every moment was spent thinking, learning, training, and understanding. His every move was upright and dignified, radiating a monk-like solemnity. He didn't exhibit any of the traits expected of young people—not even those common among middle-aged or elderly folks.

*'Even my dad isn't like this. Does his thirst for knowledge really run that deep?'* Zhang Manman didn't know how to evaluate Su Jie. His lifestyle seemed inhumanly structured—too sterile.

But just now, Su Jie had unexpectedly accepted her invitation, which surprised her and made her feel that maybe there was still a bit of “human warmth” left in him after all.

"By the way, how's your company going?" Su Jie suddenly remembered something.

"Take a look at this news first," Zhang Manman replied, pulling out her phone and handing it to him.

> Massive Shake-Up in the Xu Family!

> Xu Qiaomu's Will Revealed – Xu Jiazhi from the Third Generation Takes the Helm

> Xu Ziming, Xu Zide, Xu Ziqiang, Xu Jiahao, and Xu Jiaren Under Investigation for Embezzlement; All Shares Transferred to Haoyu Group

> Xu Jiahong Also Transfers Shares to Haoyu Group

> Xu Family Stock Plummets; Haoyu Group Takes Advantage for Acquisition

> Haoyu Executive Li Xiaozhen Leads the Charge to Seize Board Control

> Xu Group's Overseas Trade Paralyzed by Militant Interference – Facing Massive International Claims

> The Xu Empire Teeters – What's Next?

A barrage of headlines flashed across Su Jie's eyes—it was nothing short of an earthquake.

He had spent a month studying under Masters Luo and Ma, disconnected from online news, and had no idea such a monumental upheaval had occurred in such a short time.

"How could this happen? Haoyu again! Their attack was brutal—coordinated, multi-pronged, and clearly premeditated. Even such a massive group like Xu's is being overwhelmed without resistance." Su Jie wasn't a business expert, but he understood enough to see that Haoyu had been planning this for a long time. Even high-ranking executives within the Xu Group had likely been compromised.

Particularly concerning was the massive overseas shipment that had been seized by militants. Without timely delivery, the Xu Group now faced enormous international penalties—a blow straight to the core, and Su Jie suspected Haoyu's involvement behind the scenes.

He couldn't help but think of Feng Hengyi again.

The subsequent share acquisition and boardroom takeover were aggressive and lethal—like a master duelist aiming straight for the heart.

"Hmm?" Su Jie noticed something—Haoyu's executive in charge of the takeover was none other than Li Xiaozhen, the woman he had once saved on a whim, and the ex-girlfriend of Xu Jiahong. She lived in a fifty-million-yuan mansion that was worse than a landfill.

"Xu Jiahong got played. Dated a woman and didn't gain anything—ended up leaking tons of family intel instead. Now Haoyu's going for the kill. The Xu family doesn't have any real heavy-hitters left—they probably won't be able to withstand the assault," Zhang Manman commented. "If Xu Qiaomu were ten years younger and full of energy, Haoyu wouldn't stand a chance. But right now, they're in serious danger."

"Is there any way to turn this around?"

The Xu family was Su Jie's mother Xu Ying's side of the family. Although she had cut ties, never taken a cent from them, and wanted nothing to do with them in the future, Su Jie still didn't want to see the family wiped out by Haoyu like this.

"If they succeed in swallowing the Xu Group, Haoyu will become fully-fledged," Zhang Manman said. "The Xu family owns a lot, especially overseas—companies,

real estate, unique trade channels. Domestically, they have real estate, hotels, supermarkets, and manufacturing businesses. Though these are capital-heavy and less profitable now, for Haoyu—a lightweight online business—they offer exactly the kind of foundation and assets they lack."

"I get that. Haoyu's strength lies in online networks, but they're weak in traditional industries, which is Xu's strength. If Xu Qiaomu were still in good health, Haoyu wouldn't have an easy time. He could even reverse the situation and trap them. But he's dying—if he passes, the whole house of cards will fall. The Xu family will truly be finished," Zhang Manman continued. "Their decades of accumulated wealth would be devoured, and Haoyu would gain access to international markets, becoming a global giant."

Su Jie listened in silence. He knew Zhang Manman wasn't speaking idly.

"There is a way to turn things around," she said. "Right now, the most critical issue is the seized overseas shipment. That's what triggered the stock crash, investor panic, and general instability. If that crisis is resolved, everything else can be handled. Xu Qiaomu already begged my dad and promised generous returns. He knows the Feng family behind Haoyu is like a starving wolf—they won't stop until there's nothing left."

"And what can I do?" After hearing all the news and analysis, Su Jie felt powerless.

So what if he was good at martial arts? So what if he aced his studies?



In this kind of corporate war, he was just a regular nobody—completely out of his depth.

His little club with Hua Xing might earn some money, ease the financial pressure, but it was still just a small-time operation. Even if it ran for ten thousand years, it could never compete with Haoyu.

"Come with me overseas. Help me get that shipment back," Zhang Manman said bluntly. "It's a great opportunity to train."

"What?" Su Jie's voice faltered. "You mean take the goods back from militants? Are you serious, or are we filming a Hollywood action movie?"

As a model student, that sounded like pure fiction to him.

"You think this is a movie?" Zhang Manman shot back. "Doing business in warzones is lucrative, but incredibly risky. China is stable and safe, but many places abroad are in total chaos. If you want to take your martial arts further, this is a chance to see the real world. Of course, we don't have to fight—we can negotiate. But muscle is essential. You're stronger and more focused than I am. You'd be my best assistant. If we pull this off, I'll help your sister break free from Haoyu's grip. Deal?"

"Really?" Su Jie's biggest concern had always been his sister.

"Of course. These days, changing jobs is easy. Worst case, she just pays a penalty fee. Haoyu may be ruthless, but this is still a country ruled by law—they can't do whatever they want. If we help the Xu family survive, you're Xu Qiaomu's grandson. That alone opens up all kinds of strategic options for counterattacking Haoyu."

"I really don't know much about this," Su Jie admitted after a moment. "But I'll go overseas with you. I want to see the bigger picture—and hopefully, solve this crisis once and for all."

## Chapter 103: Young Prodigies Not the Only Genius

"Before that, I want to take you to meet someone. He's kind of like you," Zhang Manman said to Su Jie. "If we can get him on board this time, our odds will increase significantly."

"Who is it?" Su Jie asked.

"Zhang Jinchuan. He used to be Master Luo's student and learned a lot from him, but he wasn't content. He went on to study under many experts. He's a martial arts prodigy, born into a martial arts family. Though we share the same surname, we're not related. His family traces back to the Zhang clan from Daoist Longhu Mountain. Apparently, he's been practicing Daoist qigong with his elders since

childhood to develop his intelligence—he’s exceptionally smart. He’s also a senior in high school now but has already invested in his own company. He created a short video app called Magic Sound, which has a huge user base and is now valued at over a billion yuan. He’s already a big-time entrepreneur,” Zhang Manman explained.

“Magic Sound? He made that? I’ve seen a bunch of classmates playing with it—uploading ten-second clips and sharing them. Super popular. The user base is growing really fast. Fits young people's tastes perfectly. Even Hua Xing often uploads our training videos to gain traction,” Su Jie said in surprise. “He really made that? He’s that capable?”

Still in high school, already founded a company worth over a billion, a martial arts expert, and a top student. A textbook overachiever.

Compared to that, Su Jie was nowhere near.

After all, Su Jie only founded Huaxing Club, which had made just over a million yuan so far—barely enough to buy a bathroom. Meanwhile, Zhang Jinchuan was a successful entrepreneur commanding storms in the market.

Especially after he won a poetry competition, stylish and eloquent, he instantly became a youth icon.

Su Jie had read some novels before about protagonists reincarnating and starting businesses in the modern world, seizing every opportunity to succeed. But none of them seemed much more impressive than what Zhang Jinchuan was doing now.

Clearly, true genius really does exist in this era.

“But that’s not the main reason I want to talk to him,” Zhang Manman continued. “It’s because he’s also an enemy of Haoyu. When Magic Sound started gaining traction, Haoyu tried to acquire it, but he refused. After that, Haoyu pulled a bunch of dirty tricks to bankrupt him, but he defused every one of them and even made Haoyu suffer multiple losses.”

“He’s that powerful?” Su Jie’s heart ached at the mention of Haoyu. His older sister had started her own company too. Once Haoyu saw its potential, they crushed it with business tactics and took it over. Now she was trapped in a den of wolves, and Su Jie couldn’t do a damn thing. He simply didn’t have the power or money to pay the penalty for breaking their contract. And without a strong force backing them up—a team of elite lawyers—even paying billions might not be enough to escape.

That’s just how ruthless the real world is.

And in the face of all this, Su Jie’s martial arts were useless.

Besides, even if his skills were top-tier, he probably still couldn’t beat Feng Hengyi.

To him, Haoyu was a massive behemoth. Beating them in a short time was impossible.

Su Jie had a long-term plan—three to five years. In that time, he'd build his strength, expand his network, gain allies and influence. Only then could he challenge Haoyu.

After all, he was just an ordinary high schooler. No matter how gifted, he couldn't take on a corporate juggernaut worth hundreds of billions alone.

But someone else had done it—Zhang Jinchuan.

“Let's go,” Zhang Manman said, walking to the door and hailing a car via an app.

The car had bottled water and a variety of snacks. The driver was young, in uniform, wearing white gloves, and the interior was spotless.

