

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 111: Relentless Pursuit, Mercy Without Equal

The attackers came fast, driving a pickup truck straight through the gates of the compound. They headed directly toward the building where Su Jie, Zhang Jinchuan, and the others lived, firing shots from a distance as they sped in. Everything about their assault was well-executed—it was clear this had been meticulously planned.

Fortunately, Su Jie and Zhang Jinchuan were highly alert. In that split second between life and death, they dove behind cover, avoiding the initial gunfire.

But the truck kept coming. It swerved sharply, and Su Jie spotted four or five armed men inside. Suddenly, they hurled several dark objects toward the house.

Boom!

Flames and deafening blasts erupted from inside.

“Not good—Zhang Manman and the others are still in there! These people came to wipe us all out. If we’d been resting in our rooms as usual, those grenades would have killed every last one of us,” Su Jie said in a low, tense voice.

Thankfully, he and Zhang Jinchuan had been outside at the time.

“Su Jie, we’re fine.” The voice came through his comms device after the explosions. “Are you hurt?”

“We’re fine,” Su Jie quickly replied. “You weren’t inside?”

“No. We suspected an attack was likely, so we staged a fake scene,” Zhang Manman’s voice answered over the link.

By then, the compound’s security detail—battle-hardened mercenaries—was springing into action. The pickup spun around and roared toward the gate. But the mercenaries were quick and experienced. As the vehicle tried to escape, several sharp bursts of gunfire rang out.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

One tire blew, then another. The truck skidded to a halt, crippled.

The gunmen didn't hesitate. Even as the vehicle stopped, they flung open the doors and scattered into the maze of alleys in the nearby ruined city.

"After them," Zhang Jinchuan ordered.

Su Jie didn't think twice. He charged ahead, adrenaline surging. The fear was gone—replaced with a raw, electric thrill. This was life and death, far more intense than any ring fight or street brawl. It was practically special forces combat: one mistake could mean a bullet in the head.

Only now did Su Jie realize how little pressure his old training environment had put on him. Here, in this crucible, his mind and skills were being tempered like never before. Survive this, and going back to martial arts—he'd be terrifying. If you're not afraid of bullets, why fear fists?

They didn't chase in a straight line. Instead, they moved from cover to cover, using rubble and shadows to mask their approach. In the darkness, it was easy to stay hidden and close the gap quickly.

Su Jie moved like a mountain monkey—running, rolling, leaping, each movement compact but fast as lightning. This was the essence of the Hoe Strike Style: "Dodge like a monkey, strike like a tiger."

Soon, they reached the alleys of the ruined district, surrounded by collapsed concrete and bomb craters from past conflicts.

“They went down this street,” Zhang Jinchuan whispered, crouching behind a thick slab of rubble. “They’ve got guns, so be careful. But in the dark, they can’t fire recklessly. Muzzle flashes would give them away, and ricochets could kill them. We actually have the advantage. You’ve got your knife, right? How about we finish them here?”

“Not so simple,” Su Jie replied, though a fire burned in his chest. This was something he’d only seen in movies—now he was living it. The sting from a scrape on his arm reminded him it was all real.

Foreign country. Under attack. Fighting back. Death could come any second. His nerves tightened like steel wire.

Zhang Jinchuan tossed a chunk of concrete into the distance. It clattered loudly.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunfire tore into the spot.

“Damn—we didn’t bring helmets,” Su Jie muttered. A steel helmet wouldn’t stop a direct bullet, but it could deflect a ricochet.

“No choice—we go for it,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “I’ve got their position. You heard it, right? In that ruined building ahead?”

“I heard.” Su Jie’s senses sharpened to a razor’s edge. In his mind, he mapped the shooters’ positions and imagined their aim lines.

“Move!”

Jinchuan slithered forward like a snake. Su Jie darted from side to side, weaving through imaginary bullet paths based on his limited shooting experience from the Washin Mountain Villa range. It wasn’t much, but his agility and the cover of night kept him safe.

They slipped into the building’s skeleton. Su Jie could hear the faint breathing of their prey.

Jinchuan suddenly pulled out a flashlight, switched it on, and hurled it into the room.

Swish!

The beam lit up five figures. One face was all too familiar.

“Grey Wolf!” Su Jie recognized him instantly.

The men flinched at the light, guns shifting toward it—but they didn’t fire. The room’s reinforced concrete would send bullets ricocheting unpredictably, possibly back into them.

Movies made gunfights in rooms look safe behind tables or walls. Reality was different—modern rounds could tear through thin cover easily.

Without hesitation, Su Jie lunged, closing the distance to Grey Wolf in a heartbeat. Faster than he’d ever moved before, his palm slammed across the man’s face. If he’d been slower, Grey Wolf would have fired.

Even Jinchuan was momentarily stunned—he’d still been planning his move.

‘No wonder Master Luo picked him,’ Jinchuan thought. Even national champion Liu Long might not dare this.

Grey Wolf reacted fast—his gun clattered to the floor, and in the same motion a knife appeared in his hand, driving for Su Jie’s ribs. In close quarters, a blade was deadlier than a gun.

But Su Jie's Hoe Strike Style "Eagle Claw" grip caught Grey Wolf's wrist mid-strike and twisted hard.

Crack!

The wrist dislocated instantly. Pain contorted Grey Wolf's face.

Su Jie didn't stop. Stepping in, palm braced on the man's chest, his foot hooked behind Grey Wolf's legs. A brutal push-pull—

Crack!

The man's spine gave way, dropping him limp to the ground.

This was the Hoe Strike Style's "Breaking the Branch," a wrestling-and-grappling finisher designed to disable instantly. The style's other variations—"Pulling Weeds," "Shaking the Wheel," "Leading the Ox," "Carrying the Load," "Chopping Firewood," "Smashing Stone," "Pushing the Mill"—all came from farm work, but each was vicious in a fight.

Su Jie didn't linger—he rolled to the flashlight, shut it off, and rolled again.

Bang-bang-bang!

A gunman fired blindly in the dark, just as Su Jie had expected. Luckily, the ricochets missed him.

Then—

Shhhk!

The wet slice of a blade across a throat. Jinchuan had used the darkness to close in and kill one.

Su Jie froze in his hiding spot, the sound vivid in his ears—blood spurting, a choking, dying gasp.

Click!

Light flooded the scene again. Three men remained. One, a younger man, suddenly shouted in English:

“Stop! Surrender!”

He dropped his gun. The others hesitated, then followed suit.

Jinchuan raised his knife again, ready to finish them.

“Stop!” Su Jie barked.

Something in the young man’s face and bearing caught his attention—marks that suggested high status. Such a person wouldn’t normally be here in a raid.

He glanced at the dying man on the floor, throat slashed and spasming. Dropping into a crouch, Su Jie pressed skilled fingers to the wound, stemming the blood.

The neck’s major arteries, once cut, bleed out fast—only immediate pressure can save a life until surgery.

From his kit, Su Jie pulled bandages and worked quickly, binding the wound tight. The man was still alive—for now.

He looked at the remaining three in English: “Is there a hospital nearby? One has a spinal injury. The other’s artery is cut. If you move fast, they can still be saved.”

Chapter 112: Spirit Linked to Heaven and Earth

The three bandits who had set their guns down stood there, stunned.

They never expected that their enemy would actually be tending to their wounded.

The leader among them was a young man, probably just over twenty, with a face that still carried a trace of youth. He was the first to lower his weapon and call for a halt, making a clear gesture of surrender.

He spoke English as well. “We surrender now. Will you let me leave?”

Even as he asked, he muttered something rapidly in the local dialect to the two men beside him.

Of the five bandits who had come today, only one — “Grey Wolf” — was a man from the Feng family. The rest seemed to be native tribal fighters.

“I can let you go. You’ve been misled,” Su Jie replied — in the local dialect.

The three remaining bandits were visibly shocked.

“Su Jie, you speak the local dialect?” Even Zhang Jinchuan was taken aback.

“I prepared beforehand,” Su Jie explained. He had the advantage of his older sister’s AI learning device. Before coming here, he had used it to pick up enough of the dialect to manage simple conversations and understand most casual speech. His pronunciation wasn’t perfect, but his ear for languages was excellent — in English, his listening tests had always been flawless, never missing even half a syllable.

“You’re Chinese? You know martial arts? And your skills are better than his?” the young bandit leader asked in the local dialect.

“Yes,” Su Jie nodded.

Shua!

The young leader muttered again, then suddenly lunged forward, clearly wanting to test Su Jie.

Su Jie stood, nodding slightly, inviting him to make the first move.

The bandit came at him fast, fists like the wind, full of ferocity, his footwork nimble and quick — the mark of real fighting skill.

Su Jie didn't bother with elaborate moves.

Slap!

The sharp crack rang through the air.

The young man tumbled to the ground, sitting down hard, shaking his head in confusion.

After two or three wobbles, he got up again, raised both arms to guard his head, and charged like a battering ram.

Another slap from Su Jie.

This time, even with both arms up, he couldn't block it. He went down again.

Finally, realization dawned on him. He jumped to his feet, clasped his fists together, bowed deeply, then unbuckled and dropped all his remaining weapons. Without another word, he hoisted "Grey Wolf" and helped the bandit who had been bandaged, leading them away.

Zhang Jinchuan didn't stop them. Once they were gone, he collected the scattered weapons. "Su Jie, these men came here to kill us. Letting them go will only bring trouble later."