“Let's stop by a couple of universities, then head over to Haizi Lake for a stroll through the gardens,” Zhang Manman said in a crisp local accent.

“Oh?” the driver perked up at her fluent dialect. “You're a local? I thought you were from out of town. That courtyard earlier—was that your house? That place has to be worth at least 300 million yuan.”

“That was my teacher’s place—he’s loaded,” Zhang Manman said, striking up a chat. “My ancestors were from here. They once escorted silver for Empress Dowager Cixi, then went abroad. By the way, how much do you make driving this car? Is this ride-hailing app any good?”

“Used to make a lot—tens of thousands a month. But after the subsidies dried up, it dropped to around seven or eight grand. Barely getting by,” the driver replied gloomily.

The two of them chatted away with ease.

Su Jie quietly listened. He could tell Zhang Manman was doing some kind of market research—probably prepping for her own business venture.

They visited the two most famous universities, then headed to a renowned garden. Along the way, Zhang Manman was like a native guide, explaining everything with deep familiarity.

“What did your ancestors do? You said they escorted silver for Empress Cixi—were they part of a security escort agency?” Su Jie asked. “Back in the Qing Dynasty, those guys had real skills. They traveled far and wide, transporting tea all the way to Russia, Mongolia, even further. The most famous of them all was Broadsword Wang Wu, who took part in the Hundred Days’ Reform.”

“Not an escort agency—more like a secret society. The Green Gang. They worked with the court on transporting goods via waterways,” Zhang Manman explained. “Old secret societies had tons of rules and were full of characters from all walks of life. My great-grandfather used to tell all kinds of stories. I’ll introduce you to him sometime—he’s fascinating.”

“How old is your great-grandfather now?” Su Jie asked.

“112,” Zhang Manman replied. “He’s a health nut. Still eats a big bowl of fatty meat every day, drinks a bowl of liquor, smokes pipe tobacco, and performs brick-breaking stunts with his head on the street—stuns the hell out of foreign tourists.”

“That’s considered healthy? Fatty meat, smoking, and drinking?” Su Jie looked bewildered.

“We’ve tried to talk him out of it, but he swears that’s what’s kept him alive this long. Take those things away, and he’d probably drop dead immediately. I think it’s his mindset that keeps him going,” Zhang Manman said.

“Yeah, psychology backs that up. Studies show people with a positive mindset live longer than any diet or health regimen. Plenty of old folks in the countryside who drink, smoke, and eat fatty meat live past 100. Meanwhile, the health ‘experts’ who tell them to quit all died early,” Su Jie nodded.

After half a day exploring, they stopped by a small noodle stall to try some local snacks.

Su Jie remained calm and unhurried the whole time—never once seemed impatient. This gave Zhang Manman a new impression of him.

She had expected him to be visibly affected by her earlier revelations. Given what was at stake, she thought he'd be too distracted to enjoy food or sightseeing. Based on her previous observations, Su Jie struck her as someone who wouldn't waste a second of study time.

But here he was—wandering campuses, touring gardens, trying street food, even casually shopping—and enjoying himself more than she did.

It left her baffled.

“What? Trying to see if I’ve got patience?” Su Jie asked with a smirk as he caught Zhang Manman sneaking a glance at him. His eyes sparkled with clarity, like he could see right through her.

“I shouldn’t have let you study physiognomy,” Zhang Manman said with a pout. “Let’s finish up and go talk to Zhang Jinchuan. The enemy of our enemy is our



friend. He's got some serious moves against Haoyu. Rumor has it he's got dirt on Feng Yuxuan and forced him to cough up over a hundred million."

"Everyone's throwing around billions like pocket change. I feel like I live in a slum," Su Jie shook his head.

"Wait a sec—didn't you say you don't talk while eating? Habit or something?" Zhang Manman suddenly noticed a detail.

"That's because my digestive system needs to fully absorb nutrients during meals. Talking interferes with digestion. But lately I've been training in the Thirteen Protectors External Qigong. My internal organs are much stronger now—just a bit of movement and I absorb everything," Su Jie explained.

"But doesn't that break your 'move like a machine' rule? I remember you saying everything you do has to follow a strict routine," Zhang Manman pressed.

"The Book of Changes teaches the importance of change. That rule was the foundation. Once it's solid, you move naturally," Su Jie replied smoothly.

"Alright then. After all this walking, what do you think of B City's feng shui?" Zhang Manman asked, shifting gears.

“Tiger crouched, dragon coiled. Imperial aura, still lingering,” Su Jie began in a scholarly tone. “Though a thousand years have passed, the dragon’s spirit remains. Originally, the wind rose with the water, but due to soil erosion and sandstorms, the royal energy had faded. Now, with reforestation and green development, the land’s energy has stabilized and regained strength. The dragon is stirring once more, rising into the sky. But the city’s scholarly vibe is growing stronger, while its wealth is migrating south. In the future, this place may become a cultural capital.”

“Anything else?” Zhang Manman asked.

“The urban planning is creative—hints of an upcoming tech boom. Young talents and future moguls will likely emerge from here. Of course, my feng shui skills are still shallow. This is all I can tell. For deeper insights, you’d need someone older, wiser, and more experienced,” Su Jie said modestly.

“Let’s go.” Zhang Manman didn’t comment further, just thought quietly for a moment and got up.

They got in the car again and arrived at a startup park.

“Zhang Jinchuan’s company is in here. The government’s giving big support to emerging industries. Rent, utilities—everything’s cheaper than outside. Tons of policy incentives,” Zhang Manman said. “So, what do you think of this park’s feng shui?”

“Feng shui starts with the bigger picture,” Su Jie paused before answering. “In the face of national momentum, feng shui is a minor art. When the country is strong, even the harshest desert can become a lush oasis. Yu the Great tamed floods, the First Emperor built the Great Wall, the Sui emperor dug the Grand Canal—all were feats of national strength. And now, we’re even more capable.”

## Chapter 104: Holding All the Cards

Su Jie had only scratched the surface of feng shui and physiognomy, but thankfully, he had developed the habit of keen observation. Every blade of grass, every tree, every person, and every event left an imprint deep in his mind. A bit of analysis and calculation led him to conclusions—and he moved on without leaving a trace.

The foundational knowledge he learned from Master Luo and Master Ma was like formulas in mathematics, physics, or chemistry. Observing a residential complex, a street, or a person became a problem-solving exercise.

Through continuous practice and comparison, he slowly became more proficient and began to grasp some essence of it all.

But he had no intention of showing off this knowledge.

To him, feng shui and physiognomy were simply ways to broaden his horizons, enhance his appreciation of traditional culture, and find methods to cultivate a calmer mind and a deeper personal realm.

They were tools for spiritual cultivation.

"Up ahead is where Zhang Jinchuan's company is located." Zhang Manman and Su Jie had entered a start-up park. The area was neat, full of energy, and brimming with entrepreneurial spirit. The employees were all young people, their faces full of hope for the future. Even an outsider would feel that this park held great promise.

"Li Kun Network Technology Co., Ltd.?" Su Jie read the sign in front of one of the buildings. The name sounded strange—but being well-read in the Book of Changes, he immediately recognized it. "Li" represents fire, "Kun" the earth.

Fire above, earth below—together, they form the hexagram Jin (progress).

A perfect match for Zhang Jinchuan's name.

The "Jin" hexagram is also an auspicious one. Fire symbolizes brightness, and with brightness rising above the earth, it implies the rising sun—"Jin" carries the meaning of advancement and promotion.

Clearly, Zhang Jinchuan had learned a lot from Master Luo.

The layout in front of his company was refreshing. First, it was spotlessly clean, with bright floor tiles. Fresh flowers had been carefully placed at key positions near the entrance. A light breeze carried their fragrance into the noses of passersby, refreshing and uplifting.

The breeze was soft, natural, and gentle—meandering from between the tall buildings above, then calming as it reached this spot. It nourished people without dispersing wealth.

In feng shui, the wind matters greatly.

As the saying goes, “a strong wind is like an arrow.” If wind isn’t handled properly, it brings illness and loss.

There's science behind this too. Wind carries away body heat. Over time, this leads to chill seeping into the body, which causes illness, fatigue, and irritability. And when people get sick or agitated, nothing goes well—naturally, wealth suffers too.

Some houses are plagued with constant crosswinds. Even in summer, they feel cold—far from ideal living spaces.

But having no wind is just as bad. Without air circulation, people feel stifled. Dampness and mold thrive, and bacteria multiply.

Even in architecture, airflow is a serious field of study.

When Master Luo gave lectures to Su Jie, he even cited the example of the Twin Towers in New York. During their construction, engineers didn't yet understand wind tunnel testing. As a result, once completed, the towers created enormous wind tunnel effects when city breezes blew past—making the area around them nearly impassable.

This is what's called “evil wind” in feng shui—a sign of misfortune.

But in front of this building, everything had been designed with care. Color, sound, scent, and tactile sensation, the signage, the reception area, even the guards—all projected an image of vibrant positivity. It felt like a company with fresh, modern vitality.

Anyone arriving to do business here would instinctively think: "This place is solid. It has a future."

At the door, a young woman in casual wear came out to greet them.

Her outfit wasn't overly formal, nor did it look sloppy. It seemed purposefully designed—brimming with energy, clean, crisp, and professional—unlike the often tacky corporate wear at other companies.

*'Whoever designed this company's clothing has real talent,'* Su Jie thought, and couldn't help but ask, "Who designed your uniforms?"

"Our boss did," the young woman said with a touch of pride. She looked like a college student intern, but carried herself with surprising experience. "You must be Ms. Zhang Manman. Our boss is waiting in the office. Please follow me."

As she led them through the company, they passed rows of workstations filled with energetic young programmers typing away or teams brainstorming in meeting rooms. The company had around a hundred employees, all looking hardworking, talented, and focused—no slackers or management headaches in sight.

"Zhang Jinchuan really knows how to lead a team. He must be excellent at interviews," Su Jie thought, impressed.

The company may not have been large, but like a sparrow with all its vital organs, it was perfectly structured—and filled with top-tier talent.

It also became clear why Zhang Jinchuan had sought out Master Luo to learn physiognomy.

Once mastered, such skills were incredibly useful for an employer. Building a great team was the foundation for a company to take off.

Upstairs, they were greeted by a massive painting.

It depicted a towering mountain shrouded in mist, reaching into the heavens. Within the swirling clouds, faint hints of dragon scales and claws peeked through—making it feel as if a divine dragon was hidden among the peaks, about to burst forth.

In the distance lay rivers, lakes, cities, and people—an entire landscape of the nation.

The painting radiated tremendous energy. Though only a few fragments of the dragon were visible, they made viewers feel watched—small, humbled, and awed.

“This piece is called "Cloud Dragon over Buzhou". Our boss painted it himself. It combines classical ink techniques with modern oil painting,” the assistant explained briefly, but with impact.

Anyone who saw it would stop and admire it. And through that admiration, they’d naturally feel a sense of reverence toward the artist—and that changed the psychology of any negotiation.

This too was part of feng shui layout—just as much modern psychology and interior design as traditional mysticism.



Su Jie wasn't swayed by the painting—but couldn't help but wonder: was Zhang Jinchuan really a high school senior, just like him?

Running a company this big, hiring top people, designing uniforms, painting masterpieces... he seemed good at everything.

From the moment Su Jie entered, an image of a respected, seasoned elder kept forming in his mind—someone with the aura of Master Ma or Master Luo.

This was Zhang Jinchuan?

But yes, he really was just a twelfth-grade student.

It felt like he was playing life on cheat mode.

Behind the giant painting was Zhang Jinchuan's office.

At the entrance was a large screen. When someone stood in front of it, their image appeared—facial recognition scanning.

“Access granted.”

The assistant scanned her face, and the door slid open automatically.

Sure enough, inside was a young man, about Su Jie’s height, wearing similar casual clothes and running shoes—a sporty, relaxed style that fit the image of a young tech CEO. Nothing old-fashioned about it.

The office was bright and clean—bookshelves, a desk, a fabric couch, and a solid wood meeting table. Tastefully minimalist. Nothing fancy or expensive, but very comfortable.

Notably, there was no traditional tea set.

Most executives kept a tea table for meetings. To Su Jie, though, that had become cliché.

“Manman, you're here! And this is your friend?” Zhang Jinchuan greeted them warmly and handed over two bottles of mineral water.

“This is Su Jie. Technically, he’s your junior—just finished training under Master Luo,” Zhang Manman introduced.

“Impressive.” Zhang Jinchuan nodded and shook Su Jie’s hand. His expression showed respect—but Su Jie picked up on the subtle signals. Jinchuan wasn’t truly impressed. To him, Su Jie was just another person.

“Let’s get to the point,” Zhang Manman sat down and cut straight to business. “Jinchuan, I laid everything out clearly in the email. I wanted to talk in person to finalize it. You already know your company has gone head-to-head with the Feng family. And knowing their temperament, they won’t let it go. They’ll use every tactic they’ve got. This is the perfect chance to strike back. It’ll be a challenge for your kung fu, too. Are you in?”

“I understand,” Zhang Jinchuan said calmly, seated on the sofa. Every move was composed and elegant—mature far beyond his years. He looked at both Manman and Su Jie. “The Feng family’s actions have indeed gone too far. If they swallow the Xu family, their power will snowball. If they target my company next, I’ll be in deep trouble. But let’s be frank—this is dangerous, and the benefits are limited. Manman, I’ll level with you. I know what the Xu family offered you. If I get involved, success is guaranteed. Without me, your odds are under 50%. So I want 60%. Fair, right?”

“That’s too much,” Zhang Manman frowned. She hadn’t expected Jinchuan to be so bold—or greedy.

“Not at all,” Jinchuan replied. “Let me explain why I’m asking for 60%. The moment I heard the Feng family was moving to acquire the Xu family, I knew

something big was happening. I immediately started gathering intel and found the critical weak point—those seized shipments overseas. I now have access to some of the Feng family’s confidential data. I also know about their dealings with the armed groups. If I come with you, I can use their weak spots to convince those militants to release the cargo. Without me, not only will you fail to recover the goods, you might not make it back in one piece.”

“You have intel on Haoyu?” Zhang Manman was visibly shocked. “How did you get it?”

Su Jie frowned.

The flow of the negotiation had been completely taken over by Zhang Jinchuan.

## Chapter 105: Exceptional Talent, Difficult to Befriend

*‘From a physiognomic perspective, Zhang Jinchuan’s fate is extremely prominent. His forehead is full, his facial features heavy like mountains, and his spirit glows with intensity—there even seems to be a trace of double pupils. His gaze is sharp, like a hawk soaring in the clouds and surveying the world below. His ears are spread open, as if he can hear the secrets of life and death—like a divine monkey who listens to the whispers of fate. This is what’s known as ‘hawk-eyed and monkey-eared.’ Especially the appearance of double pupils—since ancient times, this has been a sign of great strategic talent.’*

Su Jie quietly observed Zhang Manman negotiating with Zhang Jinchuan, applying what he had learned of physiognomy.

He noticed Zhang Jinchuan seemed to have “double pupils.” Historically and mythologically, individuals said to possess this rare feature include Cangjie, Emperor Shun, Duke Wen of Jin, and Xiang Yu, the Conqueror of Western Chu.

However, from a modern medical perspective, what’s interpreted as “double pupils” is often just early-stage cataracts. Best to get it checked at a hospital before it risks leading to blindness. (G: ouch!)

In physiognomy, “double pupils” doesn’t necessarily mean literal paired pupils; it’s more of a subtle impression—as if there’s an unfathomable mystery hidden in the person’s eyes that can’t be easily put into words.

In short, based on Su Jie’s half-baked knowledge of physiognomy, Zhang Jinchuan appeared extraordinarily noble, the kind of person destined for great success. He seemed like someone who could dodge calamity and always land on his feet.

Of course, Master Luo had also once read Zhang Jinchuan’s face. Although he never commented openly, Su Jie could tell Luo wasn’t impressed.

Yet Su Jie couldn’t find a single flaw in Zhang Jinchuan.

Maybe it was just beyond the limits of his amateur skills.

Zhang Manman was also silent.

She knew Zhang Jinchuan had his methods, and more importantly, he had prior experience dealing with Haoyu. That was why she had invited him to join this overseas business negotiation. There was also a more superstitious reason—Zhang Jinchuan's luck seemed to suppress the Feng family's Haoyu. If she could leverage that, it might boost their chances of success.

It was metaphysical, sure—but Zhang Manman had grown up immersed in that kind of thinking. She believed in it to some extent. Besides, she had already done extensive preparations. If she could increase their odds with a bit of mystical advantage, why not?

If Zhang Jinchuan demanded too much, she was ready to walk away.

But now, since he had detailed intel, the likelihood of success had risen sharply.

Zhang Manman was well aware that this so-called business trip was fraught with danger. Any extra edge was worth it.

But if she agreed to Zhang Jinchuan's terms, Su Jie's share would be out of the question.

“Sixty percent it is,” Su Jie spoke up.

He agreed to the terms, then looked at Zhang Manman, seeking her approval.

“What about you? Your sister’s matter...” Zhang Manman frowned.

“This time we deal with the Xu family first. Even if there’s no direct benefit to us, we can’t let the Feng family’s plot succeed. If they swallow the Xu family, their power will only grow, and it’ll be even harder to stop them later.” Su Jie made his decision quickly. No point getting hung up on short-term losses. Since Zhang Jinchuan wanted that much, let him have it.

“Huh?” Zhang Jinchuan was briefly stunned. He hadn’t expected Su Jie to agree so easily. He had thrown out that high number as a negotiating tactic—start high, walk it back. But now the other party had agreed outright, leaving him with no room to backpedal or up the ante.

“Alright then, it’s settled.” Zhang Jinchuan stood up. “I’ll join the mission. Let me know when we depart.”

“As soon as the visas are ready, we go. I’ll keep you posted,” Zhang Manman replied.

“Straightforward. I like it,” Zhang Jinchuan nodded. “Then I’ll wait for your call.”

Just like that, the deal was sealed.

Once they left the building, Zhang Manman turned to Su Jie and said, “This could’ve been your opportunity, but you gave your cut to Zhang Jinchuan. Even if we succeed and retrieve the goods, you won’t have anything to cover your sister’s breach-of-contract penalty. What were you thinking?”

“Zhang Jinchuan’s a tough negotiator,” Su Jie analyzed. “If he’s asking, he won’t back down—he’ll only push harder. And he seems to have this all planned out, moving step by step. So I figured, may as well agree early and disrupt his setup. I can tell this whole situation is a mess, but with him on board, our odds of success go way up. Of course, it’s still your call. I’m willing to give up my share entirely.”