"Killing them would bring far worse trouble," Su Jie said calmly. "These are local armed tribesmen. If I'm right, they were stirred up by the Feng family to attack us. If we start killing, there's no turning back."

"I think that young man had a high status. Better to keep him as a bargaining chip," Zhang Jinchuan said, shaking his head. "You're too soft-hearted, Su Jie. That'll cost you someday. Just like with that Feng family mercenary — you only broke his spine, didn't kill him. A man like that will never be reformed. Once he recovers, he'll come for you again. He's a deadly soldier, and if he's set on killing you, you're in real danger."

“You’ve killed before?” Su Jie asked. “I saw how practiced you were when you slit that man’s throat.”

“Of course,” Zhang Jinchuan replied matter-of-factly. “Once you overcome the mental barrier, it’s no different from killing a chicken. Easier than slaughtering a pig, really — a person struggles less. You, I think, still have that mental barrier. That’s not good. Martial arts are killing arts at their root. In ancient times, no martial skill existed that didn’t kill.”

“In the modern age, there’s modern martial arts,” Su Jie said with a small smile. “Killing is easy. Saving someone is hard. Changing someone’s heart — even harder. Everyone has their own understanding of martial arts. Do you know how Zhuge Liang pacified the southern tribes? He captured and released Meng Huo seven times until his enemy was truly convinced. For centuries after, the southerners revered him as a god. Compare that to Sima Yi’s conquest of Liaodong — massacres, city slaughters, piles of skulls. It made Liaodong a perpetual thorn in every dynasty’s side. Two completely different approaches. I won’t open that door. And here’s something else — killing intent can unleash your maximum power in an instant, but it also robs you of calm. Just now, without killing intent, I noticed something off about that young man. You’re normally more observant than me, but killing intent clouded your intuition. Most killers lose a measure of reason when their blood is up. That’s just psychology.”

“Then we’ll agree to disagree,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “I believe that killing a bandit with your own skills teaches you the true essence of the move our predecessors created — the original spirit of martial arts. Without ever killing in combat, you’ll never really know what martial arts are. Anyway, enough of that. Let’s head back. Tonight was a wake-up call. I doubt we’ll sleep soundly for a while. But in a war zone, you get used to it.”

The two quickly gathered the weapons and returned to the factory compound.

By then, things had quieted down. A few more mercenaries were patrolling, but no one seemed on edge — it was just part of life here.

“You’re back. Everything okay?” Zhang Manman was waiting at the gate.

“We’re fine. Almost took that bunch out, but Su Jie let them go,” Zhang Jinchuan said, shaking his head. “And this was at night — if it had been daylight, we’d probably have died under their guns.”

“You’re hurt?” Zhang Manman ignored his complaint and saw the bandage on Su Jie’s arm, rushing to check it.

“Just a scratch,” Su Jie replied. “It’s late. Let’s get some rest. We might have things to deal with tomorrow.” Even after such a serious incident, his mindset stayed steady — ready to sleep the moment his head hit the pillow.

“Alright. We’ll sleep in shifts. If anything happens, we sound the alarm,” Zhang Manman said, knowing Su Jie kept a strict sleep schedule.

Su Jie rinsed off with a bucket of cold water, then sprawled out on his bed in what he called the “Great Corpse State,” asleep within seconds.

He had a rare talent — no insomnia, no restless nights, no lying awake with worries. He could also set his own internal alarm: decide to wake in an hour, sleep instantly, and open his eyes exactly on time, down to the minute. If word of this skill got out, he'd probably inspire a wave of envy and resentment.

His “Great Corpse State” used to be perfectly straight. Now, in sync with his breathing, his body would slowly curl up, eventually taking the fetal position, then gradually straighten out again. Over the course of six hours, he would only shift between those two poses.

If Zhang Jinchuan saw this, he'd recognize the movements — identical to the slow transitions in the “Minglun Daoyin Technique.” Yet Su Jie did it unconsciously, his expansion and contraction entirely natural.

At 3 a.m., exactly six hours later, Su Jie woke automatically, refreshed.

He drank some water, ate a military ration — beef and vegetables compacted with various nutrients. High quality, designed for war zones by the Zhang family to ensure no nutritional deficiencies. The only downside: every meal tasted the same.

After that, he slipped out into the wilderness for training. Once warmed up, he suddenly let out a long, resonant roar, the breath flowing from his lower abdomen to his chest, throat, and out — like dragon, tiger, crane, wolf, ape, and eagle all at once.

Roaring, he began to strike every part of his body with heavy, snapping blows — head, chest, back, thighs, calves, buttocks, even groin and throat — each smack sharp and loud like firecrackers.

Wearing only shorts, he stomped the ground and exhaled forcefully, radiating a presence like a wrathful Vajra. Each strike brought blood to the surface, his muscles swelling, body steaming in the cold air — vapor from sweat meeting the chill.

This was the Thirteen Protectors External Training: Golden Bell Cover, Iron Shirt, Dragon-Tiger Vajra Hard Qi Gong,” developed by Odell. Many of its biomechanical principles were calculated by Typhon Training Camp’s AI. But even experts found it nearly impossible — the moves were complex, and it required intense psychological focus, sustained roaring, and perfect rhythm.

If Odell’s earlier teachings had been like grade-school math, this was a doctoral-level problem. Even Masters Ma and Luo had tried and failed.

Su Jie, however, had mastered it over a single winter break. Tests confirmed his coordination and precision were spot-on.

He could never train this at home — the roaring and constant smacking would have the entire neighborhood calling the police. Even in Master Luo’s home, he had to use a soundproof basement.

But here, in a foreign land scarred by war, he could finally unleash it under the open sky, without restraint.

It felt like shedding every last chain of suppression — exhilarating, unrestrained.

In the midst of his dragon-tiger roars, he even felt — if only in illusion — that his spirit could touch heaven and earth, summon wind and rain, command thunder and lightning.

He recalled that in ancient Daoist lore, there was a “Five Thunder Palm” — a method using steps, gestures, sound, and roaring to convince oneself of the power to control the elements and smite demons. Whether it was truly lost, he didn’t know.

But here, in this self-punishing hard Qi Gong, he had touched that feeling — the spirit connected to the heavens themselves.

Chapter 113: Reaping What You Sow

Boom!

All of a sudden, the sky darkened with rolling clouds. Thunder cracked in the heavens, lightning tore across the horizon, and then—like an overturned bucket—the rain poured down.

This country was known for its scorching heat and rare rainfall. Storms like this were almost unheard of. Su Jie had once read in a geography magazine that whenever such heavy rains came, villagers in certain places would rush outside, singing and dancing in the downpour, treating it as a divine blessing.

But Su Jie did not seek shelter. Instead, beneath the rumbling sky, he let out one long howl after another, pushing his Iron Body training to the absolute limit.

The thunder muffled his cries, allowing him to shout without restraint. It felt as though his soul had risen to the clouds, whirling in a wild dance with the spirits of lightning and thunder themselves.

The sensation was extraordinary—something utterly new to him. For the first time, he felt so close, so deeply connected, to nature.

Amid the storm, he howled and released his voice, venting everything pent up inside him. It was as if he had shed the constraints of humanity, overcome with the primal urge to dance with tigers, leap with leopards, and roam with wolves and apes.

Only now did he begin to understand why so many ancient masters and reclusive sages chose to live in remote mountains. Deep in those wild ranges, a person could do whatever he wished—sing, dance, gaze at the distant horizon, or howl into the vast emptiness—without caring what others thought. There, one could unleash all suppressed emotions and dissolve into the great unity of heaven and earth.

But just as the storm had come quickly, it faded just as fast. The rain merely dampened the soil before the clouds scattered and the sky cleared.

After finishing his training, Su Jie returned to the compound, showered, and applied a thick layer of ointment.

This wasn't the Nie family's secret salve—that supply had long since run out. Instead, it was a potent concoction obtained by Master Luo Weiwei through the dark web of the Typhon Training Camp, paid for in digital currency.

The ointment promoted blood circulation, strengthened tendons and bones, expelled dampness, killed bacteria, reduced inflammation, eased swelling, and relieved pain. For practitioners of external conditioning, it was priceless.

No one attempting Iron Body training could do without medicinal aid. Without it, injuries would pile up and the body would break down. Especially with Su Jie's own brutal regimen—"Thirteen Protectors Golden Bell Iron Body: Dragon-Tiger Vajra Hard Qigong"—each session was like hammering himself toward death. Fierce as a dragon-elephant, forceful as a warlord, savage as a beast, grinding himself down as though smashing iron to dust—any professional fighter watching would blanch. Without proper medicine, such punishment could easily trigger acute organ failure.

Once fully coated in ointment, Su Jie lay down quietly and fell into sleep.

He had trained his biological clock precisely: one hour of rest.

Eyes closed—sleep.

Eyes open—awake.

Exactly an hour passed. It was 7:00 a.m. sharp. Not a second off.

“My Martial Art has advanced again.” Rising, Su Jie saw that the ointment had been fully absorbed, and even the bullet grazes on his arms had healed. Only faint traces remained, and in a few days, even those would fade. He nodded to himself with satisfaction.

That morning’s training was the most powerful session he had ever experienced. His howling beneath the storm had unleashed his wild nature in full. And beyond that, he realized it was the crucible of recent events—this foreign land, brushes with death, bullets, bandits, explosions, ambushes, killing, saving lives. All of it had forced him into trials most ordinary people would never face in a lifetime. That raw, visceral experience had reshaped something deep inside him.

Still, he knew such progress was fragile. To truly break through, he would need time, reinforcement, and discipline.

“If I could train every day in this state, then in three to five months, I’d see explosive growth again.” Su Jie had been studying psychology, kinesiology, and human physiology under Master Ma and others. He wasn’t an expert, but he understood the principles well enough: in training, entering the right mental state mattered more than sheer repetition.

When body and mind aligned, when every motion felt natural and exhilarating, a single session could achieve more than dozens of ordinary ones.

With dawn came a new day.

The sun rose, the air grew hot again, and the ground dried quickly, as though the thunderstorm had been nothing but a dream. Yet in the air lingered a richer scent of moisture, and throats no longer felt parched.

In the courtyard, Zhang Jinchuan was training.

He stood facing a glass jar. Inside, on damp cloth, lay soybeans soaking in water, just beginning to sprout.

His eyes fixed on the seeds, his breath slow and delicate, he seemed to move and not move, as though syncing himself with the sprouting of those beans.

“This must be the Minglun Daoyin Technique.” Su Jie quickly recognized it. Zhang Jinchuan’s movements were so slow they were nearly imperceptible.

Su Jie watched quietly, saying nothing.

Four, five hours passed in silence.

A faint sprout finally peeked from the beans—barely visible to the naked eye. At the same time, Zhang Jinchuan’s arm had lifted... only halfway. One simple motion—raising an arm—had consumed an entire morning.

Some of the Zhang family members watched at first, hoping to glean insight into the training of two masters. But after hours of watching such excruciating slowness, they lost patience and drifted away.

Zhang Jinchuan’s practice stood at the extreme opposite of Su Jie’s. Where Su Jie’s loud cries and self-inflicted blows seemed mad to outsiders, Zhang Jinchuan’s stillness and slowness looked like idiocy.

“Do masters really train like this?” Zhang Xian, who had lost to Su Jie, still tried to stay patient. He asked Uncle Xi, Zhang Xi, who was sipping tea in the house: “I’m getting anxious just watching.”

“They say this is a profound art,” Zhang Xi replied. “If the Zhang family let him train here in this war-torn land, it means they trust his abilities. You see, even just observing tests patience. But the essence isn’t about slowing movements—it’s about slowing the heart. Anyone can move fast, but to truly slow down inside is difficult. Modern life makes people restless and hasty. To calm that is far harder than training strength or speed.”

“I could never practice this. It has no scientific basis,” Zhang Xian scoffed. “Real training is about explosive repetition, pushing limits, building muscle memory. I can endure brutal intensity. But this... this crawling pace? It feels like superstition dressed up as martial arts.”

“Yet the Minglun Martial Arts Academy, where martial culture is strongest in the country, upholds this very art as its highest discipline,” Zhang Xi countered. “It was created by their legendary headmaster Liu Guanglie and passed to his son, Liu Zihao. But even Liu Zihao lacked the patience to master it. They say Liu Guanglie, however, achieved greatness with it.”

“How does Liu Guanglie compare with the Dragon Head?” Zhang Xian asked.

“That, no one knows. They never crossed hands,” Zhang Xi said.

Su Jie, overhearing, nodded quietly. He now understood the principle.

The art's slowness was not empty. From the perspective of psychology and kinesiology, humans—primates by nature—were wired for constant motion. Stillness made them restless. That restlessness wasted energy and eroded lifespan. If one could master inner calm, it meant conquering a primal instinct, altering the emotional patterns written into the very genes.

This “near-motionless motion” was not true stillness, but an infinite deceleration, hovering at the edge of stillness while never quite arriving there. The subtlety was immense.

If someone could truly slow their heart and mind, unmoved by the fleeting world, immersing wholly within, pursuing one thing with absolute focus, then their potential—whether in learning or any pursuit—would surge to terrifying heights.

“This kind of slowness is the slowness of the soul, not just the body,” Su Jie realized.

“To slow down is to glimpse what endures forever. Even the history of mankind is but a flicker in the endless flow of time.” Another insight bloomed in him.

Just then, Zhang Manman rushed in, clapping her hands. “Enough training! Good news! General Awasi wants to see us earlier than expected. Originally it was set for three days later, but this morning he sent word inviting us to his camp to discuss the detained goods.”

“Oh? What happened? Is his attitude genuine? Could it be a trap?” Su Jie asked.

“Looks like a good turn,” Zhang Manman said. “His own son came to fetch us, quite respectful too. You’ve studied physiognomy and the Book of Changes—why don’t you divine whether this is auspicious?”

“Nonsense,” Su Jie waved it off. “Those are experiential arts at best. My experience is far too shallow to claim such certainty.”

Zhang Jinchuan ended his training posture, and the three of them walked out of the compound.

A few armored vehicles waited outside. From one stepped a young man—yesterday’s bandit leader.

At the sight of Su Jie, he strode forward, bowed deeply, eyes full of admiration, and spoke rapidly in his native tongue.

Su Jie replied in the same language.

“What’s he saying?” Zhang Jinchuan and Zhang Manman asked, baffled.

“He says he deeply respects me—for bandaging even my enemy yesterday. He’s never seen such humanity. He admits he misjudged us and promises to do everything he can to smooth this matter over. And... he wants to learn from me,” Su Jie translated calmly.

Chapter 114: The Enemy Camp: Poor Psychological Endurance

“Was it him who attacked us yesterday?” Zhang Manman’s expression darkened. “Why would Awasi’s son want to kill us? His relationship with my father has always been decent. Could he really be breaking their agreement?”

“He said he just returned from studying abroad, got deceived by others, and acted recklessly,” Su Jie explained after another rapid-fire exchange with the young man. “His name is Piman Kuiana. Yesterday was the very first time he ever picked up a gun in combat—he only wanted to gain some battle experience.”

“No wonder.” Zhang Jinchuan nodded. “He surrendered so quickly yesterday. If he had been more experienced, our victory would’ve been much harder.”

“Exactly. Other than the Grey Wolf, the rest of the fighters yesterday were rather ordinary. Compared with the elite special forces of other nations, their skills are

miles apart,” Su Jie agreed. He also admitted to himself that charging out barehanded yesterday had been more impulse than calculation. His win came with a heavy dose of luck.

Had the attackers been real sharpshooters, men who could shoot straight through the dark and hit a hundred times out of a hundred, he would have been a corpse already.

Of course, in that moment, his charge had been fueled by two things: adrenaline and the rare chance to test himself in real danger. He had seized the opportunity to sharpen his spirit. And it worked—this morning, during his practice, he felt breakthroughs everywhere, a surge of progress.

And more than that—he had managed to influence, even slightly, the son of the enemy leader. If he had followed Zhang Jinchuan’s advice yesterday and executed all the attackers, the consequences could’ve been disastrous.

“This is clearly a scheme,” Zhang Jinchuan said at once, his eyes narrowing. “The Feng family’s scheme. They deliberately incited this fool into attacking us. If we had killed him, Awasi’s heir, things would have escalated out of control. Yesterday I blamed Su Jie for being too soft-hearted, but now I see—his approach was right.”

The young man was indeed Awasi’s son, freshly returned from overseas studies. It was obvious Awasi was grooming him as his successor.

Killing the successor would have meant Awasi going all-in for vengeance.

But now, the situation had shifted.

As Zhang Jinchuan watched Su Jie chatting comfortably with the youth, his eyes narrowed further, as though he were reweighing his entire strategy.

“So that’s how it is,” Zhang Manman finally understood. “Then let’s move. Uncle Xi, stay here and watch over the camp. Gather everyone, wait for my instructions, and report to my father immediately if anything happens. Also, continue with the planned arrangements.”

“No problem,” Zhang Xi nodded.

Su Jie listened quietly. It was clear the Zhang family had their own broader plans in motion.

“Stay close to this kid. Don’t leave his side. If anything goes wrong, you can grab him as a hostage.” Zhang Manman leaned close and whispered into Su Jie’s ear.

Su Jie only smiled, then turned and asked the youth in the local dialect, “Piman, you really can’t be so impulsive anymore.”

“I know, I know. My father already beat me badly for yesterday. This morning he sent me to apologize. He also wants to host a banquet for you, to thank you for

your mercy,” the youth replied. “By the way, my name isn’t Piman—it’s Tatamiya Piman Kuiana. But I also have an English name: Gale.”

“Gale, you said you wanted to learn from me—are you talking about martial arts?” Su Jie climbed into the armored vehicle. Gale followed closely, practically glued to his side, eyes filled with admiration.

“Yes! I want to learn Chinese Martial Art... Wong Fei Hung!” Gale shouted in broken Chinese, imitating movie poses. Clearly, he had seen quite a few martial arts films.

“That’s just the movies. Real Martial Art isn’t like that. It may seem mysterious, but it never defies physics.” Su Jie explained patiently. Since Gale was a university student who knew English, his explanations were understood easily.

“Is it true,” Gale suddenly asked, “that you people come here to trade with us, buy our resources cheap, sell them high, and basically plunder us?”

“Not true,” Su Jie said firmly. “On the contrary, we came here to help you rebuild your homeland. We provide technology, help mediate your conflicts, and support the reestablishment of a united nation. That way both sides can do business better. Look—your father detained our ships and goods, but all those materials were brought from outside. Only when everyone prospers can trade thrive. If war rages everywhere, who would dare come here to do business?”