“I was actually torn myself,” Zhang Manman thought aloud. “The top priority is stopping the Feng family’s takeover of the Xu family. If the Xu family stabilizes and fights back, things could turn in our favor. If we get bogged down in petty gains, we lose the bigger picture. Plus, I was thinking—if your grandfather recovers enough strength, his counterattack could be devastating. He might deliver a serious blow to the Fengs.”

“This trip—is it really that dangerous? Are we going to be fighting armed militants?” Su Jie had gone over this countless times in his head.



“You’ve been watching too many Hollywood movies,” Zhang Manman laughed. “You think we’re going in guns blazing, soloing an armed camp, exchanging fire in an epic showdown? Even in war-torn countries, that’s rare. We’re just going to negotiate. The local armed group holding the goods was persuaded by Haoyu to block the shipment under the guise of an inspection. Normally, some under-the-table money would clear that up, but this time is different—they’re targeting the Xu family. They want to stop the shipment, trigger massive penalty fees, and sabotage the business. Your grandfather made a deal with my family. My dad pulled some strings, and I was sent to negotiate. There is risk, yes—but Haoyu and the Feng family won’t make it easy for us.”

Su Jie immediately thought of the Gray Wolf.

If Feng Hengyi could act so recklessly in China, how much worse would he be in lawless foreign territory?

The risk was real—and huge.

In the Office.

Zhang Jinchuan stood by the window, watching Zhang Manman and Su Jie leave, deep in thought.

Just then, a bespectacled young man entered. “Jinchuan, you could’ve asked for more. Why back off at the last minute?”

He was Cai Zixing, Jinchuan’s business partner and a shareholder in the company. Six or seven years older, a seasoned talent agent who had joined the startup at Jinchuan’s persuasion. His skills had quickly brought in orders and stabilized company management—like the anchor of a ship.

“Zhang Manman’s father is a powerful man. I need to leave some wiggle room,” said Zhang Jinchuan. “And that Su Jie—he’s got potential. I want to bring him into the company. He seems mild and quiet, but he’s got a rebellious core. He won’t easily bow to others. If I want him to truly work for me, I’ll need some unconventional methods.”

“You really have a knack for reading people,” Cai Zixing nodded. “Back when you convinced me to join, I honestly didn’t believe a word you said. You were just a kid. Why would I give up a multi-million salary to join a startup paying peanuts? But somehow, you persuaded me. To this day, I still think it’s a miracle.”

“And now look where we are. You were making two million a year. Even after 20 years, that’s just 40 million. And you were already stuck in your company—no room to move up, and your relationship with your boss wasn’t great,” Zhang Jinchuan smiled. “Now, in just two years, we’re valued at over a billion—and we’re still climbing.”

“Yeah, I’ve been talking to investors. Some funds are willing to invest at a three-billion valuation. Even Haoyu Group’s investment arm came back, offering to buy in at a premium. What do you think?” asked Cai Zixing.

“There are no enemies in business,” Zhang Jinchuan smiled faintly. “But we can’t take Haoyu’s money. Still, we can use their interest to drive up our valuation and extract more profit. We’ve survived all their traps so far. I suspect this latest approach is another ploy. Send me the contact info they gave you—I’ll take a look.”

“Got it, boss.” Cai Zixing sent the files.

“Oh? So she’s the one handling investments now?” Zhang Jinchuan raised an eyebrow. “It used to be Li Xiaozhen, Feng Yuxuan’s assistant. Now it’s someone under Feng Qianzang.”

“Her name’s Fang Jia,” said Cai Zixing. “Last time, it was Yuxuan pushing the acquisition. This time, Qianzang wants to invest. They’re brothers, but rivals.”

“Set up a meeting. I’ll talk to her face-to-face,” Zhang Jinchuan said, scanning the documents. “I’ll analyze the situation.”

“Understood, boss. I’ll get it arranged.” Cai Zixing left the office.

“Interesting... This Fang Jia has a deeply hidden face. Her nose bridge is slightly high, and there’s a dimple in her chin—signs of someone who boosts her boss or partner’s fortune. But she’s clearly had cosmetic surgery. Her real features are different. She might be the weak link. She may not be entirely loyal to Haoyu...”

Zhang Jinchuan muttered, stretching. “So, Master Luo taught Su Jie his skills too? Then I must bring him into the company. He could be my key to unlocking the next stage of growth. Time to double down.”

After setting down the files, he stood in his office, arms wrapped as if holding a giant ball—or perhaps a baby.

He was practicing zhan zhuang, a foundational standing meditation in traditional martial arts.

But his posture wasn’t static—it slowly evolved.

Like the movement of celestial bodies.

He started with Hun Yuan Zhuang, transitioned to Three Powers Posture, then to Dragon Form, Tiger Crouch, Turtle and Serpent, Open Bow...

His movements combined traditional martial arts techniques, Buddhist mudras, and other disciplines—an eclectic mix, all executed with deliberate slowness.

Taiji is slow—but his movements were glacial.

To an onlooker, it might've been maddening.

But like the growth of plants—unseen in the moment, obvious in hindsight—he moved steadily, subtly, and with purpose.

## Chapter 106: Scenery Beyond the Borders

He kept at it until nightfall—seven to eight hours in total—just to finish this one set of movements. He was ten times slower than a turtle.

"Not good enough. Still not slow enough."

After completing the set, Zhang Jinchuan glanced at his watch and shook his head. "I still haven't truly slowed down. Only when I can perform this Minglun Daoyin Technique continuously for three days and nights will I have truly mastered it. To the extreme, slowness becomes speed, and speed becomes slowness. They transform into one another. From the peak of yin arises yang, and vice versa. Tension and relaxation follow the same principle. Principal Liu Guanglei's standing technique is genuinely formidable. I just don't know how it compares to Typhon Training Camp's special methods. Liu Zihao trained at Typhon for a while and came back much stronger—his moves in film are now flawless. But he's never truly achieved stillness, never reached the pinnacle. It's like sitting on a treasure without knowing it. The real martial arts evolution of the Minglun Martial Arts Academy lies in this ultra-slow-motion standing technique. The slower it is, the deeper the kung fu."

While contemplating, he suddenly made a move.

Swish swish swish...

His arms moved with unbelievable speed, leaving afterimages behind.

He opened the drawer of his desk and pulled out a stack of playing cards. With a flick of his wrist, the cards sprang to life, almost as if they were sentient.

He casually drew the two of diamonds. With a quick flick, it turned into the ace of spades.

Then he demonstrated techniques like palming, switching, and stealing cards—moves more magical than any magician.

Whoosh!

After playing with them for a while—testing how refined his sleight of hand had become—he flicked his wrist, and a card shot out like a blade, spinning rapidly. With a thud, it pierced through a book on the shelf and embedded itself inside.

“Not bad. Seems like there’s been some improvement.” Zhang Jinchuan casually tossed the card into the trash.

Elsewhere in a hidden alleyway private kitchen, Zhang Manman and Su Jie had just finished a carefully prepared meal of Nie family cuisine. After a short rest, Su Jie finally spoke.

“This is Nie family cooking too? Impressive. Way better than what I can do.”

“Nie family’s private kitchen used to cook for emperors and empresses. They specialize in health and wellness. Took me a lot of effort to book a table,” Zhang Manman said. “But this flavor really takes me back to our days at Minglun Martial Arts Academy. I hear things aren’t going too well there lately.”

“Could it be that the Feng family bought in and is starting to take over?” Su Jie’s heart skipped a beat.

He had deep feelings for the Academy. Gu Yang, Uncle Mang, and Nie Shuang had all treated him well. If not for Minglun, he wouldn’t be where he was. Liu Zihao might have been arrogant, but even he played a part.

“Pretty much. Liu Zihao let the wolves in. The Academy’s being infiltrated bit by bit. Doesn’t look good,” Zhang Manman said. “Now all the classes and resources are favoring fighters who’ve signed with the Feng family.”

“I always knew the Fengs were snakes,” Su Jie nodded. “Every company they invest in ends up getting controlled. Can’t believe so many businesses still fall for it.”

“Not much choice,” Zhang Manman shrugged. “Under capital pressure, most companies take a gamble. They want to scale up, so they cling to a bigger player. And they need the money. At Minglun, the old headmaster Liu Guanglei is buried in research. Day-to-day stuff is left to Liu Zihao, who’s trying to partner with Haoyu Group to fast-track the Academy’s expansion. But he has no fear of Feng’s influence. Sure, he can shoot flashy fight scenes, but when it comes to business? He’s still no match for old fox Feng Shoucheng.”

“By the way, did you get my visa processed? How long will it take?” Su Jie asked.

“Fast. Within a week. We’re not going to a major country—just some small war-torn place. They’re pretty lax.” Zhang Manman waved it off. “Did you know Zhang Jinchuan studied at Minglun Martial Arts Academy for a year too? We didn’t get much out of it, but he picked up the Minglun Daoyin Technique developed by Liu Guanglei.”

“Minglun Daoyin Technique?” Su Jie raised an eyebrow. He knew about daoyin—it was likely one of the oldest forms of martial arts. Zhuangzi wrote, ‘Blow, exhale, breathe; mimic the bear, stretch like a bird—these are the daoyin masters, who cultivate the body and live long like Pengzu.’