“I also wish for peace. I hate war,” Gale admitted. “But the way things are now, if you don’t fight others, they’ll come and devour you instead. If only I had your skills.”

“Human strength has its limits. Even the best Martial Art cannot stop bullets,” Su Jie said calmly. “But martial arts can strengthen the body, cultivate the mind, and serve as a lifelong passion. That much is invaluable.” He reached for Gale’s hand. With a sudden squeeze and twist, he pressed into several spots.

Instantly Gale felt tingling numbness spread across his body, freezing him in place.

“These are acupoints—concentrations of nerves.” Su Jie was essentially using massage techniques, based partly on traditional medicine. From the hand alone, he could sense issues with the internal organs.

Gale was stunned. “This is incredible! Once we reach the camp, you must teach me properly. My father’s men include several top instructors. Maybe you can spar with them?”

“Of course.” Su Jie knew that here, to win trust, one had to prove strength first. Without it, words carried no weight.

Two hours later, their convoy reached the outskirts of a massive camp. Prefabricated barracks dotted the grounds, alongside concrete buildings. Soldiers

with loaded weapons patrolled everywhere. The sound of gunfire echoed occasionally. Su Jie even spotted tanks, and in the distance, an airfield with fighter jets waiting.

At the camp's center stood a fortified manor. Behind it loomed a mountain, at its foot a river that flowed straight through the camp. It was a prime location: secure water, solid defenses.

Awasi was no amateur. His choice of terrain alone marked him as a formidable commander among the factions. The manor itself was plain but strong, without unnecessary luxury. That alone showed Awasi's pragmatism and ambition. A man like him would not be easily handled.

"Even if Gale trusts me, convincing his father to release our seized goods won't be easy," Su Jie thought grimly. "We'll have to play this one move by move."

The convoy halted inside the camp. The visitors were led not into the manor, but into a nearby prefab hut to wait.

"My father is in a meeting," Gale explained. "He'll see you once it's finished. I'll inform him now and be right back." With that, he rushed off.

Zhang Manman's face tightened. If the other side turned hostile now, the three of them could be shredded in seconds.

Looking at the dense ranks of soldiers outside, Su Jie also knew: even if his strength multiplied tenfold, he would be dead the moment fighting started. In real life, Martial Art masters do not waltz in and out of enemy camps unscathed, no matter what the movies say.

Suddenly, a wave of dread hit him. He forced his face calm, but his chest tightened with unease. He had analyzed the situation, considered worst-case outcomes, and found... nothing. No solution. Only death.

'My mental toughness isn't there yet,'

he realized, laughing at himself bitterly. All his years of meditation and self-hypnosis had been illusions. Confronted with true peril, he still wavered inside. His so-called training was a paper tiger, fragile and false.

How could such weakness ever break through to the realm of the 'Living Dead'?

'This trip was worth it after all,' Su Jie thought. *'Only facing real danger shows you what you lack. Illusions can never replace reality.'*

"Not even a glass of water. They're being rude—something's off," Zhang Jinchuan muttered, suddenly rising to his feet.

Indeed, no one had come to receive them. Soldiers even stood guard outside, making it feel less like a reception and more like imprisonment.

Then— clatter, clatter, clatter!

Hurried footsteps approached. With a thunderous kick, the door burst open. Several soldiers stormed in, weapons raised, black muzzles pointed straight at the three.

Su Jie's hair stood on end instantly.

For the first time in his life, he stared into gun barrels, realizing one twitch of a finger could end him forever.

The soldiers fanned out. Then, from behind them, a woman in combat fatigues stepped forward. Gun in hand, she raised it—and suddenly fired, rounds striking the dirt right at their feet.

The bullets buried deep, harmless.

But at that split second, Su Jie exploded into motion. His body dipped low, lunging forward like a hunting cat. In a flash, he reached the woman, slapped her arm at

the nerve point, and made her fingers spasm open. The gun dropped into his hand. He yanked her neck into a chokehold, jamming the barrel against her temple.

A counterattack, swift and ruthless.

Su Jie had gambled everything. When the bullets hit his feet, something inside him snapped—no more fear. If death was certain, then better to fight for even a sliver of chance.

“Su Jie, wait—it’s one of us!” Zhang Jinchuan shouted quickly. “Fuya, is that you?”

“Trump, your comrade is brave indeed,” the female soldier replied calmly, not the least bit afraid of the gun at her head. Instead, she greeted him in English.

“My name is Jinchuan, not ‘Trump,’” Zhang Jinchuan sighed, clearly having been called that more than once. “Su Jie, release her. Fuya’s a friend. She was just testing our nerve.”

Chapter 115: Schemes and Intrigues

‘Zhang Jinchuan said he’d made preparations too. On M@skNet, he got to know a high-ranking figure under Awasi, a female officer named Fuya... the very woman

standing before us now?' Su Jie instantly pieced things together. He handed the gun back to the officer and nodded, saying it was a misunderstanding.

But just a moment ago, he had been wound tighter than a bowstring, staring down the barrels of soldiers' rifles. What chilled him more was that the female officer actually fired at his feet—the sparks, the ricochet of the bullet, and the crack of the shot made him taste death all over again.

An ordinary person would have been scared witless, maybe even wet themselves. Even a seasoned fighter might have frozen, no different from a trembling barnyard hen.

Fortunately, Su Jie had toughened up through repeated trials. His psychological resilience had grown, letting him launch a decisive counterattack.

That alone showed how far his fighting skills had advanced.

After releasing Fuya, he couldn't help but feel relieved. Good thing she was only testing me. Otherwise, I'd never have subdued her so easily. If she had aimed at my body instead of the ground, I'd already be dead.

She hadn't been serious. If she had been, Su Jie knew he couldn't have won.

He quickly reviewed the encounter like a student analyzing a botched exam problem, determined not to repeat the same mistake.

“You all, out,” Fuya ordered. Dressed in sand-colored camouflage fatigues, boots laced tight, cap pulled down over short hair, with knives strapped here and there—she looked every bit the lioness who had clawed her way through blood and fire.

At her command, the soldiers left the prefab shelter.

“Your skills are impressive.” Fuya holstered her gun and nodded at Su Jie. “But too impulsive. Just now, when you charged, I had at least three ways to dodge and shoot you down.”

“No choice—I had to take the gamble. If you’d been a real enemy, I couldn’t just stand there like a target,” Su Jie admitted. He knew his attack was riddled with flaws, far from ideal, but in that split second his brain had chosen survival over perfection. Still, the encounter exposed how he struggled to stay coolheaded under mortal danger—something only hardened through grueling training and combat.

He spoke in fluent English, as did Fuya.

Though he could manage the local dialect, he’d only picked up basic phrases—fine for small talk but useless for deeper conversations. Thankfully, both Gale and Fuya’s English was excellent, so communication wasn’t an issue.

If only they spoke Chinese, Su Jie thought. Since Gale wants to learn martial arts from me, maybe I should teach him Chinese too.

“Plenty of guts,” Fuya said, studying Su Jie. “If you ever went through special forces training, you’d make an outstanding soldier.”

From their brief clash, she admired his strength, speed, reflexes, and courage. The only flaw: his inability to stay absolutely calm under extreme peril. That would take years of specialized drills and firefights to hone.

“All right, Fuya,” Zhang Jinchuan waved. “Tell us why you came. We’ve chatted over video plenty, but this is our first face-to-face. You know I’ve advised you before. Now it’s your turn to help me.”

“Trump—no, Jinchuan...” Fuya corrected herself. “I know why you’re here. I also know what happened yesterday. Originally, the general had no intention of releasing the seized shipment. But yesterday opened his eyes—someone’s been openly using him. So he changed his mind. Still, letting that cargo go won’t be easy.”

“So what should we do?” Zhang Jinchuan asked.

“The seizure was actually Bata’s idea,” Fuya explained. “He’s the general’s number two, about equal in rank to me. He’s been with the general a long time, even saved his life on the battlefield, so he’s trusted. Lately, our finances have been tight. Bata proposed seizing the cargo—either ransom it for a fortune or sell it ourselves. I opposed it from the start. We’re not bandits. If we break the rules this once, no one will ever deal with us again.”

“You’ve mentioned Bata before,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “Last time I advised you to scheme against him so he’d lose favor before General Awasi. And it worked—your position went to you, not his man.”

“You Orientals really are masters of strategy,” Fuya admitted. “In truth, I found evidence Bata’s colluding with outsiders against the general. If you can help me expose him, the general will definitely release the cargo.”

“That’s tricky,” Zhang Manman interjected. “That’s your internal affair. We can’t interfere. We’re here strictly for business negotiations.”

Su Jie listened quietly.

“This ties back to the Feng family,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “Feng Hengyi is backed by a powerful and sinister force that’s reaching in here. Bata may already be their man, or at least bought off. He egged Gale into attacking us—one, to use us to kill the general’s heir, Gale; two, to get us slaughtered in retaliation. A neat two-birds-with-one-stone. Either way, even if we ignore Bata, he won’t ignore us.”

“So you have a plan?” Su Jie asked, unfamiliar with local politics and relying on Zhang Jinchuan’s lead.

“I do,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “It’s simple. Our end goal is getting the cargo back. Awasi’s stance is still uncertain. Fuya’s with us. Bata’s backed by hostile forces and clearly wants to usurp power. Su Jie, do you see?”

“I see.” Su Jie nodded. “To recover the cargo smoothly, we need to make the general realize Bata isn’t loyal, that his ideas are poison meant to drag him down. Seizing cargo to make money? That’s a terrible idea. If it escalates and sailors die, international outrage would crush the general. Even the provisional government would sanction him, and other leaders would pile on. The real question is—does the general already doubt Bata?”

“He’s begun to,” Fuya said. “Yesterday shook him awake. But he’s still wavering.”

“Su Jie, I’ve got an idea,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “But I want to hear yours first.”

“The options are clear. Fuya should keep pressing the general. Once doubt takes root, psychology says it only grows—everything Bata does will be suspect. By the way, besides the Gray Wolf, are there any other Feng family operatives here?” Su Jie asked.

“Yes. Another one, codename Hungry Wolf,” Fuya replied.

“Perfect...” Su Jie narrowed his eyes, digging through his memory of countless historical intrigues. China’s history was practically a manual of strategy—familiar plots repeated through the ages.

“Here’s the move,” Zhang Jinchuan cut in, voicing exactly what Su Jie had been thinking. “Fuya, arrest Hungry Wolf at once. Then leak word to Bata that under interrogation, he and Gray Wolf confessed to conspiring with Bata to assassinate Gale. Whether Hungry Wolf talks or not doesn’t matter—the message gets to Bata. He’ll panic. He might even strike early, rebel outright. At that point, whatever he does will be too late.”

“Hm?” Su Jie blinked, startled that Zhang Jinchuan had said what he himself had just reasoned out.

The plan combined classic tactics: sowing discord, luring out the snake, casting a wide net.

“And if Bata stays put?” Fuya asked.

“Still fine,” Zhang Jinchuan assured. “What you’re doing is for Gale’s safety. Even if you push boundaries, the general won’t blame you—he’ll trust you more, and doubt Bata even more.”

“The details will need careful planning,” Zhang Manman said. “But time is short. The sooner, the better.”

“Arrest him, spread rumors, fan the flames. Stage a bit of chaos if needed—have people shout that Bata’s rebelling, plotting Gale’s murder... sling all the mud you can. You know the saying: lies spread in an instant, truth limps behind. And Bata’s guilty conscience will make him blunder,” Zhang Jinchuan explained further. “And Fuya—you’ll need to assign troops to guard us. Cornered dogs bite.”

“No problem. The general wants to see you soon anyway. At his residence, you’ll be safe,” Fuya said, striding out, swift and decisive.

“Zhang Jinchuan, your mind really is sharp. No wonder Feng Haoyu’s repeated attacks failed. You’re a tough one,” Zhang Manman said admiringly.

“Actually, it was Su Jie who gave me the nudge,” Zhang Jinchuan replied. “If I’m not wrong, he’d already thought of this. He was just finding the right words. Isn’t that so, Su Jie?”

“My mind doesn’t turn as fast as yours,” Su Jie waved him off.

“No—it’s that you think schemes and trickery are beneath a righteous man. You hesitate to speak them. You prefer the straightforward path. Just like your martial arts—solid, steady, always advancing head-on. Never the crooked shortcut,” Zhang Jinchuan said.

Chapter 116: Using the Past for the Present

Su Jie listened to Zhang Jinchuan's words, and once again he felt as if he were dreaming.

They were still just high school seniors, supposed to be preparing intensively for the college entrance exams. His classmates back home were buried in study sessions, practice tests, and mock exams. Yet here he was, in a foreign land torn by war, having already braved bullets and near-death encounters. Now he was even strategizing for a warlord leader, unmasking traitors, and helping to quell a rebellion.

It gave him the feeling of living inside history itself.

Whenever he read history, he would marvel: at seventeen, Huo Qubing had already led eight hundred cavalymen on a long expedition hundreds of miles deep, slaughtering thousands of enemies and capturing many of their leaders.

A young hero, the pride of the army—he had been Su Jie's age.

And Xin Qiji, the great poet, at twenty-one had led just fifty men in a daring raid on an enemy encampment of tens of thousands, captured a traitor alive, and ridden away unscathed. These were living, breathing events—not fiction.

His thoughts flashed by like lightning before he returned to the present. He looked at Zhang Jinchuan and said, "Now, all we can do is wait. Let's hope Fuya succeeds—otherwise, we'll be in real trouble."

"There's never a hundred percent certainty in anything. Do all you can, leave the rest to fate. That's how great decisions have always been made throughout history," Zhang Manman replied, indifferent to success or failure. "This plan is solid. Looks like I was right to seek out the two of you. Zhang Jinchuan, you're certainly holding the Feng family in check—but really, the credit this time goes to Su Jie. If he hadn't released that Gale, we wouldn't have had the foundation for this plan at all. What do you say? Shouldn't you share some of your sixty percent cut with him?"

"Business is business," Zhang Jinchuan quickly said. "We signed a contract before coming here. We should still honor that. But as long as Su Jie agrees to join my company afterward, we can renegotiate terms."

Su Jie, seeing how Zhang Jinchuan refused to budge an inch, realized this man was not someone guided by sentiment but by his core interests. He could cooperate with him, but not entrust him as a true brother-in-arms.

He too had his own way of reading people.

Just then, footsteps sounded outside.

The three of them fell silent.

Gale entered. “My father has settled the matter. He will see you now. Come with me.”

Su Jie stood, and the three followed Gale through the long military camp to the manor gates. Soldiers stepped forward, frisked them, and confiscated their weapons and knives before letting them inside.

The manor was simple—trees planted without trimming or ornament—but the ground was spotless, swept until it gleamed. The stark neatness left a strong impression.

Soldiers stood guard everywhere, watching the three with hawk-like eyes.

Inside was a hall for handling affairs. At a large table sat a dark-skinned, middle-aged man in uniform, missing an ear, with scars from bullet wounds across his head. His sharp gaze fixed on Su Jie and the others like a predator eyeing prey.

Yet around his neck hung a heavy gold chain; on his fingers, gemstone-studded gold rings, several on each hand; and on his wrist, a gold watch. He looked for all the world like a vulgar nouveau riche.

Back home, not even the gaudiest coal barons wore jewelry like that anymore.

Su Jie didn't laugh. He understood: this man wore such valuables so he could flee at a moment's notice if things went wrong. In a land this unstable, even the most powerful could be overthrown at any time. When chaos struck, there was often no chance to carry away wealth—better to keep it on one's body, ready to pawn or barter for survival, perhaps even for a comeback.

“Father, they're here,” Gale said to the man.

Clearly, this was the local warlord—General Awasi.

“About yesterday's attack on you by my son—I apologize,” Awasi said. “And you must be Zhang Manman, daughter of Instructor Zhang? In my youth, I trained at the Honey Badger Camp for a time. I could even be considered one of your father's students. Without that period, I would never have achieved what I have today.”

“General, we came today to—” Zhang Manman began, steering the talk to business.

But Awasi waved a hand. “By our laws, that shipment was indeed subject to seizure. Everything I did followed proper procedures.”

Hearing this, Su Jie knew Awasi would not be easy to deal with. He wasn't about to let go of such a fat prize.

Meanwhile—

In a medical ward not far from the camp, “Gray Wolf” lay on a bed, eyes open but body immobile. His lower half was completely paralyzed, incapable even of basic bodily functions. That single strike from Su Jie’s “hoe-handle snapping branch” move had shattered his spine.

Hatred blazed in Gray Wolf’s eyes.

Beside him stood a man of about twenty-seven or twenty-eight, in camouflage uniform. He wasn’t bulky, but under the yellow-brown camo was a body of steel-like muscle, radiating a sense of indestructibility, as if even blades couldn’t cut him. His hands were long and thick, the skin of his fingers calloused like scales from endless combat training.

This was “Hungry Wolf.”

“Gray Wolf, your spine is broken. Medical care here will never heal you. You’ll need advanced treatment in the U.S., costing at least a million dollars to recover,” Hungry Wolf said. “Our plan has failed. Who could’ve imagined that kid would befriend Gale? Not only did we fail, Awasi is now suspicious of us.”

“What should we do now?” Gray Wolf rasped. “Fortunately, Bata is ours. At this point, we can only burn the boats behind us—set the plan in motion directly. Once

it succeeds, those three brats will be trapped like fish in a barrel, completely annihilated. If I don't avenge this, I'm no man."

"Then so be it," Hungry Wolf said. "Awasi summoned his son back from abroad to groom him as successor. Now Bata has lost his trust—it's time to strike. I'll persuade him—"

Suddenly, Hungry Wolf's face changed. He shrank back and vanished into the ceiling with rodent-like agility, rustling away until he was gone.

Moments later, footsteps thundered. Fuya burst in, frowned at the sight of Gray Wolf on the bed, and snapped, "Search! And carry out the plan immediately."

Back at the manor, Zhang Manman fell silent, trying to think of a way to persuade Awasi, all while waiting for Fuya to make her move.

"I greatly respect Instructor Zhang. But business is business, law is law," General Awasi said in fluent English. "Still, if you want me to release the shipment, it's not impossible—as long as—"

Suddenly, gunfire erupted outside.

He leapt up. "Guards! Guards! What's happening?"

Like a startled hare, he darted into a corner, barking orders. Clearly, he'd faced such crises often enough to make these reflexes second nature.

Guards stormed in and surrounded Su Jie and the others at gunpoint.

For the second time, Su Jie stared down gun barrels—but this time he felt no panic. His mind was cold and clear.