In essence, it uses breathwork and physical movements to strengthen the body and extend life.

There are many daoyin forms. The earliest was found in silk manuscripts from the Mawangdui Han tombs. There are also cave paintings, and later developments like the Five Animal Frolics, Yijin Jing, Xisui Jing, and even Golden Bell Cover, Iron Shirt, and Thirteen Protectors Iron Body—all variations of daoyin.

“The Minglun Daoyin Technique is a unique method from the Minglun Academy. It blends ancient physical movements with modern medical science, refined over thirty years of practice. And its core trait? Just one word—slow,” said Zhang Manman.

“Slow?” Su Jie hadn’t learned much during his time at Minglun, but what he did was high-quality. Unfortunately, he missed out on their most profound teachings. Clearly, this technique was the Academy’s true hidden gem.

“They say the movements are so slow that most people don’t have the patience. It’s extremely difficult to get started,” Zhang Manman explained. “Even something as simple as raising a hand can take over an hour.”

“Raising a hand takes over an hour?” Su Jie couldn’t believe it. No one would have the patience to do that.

Even tai chi isn’t that slow.

People practicing it might go nuts—spectators even more so.

“My dad said that if you can truly master the Minglun Daoyin Technique, your strength and endurance will skyrocket.” Zhang Manman continued, “Apparently, Liu Zihao didn’t have the patience for it. But Zhang Jinchuan did. I didn’t learn it myself, but I once saw Liu Guanglei practice it—he stood there all day with one leg lifted.”

“Modern kinesiology says muscle memory comes from repeated high-speed drills. That’s how you build skill for real combat.” Su Jie said, “Tai chi values slowness as a path to speed, but everything has limits. Too slow, and it’s counterproductive.”

“Exactly. I don’t quite get it either. Seems like a waste of time,” said Zhang Manman. “But my dad insists it’s top-tier stuff. Unless you immerse yourself in it, you’ll never really understand.”

“Fair,” Su Jie admitted. “When I first practiced the hoe strike, I didn’t realize how much depth there was to such a simple move. Minglun isn’t just a school—it’s a research institute. If they developed this technique, there must be solid theory behind it. If I ever get the chance, I’d love to study it.”

Su Jie had shifted his training by now.

He no longer practiced the tai chi-style joint exercises originally taught to him by Odell. Instead, his new regimen included Golden Bell Cover, Iron Shirt, Thirteen Protectors Iron Body, and other “hard qigong” forms.

His training was intense—roars like thunder, howling chants, body slaps with vine-like arms, and wild, swaying movements like a tree in a storm.

This was the advanced stage.

The earlier methods suited beginners. His new techniques were advanced material from Odell’s curriculum, though Odell never actually passed them on. Instead, Master Luo somehow got ahold of some videos, studied them with Master Ma, and passed them to Su Jie, adding their own insights.

Sure enough, after training, Su Jie’s stamina improved drastically. His internal organs grew tougher, his mind steadier, and his body shock-resistant. Inside and out, he was like iron.

He realized cultivation truly had no limits. He once thought his training had plateaued—without breaking into the “Living Dead” realm, further gains were impossible. But now, it was like discovering a new continent.

He understood now—no matter how much he knew, he still had so much to learn.

*'Teaming up with Zhang Jinchuan and learning from him might be my chance to crack the secrets of the Minglun Daoyin Technique,' Su Jie thought. 'I made the right call.'*

If he could witness the Minglun Daoyin Technique firsthand, Su Jie felt he could deepen his understanding, push his iron-body training further, and improve his physical performance even more.

He stayed in B City for a week. The visa came through. Then he left with Zhang Manman and Zhang Jinchuan for the location where militants had seized their shipment.

The destination was remote. They flew to a neighboring country, drove across the long border, then took a boat overnight before landing on the coast. From there, another five to six hours by car brought them to the city where the goods were being held.

The entire journey took three days and nights.

The city was in ruins—destroyed streets and buildings everywhere. Refugees picked through rubble for salvageable materials.

“This place saw war a few years ago. Though there’s now a ceasefire thanks to UN mediation, many cities are still devastated. Some areas are under militant control, and skirmishes still break out. Basically, it’s a warlord mess,” Zhang Manman said.

“I’ve done my homework on this place,” Zhang Jinchuan replied cheerfully from the van. He wasn’t the least bit travel-weary.

They were riding in a minivan—a Wuling Hongguang.

Zhang Manman’s specialty ride.

Su Jie stayed silent the whole trip. It was his first time abroad—and straight into a war zone. It felt surreal, like stepping into a news report.

Refugees were everywhere. The cities were scorched ruins. Pickup trucks with armed soldiers patrolled the roads. It was nerve-wracking, as if gunfire could erupt at any moment.

Su Jie was on edge the entire time.

Compared to this, life back home had been too easy. He didn’t want to spend even a second longer here.

Meanwhile, Zhang Manman and Zhang Jinchuan were calm and composed, as if they'd been to places like this before.

Zhang Jinchuan was even chatty: “Now that this country’s rebuilding, the provisional government is slowly restoring order. Investments from around the world are pouring in to seize new opportunities. Rebuilding from ruins creates massive business potential. Sure, it’s dangerous—but where there’s money, there are always people willing to risk their lives.”

“Like us,” Zhang Manman said, slapping Su Jie on the shoulder. “Relax. It’s relatively safe now. Our country’s helping with the rebuilding effort. With our national power backing us, even the militants don’t dare mess with us. Didn’t you notice how the soldiers smiled and nodded when they saw us?”

## Chapter 107: A Moment of Weakness in the Heart

Su Jie saw the occasional passing pickup truck loaded with soldiers armed to the teeth. It was impossible not to feel nervous.

Although his martial arts were solid, his mental fortitude strong, and he'd been through multiple real-life combat scenarios—believing himself to be someone who could stay calm even if Mount Tai collapsed before him—the sight of armed soldiers in a foreign land shattered that illusion. He realized he wasn’t as psychologically resilient as he had imagined.

It was a moment of self-awareness.

At the same time, he came to appreciate just how safe things were back home.

Only in a war-torn region does one truly understand the value of a powerful and peaceful nation.

Back home, even if life was tough, people could still pursue education and work hard to build better lives. But here, survival was uncertain from one day to the next—it was hard to see any hope at all.

“This is your first time here. You’ll get used to it eventually,” said Zhang Manman. “Everyone needs time to adapt. The first time I came to a conflict zone to do business, I barely slept for the first month, had constant nightmares, and was always on edge, worried about stray bullets or armed robbers. But eventually, I got used to it. You're handling it far better than I did at the start.”

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Suddenly, a burst of gunfire erupted not far away—intense and close.

Su Jie's body instantly tensed up like a pouncing leopard. He crouched low, ready to spring into action.

Zhang Jinchuan also instinctively ducked his head, seemingly experienced in finding cover within the vehicle—his movements fluid and practiced, clearly not his first encounter.

Zhang Manman, however, remained calm. She slammed the brakes. The van slowed down and turned sharply to the roadside before coming to a stop. She immediately got out of the vehicle.

“Never stay inside a car during a situation like this. It's too large a target and can easily become a priority for attackers. And unless it's an armored vehicle, regular cars can't stop bullets—using them as cover is useless,” Zhang Manman explained as she stepped out, wearing a tan camouflage uniform that blended in well with the local terrain, allowing her to hide among grass and dirt.

Naturally, Su Jie and Zhang Jinchuan were dressed in the same gear.

Each of them carried a backpack filled with various essentials—most importantly, medical kits, military rations, and water.

They also had military-grade knives tucked into their sleeves.



It was full-on field-ops special forces gear—who knew where Zhang Manman had sourced it from.

However, none of them carried firearms—for obvious reasons related to local sensitivities.

After exiting the vehicle, the trio quickly moved a few hundred meters away and took cover by the roadside.

Suddenly, another wave of gunfire rang out—loud and rapid.

“Down!”

Zhang Manman hit the dirt.

Su Jie felt his scalp tingle. A surge of danger overwhelmed him. Acting purely on instinct, he leapt forward and flattened himself to the ground like a snake, trying to press himself into the earth.

Just where he had been standing moments ago, several small craters appeared in the dirt. No bullets were visible—no one knew where they had ricocheted off to.

Had he not reacted so quickly, he might've been shot.

Life and death had hung on a split second.

“Were we being attacked?” Zhang Jinchuan was also lying flat, blending in with the terrain like a dead leaf. His expression was serious but composed.

“No. There was a small skirmish in the city up ahead. Stray bullets just happened to land here,” Zhang Manman assessed calmly. “It’s a common occurrence. Once the shooting stops, we’ll move on.”

“Hey! Scared?” Zhang Jinchuan called out to Su Jie, still lying on the ground.

But Su Jie didn’t answer. His mind had entered a strange state.

In that split second, he’d almost been hit by a stray bullet. The consequences were unthinkable.

Movies and TV often show people getting shot and continuing to fight, with only some blood at the wound. In reality, bullets tear through flesh, leaving massive,

gaping holes. Without immediate medical treatment, disability or death is almost guaranteed.

He was just a student from back home, suddenly thrown into a foreign war zone, nearly dying from a stray bullet with no rhyme or reason.

It had truly been a brush with death.

He had fought in many matches and even been attacked by Grey Wolf with a knife—but compared to stray bullets, all that now seemed like child's play.