A guard leader rushed in, shouting in the local tongue: “General, it’s Bata—he’s revolting!”

“What? Bata revolting?” Awasi strode out of the corner, furious. “Where’s Fuya? What’s going on? Bata dares betray me? I already suspected after yesterday. I should’ve investigated immediately! And now he dares strike first—he’s courting death!”

He bellowed in rage.

Su Jie only caught a few words—the general was speaking too fast in his fury.

Soon Fuya strode in, face alight with triumph. “General, after yesterday, I investigated Gray Wolf and Hungry Wolf, interrogated them, and discovered they colluded with Bata to kill Gale. I was preparing to report to you and stop his plot, but just now Bata led his guards and fled the camp.”

“Damn it! Damn it!” Awasi roared. “He dared plot against my son! After him! To the command post!”

Furious, he stormed out to rally his troops. To Fuya, he barked, “Stay here and host our three guests. Gale, with me!” He clearly didn’t trust leaving his son behind.

“Everything went smoothly,” Fuya said once Awasi left. “Sure enough, the moment I gave the order, Bata didn’t resist—he just ran. I overestimated him. I thought he’d stand and fight me.”

“Classic case of shadows and paranoia,” Zhang Jinchuan sighed in relief. “But he was clever to run. If he’d resisted, it would’ve been suicide. Even if he denied it, Awasi would’ve stripped him of command and investigated. Then escaping would’ve been impossible. Better to flee at once. Even if nothing was proven, he’d still lose Awasi’s trust—and that alone meant doom.”

“That’s a bit like when Cao Cao tried to assassinate Dong Zhuo,” Su Jie added. “He was caught in the act, so he immediately dropped to his knees and offered the dagger as tribute. Later, Dong Zhuo suspected him and someone advised: summon Cao Cao again. If he comes, it’s loyalty; if he doesn’t, it’s treachery. Cao Cao, knowing his guilt, fled immediately.”

“A psychological game—interesting,” Zhang Manman said, realizing the plan had more or less succeeded.

“Fuya,” Zhang Jinchuan said, “when you speak to the general later, this is how you should put it...”

He pulled her aside and whispered instructions.

Chapter 117: A Well-Laid Plan

“Zhang Jinchuan really is impressive. He reminds me of the great strategists of the Three Kingdoms era,” Zhang Manman said to Su Jie.

“Mm. This makes me think of Emperor Gaozu of Han, Liu Bang, when he broke free from the Siege of Baideng. He bribed the enemy leader’s wife with a fortune, had her whisper pillow talk, and escaped. In my view, Zhang Jinchuan must have promised Fuya a great deal. Even if he pockets sixty percent, I suspect he’ll have to give away quite a lot.” Su Jie nodded.

“Too bad. Even if this goes through, you won’t gain a single benefit.” Zhang Manman said, “I noticed Zhang Jinchuan really wants you to join his company. Are you in or out?”

“We’ll talk when we get back.” Su Jie had already made up his mind. Zhang Jinchuan was someone he could work with, but never truly trust. No need to put all his stakes on him. “Honestly, I’ve already gained plenty this time—realizing where my psychological resilience falls short. That’s a cultivation benefit no wealth can compare with.”

Far away in a valley, “Hungry Wolf” met with a burly, bearded man.

The man was Bata, dressed in yellowish camouflage, with dozens of soldiers behind him, their uniforms still stained with blood.

“What’s going on?” Bata glared at “Hungry Wolf.” “Weren’t you captured? And didn’t you sell me out? How are you standing here?”

“I should be asking you! What happened?” Hungry Wolf was baffled.

“I heard you and Grey Wolf were captured, and that you exposed me. Then rumors spread that I was about to rebel, so I ran.” Bata said.

“Damn it—we’ve walked right into a trap.” Hungry Wolf froze for a few seconds, then roared.

“What trap?” Bata demanded.

“Let’s go. We can’t stay here. If Awasi catches us, we’re dead. If you hadn’t run, we might still have had a chance to clear our names. But since you fled, the charges are confirmed. There’s no going back now.” Hungry Wolf saw the situation clearly.

They’d been spooked into running.

“Fuya couldn’t have devised such a plan—it must have been those three little bastards. Who knew they were so sharp? How did they even know Fuya? And why would she listen to them?” Hungry Wolf was genuinely puzzled.

The scheme had two key points: first, Fuya had to trust those three; second, a rumor had to spread instantly to cause panic and force Bata to expose himself.

“Call it their good luck. Too bad about Grey Wolf.” With that, Hungry Wolf quickly left.

Meanwhile, at the manor, General Awasi was tallying his senior officers. He found no real power players had sided with Bata’s rebellion and breathed a sigh of relief. After issuing commands, he told his officers:

“From today, Gale will take Bata’s place. Any objections?”

“None!”

No one dared oppose.

“Good.” Awasi nodded. “Bring Fuya to me. You are dismissed.”

Half an hour later, Fuya arrived.

Awasi gestured for her to sit. “Fuya, you acted decisively this time. Well done.”

“I only did what I should.” Fuya remained standing, straight-backed. That only raised Awasi’s regard for her. “I came to ask about those seized goods. What do you think should be done?”

“Seizing them was Bata’s idea. He was actually trying to harm you, General,” Fuya said. “We need stability and reconstruction now. That requires their country’s help. If this incident damages your reputation, no one will want to do business with you later—that would be a terrible loss. Besides, their nation is strong and friendly, with other powers gravitating toward them. If they take a stance over this matter, we could find ourselves isolated. I recommend resolving this amicably. Also, the Xu family has vast experience in foreign trade. By working with them, we could open trade routes, hand over some business to them, and ultimately make far greater profits.”

“I see...” Awasi was persuaded by the logic. He nodded. “So Bata deceived me. I failed to see the long-term benefits. Old methods won’t work. With peace approaching, we must change our mindset.”

“Your wisdom is divine, General.” Fuya seized the chance to flatter him.

Back at the manor’s dining hall, Su Jie and the others sat waiting for news.

Zhang Manman still looked uneasy.

Su Jie reassured her: “Don’t worry. This should work out.”

“How can you be so sure?” Zhang Jinchuan asked with a smile.

“For us, we’re secondary. The key is that our country is strong now, standing behind us. Awasi wouldn’t dare take drastic measures—only play small tricks. Plus, we’ve erased the Feng family’s influence, so no one’s fanning the flames. With Fuya speaking on our behalf, if this still fails, then heaven itself is unjust.” Su Jie’s judgment was steady.

Soon, a rich aroma drifted in. Chefs arrived, serving a lavish spread—bread, butter, roast turkey, mashed potatoes, cheesecake, apple pie, bananas, nuts, steaming coffee.

There were even cigars.

“It worked.” Zhang Manman, seeing such a feast, knew success was almost certain.

Earlier, they hadn’t even been offered water.

Sure enough, Awasi arrived with Fuya and his son Gale.

Awasi’s expression had softened. He greeted them warmly: “Come, let’s have lunch. I’ve decided to release your goods and ships and clear up the misunderstanding. But I hope we can strengthen business ties. We could sign an agreement. I have large shipments to sell and will need to make purchases abroad. How about giving all the orders to you?”

“That’s wonderful.” Zhang Manman hadn’t expected such a drastic shift.

The meal was cheerful for hosts and guests alike.

Afterward, Awasi turned to Su Jie: “I hear you’re skilled in martial arts. Gale wants to learn from you. I also have capable fighters here. How about a match?”

“Of course.” Su Jie couldn’t refuse. Though Awasi had agreed to release their cargo, no paperwork had been processed yet. A change of mind was only a thought away.

“Daru, come in.” Awasi clapped.

Through the door strode a warrior nearly two meters tall, muscles like boulders. Yet he moved with the lightness of a cat, footsteps silent and agile.

Usually, bulky muscles slow a fighter, but this man was different—his body was both powerful and nimble.

The ideal fighting physique is compact and flexible: soft when relaxed, hard as iron when tensed, like scales layered over the body. Too little body fat is a problem, too much is a problem. The balance is key.

Daru, however, was born with natural strength—what ancient people called “divine power.” Add rigorous training and countless battles, and he was formidable.

He stripped off his shirt, revealing a torso crisscrossed with scars—knife wounds, bullet wounds, not an inch of unmarked skin. A terrifying sight. Any opponent would lose heart at first glance.

Su Jie was stunned.

Every scar was a record of battle. Daru's real-life combat experience far surpassed his own. These weren't sparring scars, but the marks of surviving countless brushes with death.

Scars are a man's medals—and Daru's were uncountable.

'This man's real-fight experience dwarfs mine. In terms of strength and stamina, I may not even have an edge.' Su Jie didn't dare underestimate him. He knew himself—though he'd fought many matches and trained at the highest level, his psychological resilience was still lacking. He hadn't yet reached the state of treating life and death as mere play. His corpse-pose meditation, infant curl, and external body training were, at the end of the day, just layers of psychological armor.

But here, facing real guns, he realized once stripped of those mental crutches, he was still just an ordinary man.

Su Jie weighed in at 85 kilograms. Daru looked at least 150.

Even in world combat sports, such a heavyweight class didn't exist.

Not even boxing's super heavyweight division reached that size.

But since he'd agreed, Su Jie had no choice but to step up.

Zhang Jinchuan's expression darkened. He could tell Daru was no ordinary opponent.

"Even Liu Long, the top domestic fighter, wouldn't be his match," Zhang Jinchuan murmured to Zhang Manman. "I wouldn't dare face him."