*'Life and death are unpredictable.'*

It took more than ten seconds for Su Jie to come back to himself. Just now, it had felt like a dream—surreal and disconnected. But looking at his arm, now scraped and bleeding, he realized everything was terrifyingly real.

And what came next might be even more dangerous.

Two conflicting thoughts arose in his mind. One was a desire to embrace danger—knowing that if he survived it, his psychological resilience would reach a new level.

Huang Dingyi had said Su Jie's "Hoe Strike" technique had the flavor of ancient warriors charging into battle, but lacked the genuine essence of lived combat. It was all mental suggestion—untainted by blood and fire.

Now, having dodged a bullet—literally—Su Jie had tasted that essence.

But it wasn't enough. He needed more of it to make the "Hoe Strike" truly unstoppable.

The second thought was to turn around and go home. Live a quiet, safe life. Why risk dying in a foreign land? Martial arts can be practiced slowly. Money can be earned over time. Lose your life, and it's all over.

Especially if he died not by some enemy's hand, but by a random stray bullet during someone else's firefight—that'd be a senseless, meaningless death.

But in the blink of an eye, Su Jie realized this was the soft, comfort-seeking part of his psyche speaking up. In peaceful times, such thoughts are easily hidden. But in a harsh environment, they surface, trying to erode resolve and weaken willpower.

"Destroy it!"

Su Jie smashed his fists together, thumbs locked like bull horns. It was a mudra from the “Thirteen Protectors Iron Body”—a symbol of inner strength clashing against weakness, cultivating an immovable diamond-like spirit that crushed fear, cowardice, and distracting emotions.

As his fists met, a jolt ran through his body. His senses sharpened. That second thought—of retreat and comfort—was smashed into oblivion.

*‘Be vigilant in times of peace. Even in a peaceful era, one must remain cautious and hardened. Forget war, and danger follows; love war, and destruction comes.’*

He recalled the ancient wisdom.

“All right.”

The gunfire in the distance had subsided. Zhang Manman listened intently for a while before standing. “Let’s move. We have a base in the city run by the Zhang family. We’ll settle in first, then negotiate with the local armed group that seized the shipment.”

“No problem,” Zhang Jinchuan replied. “Your family has plenty of connections. Convincing the militia leader shouldn’t be hard. The real concern is that since the Feng family made a move, they’re probably prepared for that too.”

“Su Jie, you seem different,” Zhang Jinchuan said, narrowing his eyes, sensing a change in Su Jie’s demeanor.

“Just a bit of aftershock,” Su Jie replied. “I’m good now. Let’s keep moving. You two are seasoned. I’m the newbie here—I’ll observe before making any calls.”

Back in the van, they noticed the windshield had been shattered—clearly hit by a stray bullet. Zhang Manman seemed unfazed. They cleaned out the glass and resumed their journey.

As the van approached a ruined urban area, more people began to appear.

Groups of soldiers roamed—three to five at a time—with no clear purpose.

There were also makeshift military camps.

"One, two, three—go!"

Just then, Su Jie heard something familiar—Chinese.

He spotted a fellow countryman filming with his phone in front of a group of neatly lined-up soldiers, all holding rifles and making peace signs, singing in awkward but intelligible Mandarin:

"Zhang Yingying! Happy birthday... Happy birthday to you..."

They sang the whole song—over a minute long.

"All right, next video—everyone shout, 'Liang Liang is so handsome!'"

"Third video—hold up these boots and say, 'Top-notch quality!'"

Su Jie watched in stunned silence as the soldiers sent birthday wishes, praised some guy's looks, then promoted a pair of boots for a commercial.

"This is normal," Zhang Jinchuan chuckled. "You can order this kind of video on any e-commerce site back home. Pay a few hundred yuan, and these soldiers will shoot a promo for you. It's a business opportunity someone came up with over here. See? He's paying them."

Sure enough, the countryman filming was handing out cash to the soldiers.

They looked delighted, clapping shoulders and giving awkward thumbs-up.

“Lao Tie, 666...” they chimed in broken Chinese.

Their attitude was warm and cheerful.

Su Jie thought about it—he had seen reports like this online, but never paid much attention. Having been on edge all this time, the moment of lightheartedness relaxed him.

The countryman finished filming and waved at the van, approaching them.

“Don’t head into the city just yet. There was a small skirmish earlier. It’s quiet now, but still a bit unstable. Tomorrow should be better,” he advised.

Su Jie noticed the young man had deeply tanned skin.



“Bro, you’re something else—found a niche business in a warzone,” Su Jie greeted him, genuinely warmed by meeting a fellow Chinese abroad.

“Just a small thing. Got lots of orders. These soldiers are happy, too—it’s a source of income and it’s safe. Now they all protect me, worried I’ll get hurt and stop paying them. A lot of people here are tired of all the fighting. If there’s a way to make money that’s also fun, why not?” the young man grinned. “I’m here for engineering work. What about you guys?”

## Chapter 108: Strategizing a Countermeasure

The young man’s name was Qiu Tianyou. He had come here with the construction crew to assist in rebuilding efforts. By chance, he discovered some business opportunities and started operating a small venture, which unexpectedly became wildly popular and booming.

“I opened a restaurant here, and next to it I set up a few old-style projectors to play classic films. People came to watch movies. In just one year, I made several million,” Qiu Tianyou was chatting with Su Jie, Zhang Manman, and Zhang Jinchuan. While speaking, he gestured toward a cluster of makeshift shelters in the distance — temporary prefab units. Next to them were many stoves and burners, where cooks were busy preparing food. A constant stream of soldiers and civilians came to eat.

Some military armored vehicles — even tanks — were parked nearby, with soldiers constantly climbing down to eat.

Even soldiers from opposing sides, who were clearly not on good terms, queued up in peace.

Next to the dining area was an open lot with a large hanging screen. Far off behind it, an old-style projector was playing a film — a classic from the “Wong Fei-hung” series.

As the rousing, heroic music kicked in and Wong Fei-hung made his entrance with his shadowless kicks and dynamic moves, the crowd burst into cheers.

“Martial Art films are the most popular here — every screening is packed,” Qiu Tianyou said. “Whenever there’s a showing, soldiers from distant cities even drive hundreds of miles in military vehicles just to watch. They really lack entertainment. Last time, a bunch of soldiers even grabbed me and begged me to teach them Chinese Martial Art. But I don’t know any! They just wouldn’t believe it.”

After chatting for a while, someone called out to him from a distance. Qiu Tianyou quickly excused himself. “I’ve got to get back to business. Be careful. If anything comes up, contact me. Maybe I can pull some strings.”

Watching Qiu Tianyou walk away, Su Jie felt something stir within him.

Just a restaurant, a screen, and an old projector — yet it brought together people of different races, cultures, and even opposing factions in temporary harmony.

Martial Art seemed to act as a bridge — a medium for civilizational dialogue.

Maybe learning Martial Art wasn't just for fighting. It had other purposes too.

“Let’s go,” Zhang Manman said. “Chinese Martial Art really is popular all over the world, especially in war-torn areas. Everyone wants to learn because life is so unpredictable. The head of the armed group that detained the shipment is also a Martial Art fanatic. That’s why I brought you two along.”

“It’s not that simple,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “The Feng family’s trading group is tight with that armed leader. In fact, they even trained his men. From what I know, Feng Hengyi — the third son — is about our age, but he’s helped train those fighters. The soldiers he trained are all tough and capable of holding their own. Plus, Feng Hengyi has other deals with the head, which is why they dared to detain the shipment.”

“Seems like Feng Hengyi’s business extends beyond the Feng family’s Haoyu Group,” Su Jie thought, his understanding growing clearer.

Zhang Jinchuan had access to a lot of intel, but he didn’t share it all — just bits and pieces to show his value.

“Feng Hengyi trained from childhood in the most secretive Typhon Training Camp — basically started martial arts in the womb,” Zhang Manman added. “Feng Shoucheng invested a huge amount in grooming him. Now, there’s a powerful force backing him, and he’s clearly part of it.”

Their van soon entered what looked like a ruined city — no traffic lights, no one maintaining order. They weaved between buildings and finally stopped near what seemed to be an old industrial site.

The compound was surrounded by high walls topped with barbed wire, and mercenaries patrolled the gates.

As the van approached, the mercenaries signaled for it to stop and aimed their guns inside.

Zhang Manman got out and showed them her credentials.

After a long inspection, they were let through.

The van drove into the compound and stopped in front of a row of single-story buildings.

“Manman, you’re here?” In front of the buildings stood a dozen or so people. Leading them was a middle-aged man who bore a faint resemblance to Zhang Manman — likely a member of the Zhang family.

“Uncle Xi, how’s the situation?” Zhang Manman asked as she stepped inside. The room was modest — plain tables, a coffee table, a few wire-frame beds — no different from a construction site barracks. But it was extremely clean, with no trace of odor.

“It’s not looking good,” Uncle Xi said, glancing at Su Jie and Zhang Jinchuan, hesitating.

“It’s fine. These two are skilled fighters I invited. I believe this matter has to be handled by the local rules. Having two experts makes things easier,” said Zhang Manman. “This is Su Jie, and this is Zhang Jinchuan. I’ve already sent you the details. My dad said I’m in charge here. Just cooperate with me. Whether we succeed or not, I’ll take full responsibility.”

“Alright.” Uncle Xi nodded. “Awasi wants us to go see him face-to-face in three days. At first, I thought just a word from the Dragon Head would be enough to settle this. But things changed. He’s not even giving the Dragon Head face anymore.”

Su Jie didn’t speak, but he caught on: this Awasi was likely the armed leader who detained the shipment, and “Dragon Head” referred to Zhang Manman’s father, Zhang Hongqing.

Zhang Hongqing clearly wielded significant influence. In many places, his word alone could resolve major issues — even armed groups would show him respect.

But now, that respect seemed to have hit a wall.

“No matter what, we’ll meet him in three days,” Zhang Manman said. “Jinchuan, time to put your intel to use. Don’t you have a lot?”

“Awasi’s shift in attitude makes sense — I bet someone from the Feng family has arrived,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “This cargo seizure is the Feng family’s ace move, aimed at striking a fatal blow to the Xu family. If we resolve it too easily, the Fengs would lose face. But I think a few of Awasi’s subordinates are ripe for defection. One of them, a woman named Fuya, has an account on M@skNet. I’ve already made contact. In the next three days, I can feed you internal intel.”

“Impressive.” Uncle Xi and the others looked at Zhang Jinchuan with newfound respect.

They hadn’t expected this young man to be so capable.

Su Jie remained quiet. He couldn’t contribute much yet. Compared to Zhang Jinchuan’s strategic maneuvering, he felt a bit green. Only now did he truly grasp the other’s brilliance — no wonder he’d launched such a successful company in such a short time. He wondered how good Zhang Jinchuan’s martial arts were.

Although Su Jie had been traveling with Zhang Jinchuan for several days, he’d never seen him fight.

“By the rules here, this will probably come down to a duel in the end,” said a young man nearby. “So, I want to see how good you guys really are.”

“This is Zhang Xian — one of the top fighters of our generation,” Zhang Manman whispered to Su Jie. “There are a lot of armed groups around here, and clashes are frequent. But people realized full-blown fights are too costly — they waste ammo, manpower, and make it easy for others to take advantage. So everyone agreed to resolve disputes the old-fashioned way — like Roman gladiators. Each side picks a champion. Whoever wins, calls the shots. I suspect our negotiations will end with this method.”

Su Jie understood. In places where power struggles run deep, people often rely on primitive methods like this to resolve conflict.

He’d seen it in old Hong Kong gangster films: disputes settled through gambling or one-on-one fights.

Large-scale shootouts cost too much and invite outside interference. A duel gives both sides a face-saving way out.

It was a very Western solution — during Europe’s Middle Ages, duels were common among nobles. Boxing itself came from this tradition.

Even the famous poet Pushkin died in a duel.

“Zhang Xian, I know you’re not happy. You think you can handle this on your own and don’t see why I brought outsiders in — let alone gave them sixty percent of the cut. But you don’t understand — this can’t go wrong. I think your skills are still lacking. If you don’t believe me, Su Jie, why don’t you give it a try with him?” Zhang Manman said.

Since Zhang Jinchuan had just demonstrated his value, Zhang Manman naturally wanted Su Jie to show his as well — to avoid anyone looking down on him.

At that, Zhang Jinchuan frowned slightly. He was beginning to notice — Zhang Manman clearly favored Su Jie. In subtle ways, she unconsciously leaned toward him.

Su Jie nodded and stood up, facing Zhang Xian. “Let’s try.”

He stepped forward. Zhang Xian moved three paces ahead, sizing him up. “You go first,” he said, maintaining his composure.

Su Jie didn’t hesitate. “Alright then, here I come.”



His foot slid forward, and he shot toward Zhang Xian like a runaway train. As he advanced, his hand rose from below and then came crashing down — like a fisherman casting a net to catch everything in one sweep.

His upward and downward motions formed arcs, natural and unrefined — no hint of artifice, no trace of force. Pure and vast.

Zhang Xian suddenly felt darkness fall over him, as if the sky were collapsing. His feet felt rooted to the ground, immobile. Su Jie's palm seemed to sever the connection between his body and mind — his brain and limbs disconnected.

The palm landed on his face, then pressed down gently.

Zhang Xian collapsed, unsure how he'd even hit the ground.

“Hm?” Zhang Jinchuan watched Su Jie's technique—a move called “Hoe Strike”—and finally saw its true power. Even he couldn't help being impressed.

## Chapter 109: A Close-Combat Defeat

Su Jie's martial arts had improved drastically. He was already formidable during his fight with Zhou Chun, and after a series of intense training sessions—especially under the joint tutelage of Masters Ma and Luo—his strength had grown

significantly. By integrating the “Great Corpse State” with the natural relaxation of an infant’s sleep, his physical conditioning reached new heights.

He transformed his foundational training—both scholarly and martial—into an advanced hard-body technique: the “Thirteen Protectors Iron Body Technique,” which fused Iron Shirt, Golden Bell, Tiger-Dragon Vajra Hard Qi Gong, and other forms of internal and external training. His body became tough, resilient, and powerful—like a rare war god from the annals of history.

His signature move, the “Hoe Strike,” became near perfection.

With that kind of skill, Zhang Xian was no match.

“I don’t accept this! Again!” Zhang Xian stood up, shaking his head, convinced that Su Jie had caught him off guard with a sneak attack.

“Alright, you go first this time,” Su Jie replied sincerely.

Zhang Xian feinted left, hands up, then suddenly retracted and struck toward Su Jie’s center with a fierce punch.

Smack!

Before the punch landed, Su Jie parried it cleanly.

The next thing Zhang Xian saw was a palm on his face, gently pressing him down into the ground again.

“I don’t believe this!” Zhang Xian leapt up and launched another furious assault.

But just as he moved, another palm landed on his face—down he went again.

Now he understood. The gap between their skills wasn’t small—it was a chasm.

Admitting defeat, he stared curiously at Zhang Manman, wondering where she found someone like Su Jie. This guy was unbelievably strong. Though Zhang Xian was from a collateral line of the Zhang family and lacked the resources of direct descendants, martial arts depended more on grit and talent. Among the direct lineage, a few might surpass him, but no one could match Su Jie’s level—he was in another league entirely.

“This skill... it’s practically otherworldly,” Uncle Xi and the other Zhang family members were shaken.

The Zhangs were a massive clan, even larger than the Xu family. They’d expanded overseas since the late Qing dynasty. Originally bodyguards and caravan escorts, they had built vast business empires and weathered all sorts of storms—none of them were easily impressed.

Especially Uncle Xi, a key figure in family affairs despite not being of the main line. He immediately recognized that Su Jie and Zhang Jinchuan—brought by Zhang Manman—were both top-tier talents. With these two on her side, her influence in the family would grow tremendously.

*'If these two are working for Manman, the family dynamics might shift,'* Uncle Xi thought to himself, eyes gleaming.

“Alright, let’s rest. We’ll meet again tonight to discuss the situation in detail,” Zhang Manman clapped her hands.

After dinner, night fell.

Zhang Manman met privately with the family core.

Su Jie didn’t intrude. Instead, he felt a sudden urge to explore the war-torn ruins outside the factory camp and soak in the atmosphere of a foreign battlefield.

His skills had grown, and fear no longer had a grip on him. He even wanted to taste the chaos of bullets and bombs.

Whatever happened on this trip, he was certain his abilities would evolve further, and his spirit would be more complete.

“Thinking of going out?” Zhang Jinchuan walked over. “Wanna talk?”

“Sure.” Su Jie sat down on the steps. “Actually, I’ve always been curious about your skills. You trained with Master Luo, spent a year at the Minglun Martial Arts Academy, and even learned their secret technique—the Minglun Daoyin Technique. Care to show me?”

“I’ve learned a lot,” Zhang Jinchuan said, sitting beside him. “You studied at Minglun for two months and reached this level. I’ve been training since I was six. I’m eighteen now—that’s twelve years, nonstop. You’ve been training for less than a year, right?”

“Nine months, to be exact,” Su Jie nodded.

“No wonder Masters Luo and Ma see you as their successor,” Zhang Jinchuan’s tone had a tinge of envy. “I learned feng shui and physiognomy from Master Luo, and when he said I’d mastered his teachings, I knew he was cutting me off. But forget that—wanna spar a little? Just light contact, no exhaustion.”

“Let’s do it,” Su Jie agreed. Zhang Jinchuan was no joke. Even a friendly match would be valuable.

“Here we go,” Zhang Jinchuan stood.

Su Jie sprang up and took the initiative.

His movement glided like skating on ice—again, his signature “Hoe Strike.” Fingers slightly curled, palm cupped inward like a vortex, locking his opponent in place.

Zhang Jinchuan said nothing. He dodged like a ghost, twisted away, then countered with a sharp straight punch to Su Jie’s head.

Even before the fist landed, Su Jie felt the air compress and ripple.

He shrank his body back, raised his arm to intercept—another “Hoe Strike” reversal.

This move wasn’t just an opener—it was also a block. It could mimic spear, sword, or any weapon.

Buzz...

Just as Su Jie's second "Hoe Strike" was about to stop Zhang's arm, the latter bent his elbow mid-motion and struck at Su Jie's chest.

A classic "Heart-Thrusting Elbow" from Bajiquan—short, savage, and deadly.

Su Jie's body rippled like water. At the critical moment, he diffused the strike, dropped his hands down, and caught the elbow—a technique called "Eagle Grip" from within the same fist style.

He was like an eagle pinning a giant snake.

He pressed down, launched upward, and struck again with the same move.