"Liu Long is the 80-kilo champion. This man is twice his size, with longer reach. That alone is daunting. Worse, he's had special training and countless kill-or-be-killed fights. For him, professional fighters are like hobbyists sparring in a park. If I'm right, he's also been long-term on banned substances and stimulants." Zhang Manman nodded grimly.

Zhang Jinchuan grew anxious for Su Jie. He was well-versed in combat himself and understood the strengths and flaws of both traditional martial arts and modern fighting.

Most traditional martial arts practitioners, even “masters,” lack true fight experience. When a real fight comes, their moves fall apart—like students who’ve memorized formulas but never solved problems, freezing during the exam.

And even professional fighters, though hardened by ring combat, were like chickens compared to men who’d survived battlefields drenched in blood.

Chapter 118: The Irreconcilable Gap of Weight

“This man’s strength might break some world records,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “Forget weightlifting—take the 100-meter sprint. The current world record is 9.58 seconds. But that’s without using stimulants or banned substances. Nowadays, there are plenty of enhancers without side effects. Who knows how fast and strong someone could become on them?”

On the surface, Olympic world records seem unbreakable. But with performance enhancers, shattering them becomes almost effortless.

Zhang Manman knew this as well. The reason the Olympics banned stimulants was because otherwise, everyone would be competing on drugs, and the entire meaning of sports would collapse.

Earlier generations of performance enhancers had harmful side effects. But with advances in science, she knew that many research institutions had already eliminated those side effects, turning them into something like health supplements. They simply remained prohibited in sporting events. Follow current novels on novel-fire.net

And now, this Daru—just one look was enough to tell he was a user. Otherwise, how could someone with such massive size still maintain that kind of agility?

There were agile fat men in reality, but Daru was a giant who moved like one.

Zhang Jinchuan and Zhang Manman exchanged words here and there, but in truth, they were subtly reminding Su Jie to be cautious, to shape his strategy based on Daru's physique and fighting style, so as to avoid defeat.

Su Jie stood up and stripped off his shirt, revealing a solid, powerful body.

Ever since he had cultivated the Thirteen Protectors' Golden Bell Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong, his physique had undergone a profound change.

The bulky muscle mass had receded, replaced by a steady increase of fat, which gradually layered over his muscles. His body fat percentage had risen. From the outside, he looked like someone who had slacked off in training. But he knew that this state was actually the healthiest and most resilient against blows.

On the surface, he appeared closer to an ordinary person. One could no longer tell he was a practitioner. Yet his muscles had not diminished; instead, under neural control, they had become softer, more elastic, more alive.

Moreover, the fat on his body was evenly distributed, without the usual clumps.

Ordinary people who neglected training and gained weight would rapidly accumulate fat around the belly and thighs. Su Jie's fat, however, spread evenly like a thin membrane covering his body. Soft to the touch, it could absorb tremendous impact, while also being finer and more sensitive.

Even so, compared to Daru, he seemed far inferior.

Su Jie's build—185 cm tall, 85 kg in weight, with a wingspan longer than most—looked impressive among ordinary people. But against Daru—2 meters tall, weighing over 150 kg—the contrast was like child versus adult.

Daru was nearly twice his size.

“This is an unfair contest...” General Awasi said with interest. “Strictly speaking, in combat sports, this violates the spirit of fairness. But Chinese Martial Art always speaks of ‘the weak overcoming the strong,’ of ‘four ounces moving a thousand pounds.’ Wouldn’t you agree? Daru is my most powerful warrior, trained in gladiatorial combat. The scars on his body testify to his valor. Why don’t we place a wager, and see who wins?”

When he said “the weak overcoming the strong” and “four ounces moving a thousand pounds,” his Chinese pronunciation was so mangled that Zhang Manman and Zhang Jinchuan needed a moment to understand him.

“General, Martial Art doesn’t glorify weakness overcoming strength,” Zhang Jinchuan replied. “Weakness is weakness. Strength is strength. We say: first courage, second strength, third skill. No matter the situation, raw power always comes first.”

“Not necessarily,” Awasi countered. “Add knives or guns to the fight, and speed becomes decisive. Smaller fighters would even have the advantage. But today, it’s pure hand-to-hand combat.”

Zhang Jinchuan paused—momentarily thrown off by the general’s rebuttal.

Indeed, if it were knives or swords, no one could say for sure whether big or small builds had the upper hand. There wasn’t enough modern data, and no one could conduct such experiments. But with guns in jungle warfare, the smaller, more agile fighter with a smaller target profile certainly held the advantage.

“Let’s begin.”

The living room was spacious, more than enough for Daru and Su Jie to fight barehanded.

The two squared off. Daru slapped his chest in salute.

Su Jie clasped his fists and bowed.

Each had his own ritual. This was not life-or-death—only friendly sparring.

Boom!

The moment the salute ended, Daru lunged forward.

Su Jie's vision darkened—the man's massive figure rushed at him like a bear, yet without any clumsiness. He was astonishingly nimble, his footwork light and sliding forward like a dancer's moonwalk.

'This guy could do parkour,'

Su Jie thought. He had never seen such an agile giant.

As Daru closed in, his fist was already arcing toward Su Jie's face.

In that instant, Su Jie could have ducked and slipped inside. But he made a split-second judgment: doing so risked miscalculating the distance, because Daru's reach was enormous.

Worse, it felt like Daru had deliberately set a trap, luring him into a pocket.

Judgment was everything. Beginners lacked it—once a fight started, they lost their heads, flailing wildly. Slightly better fighters understood advancing, retreating, defending, dodging, counterattacking—but their sense of distance and direction was imprecise. Stronger fighters controlled all that well, knowing exactly when to strike and which style to use against which opponent.

Su Jie stood above even that—able to anticipate his opponent, making the most correct choice in a flash.

He slid back, then darted sideways, refusing to take the bait.

Daru's eyes narrowed. His next punch blasted forth like a cannon, full of ferocity.

Su Jie kept dodging, not engaging head-on. He felt transported back to his early days at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, when he fought in small ring matches—

running evasively against strong opponents, buying time. He hadn't fought like this in ages. Ever since his Martial Art matured, he had always gone in hard—taking punches head-on and slapping opponents down.

But now, he had shifted styles again, relying on his smaller frame and agility, refusing to clash directly.

After several failed attacks, Daru saw Su Jie darting about like a mouse. Yet he showed no irritation. Instead, his eyes grew colder—until they became utterly emotionless.

Su Jie sensed the change and shivered inwardly.

The man's size wasn't the true terror. The terrifying part was his complete lack of emotional fluctuation—remaining calm, analyzing every move, never influenced by environment or by the opponent's mentality.

This was the product of countless life-and-death battles. Without calm, he would have died long ago.

Sensing Su Jie's fleeting shock, Daru spread his arms wide, enlarging his coverage. His feet shifted like a storm wind, sweeping forward in a net-like encirclement.

Such movements were almost unheard of in striking combat—leaving the centerline wide open, as if begging to be attacked. Only in wrestling or sumo would someone engage this way.

Yet Daru did exactly that—closing on Su Jie with a massive embrace, ignoring his own exposed center.

Su Jie charged forward suddenly, as if to pierce straight through the middle and see what trick Daru was playing. But Daru didn't react, pressing ahead as though he meant to crush a bayonet with his chest.

At the last moment, Su Jie braked hard and darted away again.

His earlier charge had been a feint—a probe to test Daru's response. But Daru had given none at all, continuing steadily on course.

Such a person was either a clueless rookie—or a master so deep that nothing external could sway him, one who calculated everything.

Clearly, Daru was the latter.

'This man's reflexes, speed, calculation, mental toughness, and composure—all at the highest level. What a nightmare to face.' Su Jie felt a stab of helplessness. The man was like a giant turtle: an impenetrable shell, yet moving as fast as a mouse.

Through his tests, Su Jie saw that Daru's speed was slightly inferior to his own, but not by much—not enough to be kited around.

In boxing, there was the “pirate style,” where the faster but lighter fighter danced around, striking and retreating until cumulative damage forced surrender.

But Daru's enormous reach nullified that.

Every time Su Jie tried to slip in with a counter, he realized that Daru's long arms could always intercept—and even put him at a disadvantage.

'If this man were my weight, his speed would surpass mine,' Su Jie thought grimly. *'Terrifying. Someone like Zhou Chun wouldn't last ten seconds against him.'*

First courage, second strength, third skill.

On courage and psychological resilience, Su Jie realized Daru was unshakable. He had seen too much life and death. Even if a blade pierced his eye, he might not even blink. He was a true “iron man.” In this, Su Jie was at a disadvantage.

On strength, there was no comparison.

On skill—an amalgam of qualities and technique—Daru again held the edge. His real combat experience far exceeded Su Jie's.

'So where is my advantage?' Su Jie thought as he dodged. 'First, I'm younger. Second, he's suffered countless injuries—no matter how strong, a body of flesh and blood cannot be flawless. Third, my speed is a touch faster—as long as I stay beyond his reach, I may find chances. Fourth, my smaller size makes me a smaller, more agile target. I must exploit that to the extreme...'

Chapter 119: Hard-Fought Battle That Refines the Man

In less than a second, Su Jie's mind had already analyzed the strengths and weaknesses on both sides and formulated a strategy.

From the moment the fight began, not even ten seconds had passed.