Zhang Jinchuan spun, stepped aside, and jabbed at Su Jie's neck like a javelin—another deadly move: "Taibai Sword Dance."

Swish! Swish! Swish!

In less than a minute, the two exchanged dozens of blows.

Zhang Jinchuan never repeated a move—his attacks blended techniques from countless disciplines: karate, Muay Thai, kickboxing, even military kill strikes. It was overwhelming.

Su Jie, on the other hand, used nothing but his “Hoe Strike.” Dodge, block, counter—endlessly. It looked like he was on the defensive, barely landing hits.

But Zhang Jinchuan knew better—none of his strikes could break through. Su Jie was like a turtle: unbreakable shell, with a head that might snap out and bite at any second.

And turtles don’t let go once they bite.

Suddenly, Zhang Jinchuan leapt back—seven or eight steps, out of striking range.

Su Jie didn’t know why he retreated so far, but he could sense the fight wasn’t over.

He rushed forward to close the gap.



Then—Zhang Jinchuan flicked his hand.

A glint of silver streaked through the air—steel pellets!

Su Jie, mid-lunge, couldn't change direction. He braced himself and took the hit.

Pa! Pa! Pa! Pa!

The pellets slammed into his body—high penetration. A few hit nerve points, stunning him briefly. Though his iron-body training helped him recover quickly, the damage was done.

In that moment of hesitation, Zhang Jinchuan counterattacked.

Fist to chest, elbow to ribs, kick to legs—three clean hits sent Su Jie sprawling.

Covered in dirt, Su Jie rolled back to his feet and dusted himself off. “Hidden weapons?”

“In ancient martial arts, hidden weapons were number one. You should know that,” Zhang Jinchuan said calmly.

“I lost. No argument there,” Su Jie admitted. He could tell Zhang Jinchuan hadn’t gone all out—many tricks were still hidden. Their spar was more of a technical exchange, not a death match. He hadn’t used his full power either.

Still, he realized he was likely inferior. In a true fight, he’d probably lose eight out of ten.

The use of steel pellets had disrupted his rhythm completely. He hadn’t seen it coming. And in real life, anything goes. In the old days, hidden weapons were the deadliest part of martial arts: throwing knives, sleeve darts, iron beans, slingshots—one strike could end a fight.

Novels often portrayed hidden weapons as dirty tactics used by low-tier villains. In reality, someone who mastered hidden weapons in one year could kill a martial artist who trained for decades.

Odell had warned him early on—when facing someone with a knife, always watch for throws.

Zhang Jinchuan’s hidden weapon technique was precise—those small steel pellets were thrown en masse, impossible to guard against.

*'Good thing it was just steel pellets. If it were a gun, I'd be dead. Some agents trained in quickdraw can fire in under a second. No time to react,'* Su Jie thought. He wasn't bitter about the loss. He was reflecting.

The defeat was a valuable lesson. His skills were enough for street brawls and exhibitions, but against professionals trained in killing? He'd be done for.

## Chapter 110: Ambushed: Real Danger and a Trial of the Heart

"Our sparring match doesn't really mean much," Zhang Jinchuan said. "Neither of us dares to go all out. It's no different from those traditional martial arts 'hand exchanges.' I look forward to the day we can fight for real—on a platform, in a cage, whatever it takes. That's when I'll see your true potential."

"After so many moves, your technique is above mine, and your stamina is better," Su Jie replied. "But your ability to take hits is a little weaker."

"You've trained specifically to withstand blows, haven't you?" Zhang asked. "Specialized conditioning, over and over again. I know Uncle Mang did electric current stimulation experiments on you. Even elite agents find that agony unbearable, yet you endured it. That's impressive."

“You know about that?” Su Jie was surprised Zhang had studied him too.

“Of course. I’m a direct disciple of former principal Liu Guanglie. Many coaches at the Minglun Martial Arts Academy stay in contact with me. I even planned to set up a research fund there, but the Haoyu Group barged in and ruined it. Damn those Fengs—they have to meddle in everything.”

“Minglun Martial Arts Academy is a gold mine—remedies, human physiology, kinesiology, psychology research, plus its brand value. In sports science, it’s top-tier. I can’t understand why Liu Zihao would invite the wolf into the house,” Su Jie said, shaking his head. Decades of teaching experience and priceless experimental data made the academy the nation’s number-one sports science brand.

“Zihao’s short-sighted,” Zhang said. “If it were me, I’d proceed steadily, wait for the right opportunity. As living standards rise, sports and wellness will have huge market potential. The health supplement industry is a mess right now—what’s needed is a credible giant to dominate. Minglun could have soared, but thanks to that interference, they’ve set themselves back years. Mark my words, the fallout will be obvious later. Personally, I see big potential in things like Neizhuang Liquor—mass-produce it, and it could take the world by storm. Remember that tycoon who came back from ruin just by selling health supplements?”

Su Jie thought of the Nie family’s “secret ointment” and “internal strengthening wine.” Ordinary names, extraordinary effects—essential to his own progress. Without them, his intense training might have left him crippled. The liquor, taken in small amounts, heated the organs, sharpened the mind, boosted dopamine and endorphins, and primed the body for peak performance without side effects. The

ointment strengthened joints, promoted circulation, and healed injuries quickly. Used together, they turned dedicated training into rapid transformation.

“What a shame,” Zhang said. “Those remedies were perfected over decades, tested thousands of times, all from ancient formulas passed down to Minglun. And Liu Zihao just handed them over. My sources say Haoyu plans to mass-develop them with him, pushing into the supplement market.”

“Haoyu has the online channels, Zihao has the media brand—but these can’t yet be mass-produced. I worry Haoyu’s greed will ruin their reputation,” Su Jie admitted.

“They will. Haoyu devours markets like locusts,” Zhang sneered. “Word is Feng Shoucheng’s three sons have been... altered in fortune—one’s a Taotie, one a Pixiu, one a Yazi. Ancient beasts, never sated, never merciful.”

“We both know the truth about face-reading,” Su Jie said. “Right now, I just hope we can get the armed group to release the detained cargo so the Xu family’s shipment leaves safely, or Feng’s scheme will succeed.”

“The cargo’s on three cruise ships at a nearby port, guarded by armed men. No one can leave, and supplies cost a fortune. On top of that, daily port fees and detention fines are piling up. Two options: storm the place, drive them off, and have the crews sail out—quick and direct. I’ve analyzed it: they’re lightly manned and disorganized. Or wait for negotiations. But if Feng keeps interfering, delays will multiply. Commercial talks can drag on forever.”

Zhang’s first proposal was straight from an action film—storm in and rescue everything.

“That’s not wise,” Su Jie refused. “Not because I’m afraid, but first, breaking the established order here will harm all Chinese businesses, not just Xu’s. Second, we came to resolve this peacefully. Unless they try to kill us, starting chaos will spiral out of control and give others an excuse.”

“You’re cautious,” Zhang said. “I figured peace was unlikely from the start. If Feng’s plan were easy to foil, it wouldn’t be worth his effort. He might even be baiting us into the obvious move.”

“So we came for nothing?” Su Jie asked.

“It depends on the bigger players,” Zhang replied. “Zhang Manman’s father, Zhang Hongqing, has pulled many strings. The overall picture’s clear; now it’s about fine moves. You won’t take my first suggestion, and I doubt Manman will either, so let’s drop it. We’ll adapt as things come. By the way, want to join my company?”

“Your tech firm? I’m not skilled in that field. But if you need talent, I can recommend my sister as a consultant,” Su Jie said.

“I know your sister—AI expert at Haoyu’s R&D lab. I even know about her old company, the trap she fell into, and the predatory contract she signed with Feng Yuxuan. You want her out, but the penalty’s too high, right?” Zhang said shrewdly. “If you join me, I can get her free, give you shares and a big salary.”

“You can manage that?” Su Jie asked, tempted.

“Of course. I’ve fought Feng’s family many times and never lost,” Zhang said.

“If you can really do it, I’ll join after this mission,” Su Jie agreed cautiously. He wasn’t easily swayed—he’d turned down similar offers before. Zhang was a genius, but Su Jie would watch him closely. Too many brilliant men had crooked hearts. He wouldn’t let his sister leap from one wolf’s den into another.

Truthfully, Su Jie hoped to build enough wealth and influence to let his sister start fresh on her own. He didn’t want lasting ties, not even with the Xu family.

Zhang was about to speak again when a deafening bang echoed from the distant gate—it had been blown open. His face changed instantly.

“Not good!”

Su Jie’s instincts screamed danger—far worse than the stray bullet incident earlier.

“Find cover!”

Without hesitation, Zhang dashed away.

A pickup truck burst through the gate.

Su Jie spotted the dark muzzle of a gun protruding from inside, aimed directly at them.

Pup-pup-pup—gunfire erupted.

Su Jie leapt aside in the nick of time, avoiding the bullets. The truck kept charging, its passengers clearly targeting them without restraint. In this place, such attacks were routine.

*'If not for today's stray bullet giving me practice, I'd be dead,'* Su Jie thought, diving behind a building corner.

A sharp sting hit his arm—a bullet had ricocheted from the ground, grazing him. Blood welled up, but it was only a surface wound.



Swiftly, he tore a bandage from his clothes, the kind pre-treated with disinfectant and coagulant, and wrapped it tight in seconds.

*'This is real excitement!'* His adrenaline surged—no fear, only exhilaration, like an athlete injected with pure energy. This was far more thrilling than any fight.