Su Jie's brain was like a supercomputer, feeding in every factor—movement, strength, speed, body type, even aura, terrain, and space—running precise

calculations, then controlling his body based on the results. Throughout this process, he struggled to prevent stray, reckless thoughts from intruding.

Most people, even skilled fighters, may set a strategy before a fight, but once inside, subtle factors can throw them off rhythm, causing them to lose.

Even top experts sometimes suffer sudden, uncontrollable impulses—like a stray thought flashing across the mind—that derail them.

This is most often seen in professional chess: a “number one player” suddenly makes a blunder under tension, throwing away a winning game.

It’s like the Heavenly Court was peaceful, and suddenly the Monkey King leaps out, wreaking havoc in Heaven and turning the world upside down.

The human mind is the Heavenly Court, and stray impulses outside the plan are the Monkey King.

This time, Su Jie was truly under pressure, forcing himself to squeeze out more potential.

It was different from the threat of bullets and guns.

Bullets brought instantaneous oppression—a flash of life and death completely beyond his control. But Daru’s pressure was continuous.

Just ten seconds—within that brief exchange—Su Jie already grasped his advantages and disadvantages, set his plan firmly in his mind, and strictly controlled his movements, refusing to act outside the strategy.

Swish, swish, swish...

Su Jie fully unleashed his “Hoe Strike” footwork—slipping, dodging, crouching, swaying, feinting, running, leaping, dashing. At the same time, he shrank his body inward, making himself a smaller target, bouncing like a projectile.

With this movement at full force, he was like a monkey scrambling along cliffs and ravines, leaving Daru unable to land a clean hit.

Occasionally, Daru accelerated and struck him, but the blows caused little damage.

To truly “land a hit” in combat, you must concentrate all your force at one precise point, driving power deep into the opponent’s body to cause devastating damage in an instant. Only then is it an effective strike—the same principle as a KO punch in the ring.

But against a moving target, this is extremely difficult.

That's why some people can smash bricks, split stones, and pound sandbags with great force, but in real combat they hit people with no effect—the same even for professionals.

The reason is simple: people move. Even a tiny shift of instinct throws off the focal point of force, reducing the power by ninety-nine percent.

Bricks, wood, sandbags—they don't move.

So the fight looked like this: Daru was like a gorilla, chasing a little monkey around the ring, unable to catch him. Even when he landed blows, he failed to cause serious injury—no fatal strike.

To spectators, it was hardly exciting at all.

But Awasi and Zhang Jinchuan watched with grave expressions—they understood.

Su Jie's strategy was flawless, executed with rigid discipline, showing no weakness at all. He could seemingly keep dodging forever.

And Daru, too, showed no emotional fluctuation, seemingly willing to hunt forever.

'So that's it. So that's it...'

While dodging, Su Jie repeatedly spotted openings. His mind sprouted thoughts of risking it all in a single gamble—but each time, he crushed the impulse, sticking to his plan.

As he moved, realization struck him:

'So this is what it means—"The perfected man moves like a machine!" It doesn't mean living like a puppet, but rather never letting wild impulses be born in the heart, never letting them turn into action. Like when the Monkey King jumps out—you must suppress him with Buddha-nature, bind him, lead him up to Spirit Mountain, where even he attains the scriptures and becomes part of the Dharma.'

The stray, absurd thoughts that arise in the mind are like the Monkey King—immensely powerful. In real life, people sometimes commit sudden crimes precisely because they cannot suppress such impulses, leading to disaster.

At this moment, Su Jie truly understood the meaning of “the perfected man moves like a machine.”

It was not about living mechanically in daily life—that would kill all spirit.

“Movement” did not mean the body, but the activity of the mind.

Suddenly, he thought of his father, Su Shilin—smoking, drinking, sometimes acting roguish, but hiding unfathomable depths.

‘Before, my understanding of ‘moving like a machine’ was only skin-deep, superficial. Now I finally get it.’

With that, Su Jie let out a thunderous howl.

Like dragon’s roar, tiger’s cry.

The clear, piercing sound split stone and metal.

Everyone present felt pain in their eardrums—Gale even clutched his ears. He hadn’t thought a human voice could reach such decibels.

And in that howl, Su Jie launched his counterattack.

Bang!

Daru's fist struck his chest at the same moment his fist smashed into Daru's abdomen.

Normally, this was impossible—Daru's reach was much longer. Under usual circumstances, if Daru hit Su Jie, Su Jie couldn't even touch him.

But this time, both landed blows.

Zhang Jinchuan saw clearly—in that split second, Su Jie had accelerated just enough, rushing in before Daru's reach fully extended, collapsing the distance so both strikes connected.

The impact exploded!

Daru staggered back, crashing against the wall. Su Jie flew backward, shattering a table.

Neither had the advantage.

“What power...” Su Jie’s chest had momentarily caved in, dispersing the penetrating force of the blow. He hadn’t broken bones, but pain flared and stars danced before his eyes.

Looking up, he saw Daru wasn’t much better off.

“That’s enough,” said Awasi, clapping his hands. “It’s a draw. There was no wager—no need to continue.” He feared Daru would be hurt further. He had faith in Daru, but hadn’t expected Su Jie to be so resilient.

Gale was equally shocked. He hadn’t thought Su Jie could take one of Daru’s punches head-on and stay standing.

Daru’s fists were like sledgehammers, each the size of a human head. His wrists were thicker than Su Jie’s arms. Even iron men would be crushed. Just how tough was Su Jie’s body?

Thump, thump!

Daru pounded his chest once with one fist, bowed to Su Jie in respect, and left.

“Daru holds you in great respect,” Awasi said. “I’ve never seen him so serious before. You’ve earned his recognition.”

“If we kept fighting, I wouldn’t be confident,” Su Jie admitted. Daru was terrifying, and he never underestimated him.

Against Daru, Su Jie never found a chance to use his signature “Hoe Strike” move. That technique was designed for seizing the upper hand and delivering a sudden, decisive strike. Against such a tall opponent, it was nearly impossible to reach the face.

He reflected—compared to Odell, his technique was still far inferior. Odell could drive it in no matter how big, tall, or strong the opponent was.

“What a pity this wasn’t in the gladiator cage,” Awasi sighed. “If it were, Daru’s state would have risen even higher.”

The gladiator cage was a brutal arena in these war-torn lands—only one left alive could exit. Such battles didn’t exist in civilized society. Inside, a man’s state could indeed be pushed further—or collapse entirely if his will was weak.

“Su Jie, you’re incredible,” Gale said. “Daru never finds a worthy opponent, but you’re so much smaller than him and still fought to a draw. Truly, the weak overcoming the strong!”

Su Jie just waved his hand, breathing hard. It took him a long time to steady his chest. If I hadn’t been training that hard qigong all winter break, toughening my body, that punch would’ve killed me outright.

“You three should stay here a while longer,” Awasi said. “When things settle, then you can leave. In the meantime, get familiar with Gale—there may be big business opportunities later. Gale, keep learning Chinese from them. Business will only grow, and you can’t afford not to know Chinese.”

“Yes, Father,” Gale replied.

All that day, Gale pestered Su Jie to teach him martial arts.

Su Jie had teaching experience, so he trained Gale using modules similar to AI learning programs, keeping it fun. He also taught him how to write Chinese characters.

For three days, life passed quietly. Get full chapters from [Novel_Fire\(.\)net](http://Novel_Fire(.)net)

Su Jie kept reflecting, digesting lessons from the fight with Daru. He'd hoped to spar more with the iron man, but heard Daru had gone out on a mission.

On the third morning, after training outdoors, Su Jie returned to find Gale rushing toward him, face dark.

"Daru is dead."

"What?" Su Jie was stunned. "What happened?"

"Come, I'll show you." Gale drove him out of the camp, far into the wilderness.

There, on a stretcher, covered by a white sheet, lay Daru's huge corpse.

Several military doctors were examining it.

Awasi stood nearby, his face twisted with rage he could barely suppress, listening as a military doctor reported:

“General, Daru was killed in a fight. Neither side used weapons—it looks like they agreed to barehanded combat. There are footprints showing only one opponent. The wounds are from fists and feet. All the blood here is Daru’s—the enemy seems unharmed and left safely.”

The doctors were reconstructing the scene.

Chapter 120: Evil Forces Loom Large

Just a few days ago, he had still been a living, breathing man — and now he was dead, right in front of Su Jie.

Su Jie had rarely seen a dead person. Even in this war-torn land, although he had encountered stray bullets, gunfire, and grenade explosions, he hadn’t actually witnessed death. Overall, order here was gradually being restored.

But Daru’s death chilled him to the bone — the shadow of death could descend at any moment.

He lifted the white sheet and saw that Daru's body was battered beyond recognition, like a sandbag beaten hundreds of times. Most horrifying was the caved-in section of his forehead — the imprint of a fist was clearly visible, the skull shattered by sheer force.

Just how much power did that fist contain to inflict such devastation?

Staring at the fist mark, Su Jie suddenly remembered someone.

“Feng Hengyi?”

He had fought Feng Hengyi before. Even though the man had been wearing gloves and had finished Su Jie in two punches, Su Jie still remembered vividly the size of his bare fists afterwards. They matched perfectly with the injuries before him.

“Could it be that Daru was killed by Feng Hengyi?”

Su Jie knew Daru was even stronger in a death match than he himself. To kill him and walk away unscathed, only a top-tier expert could manage it.

That meant only Feng Hengyi.

Such a man must have been subjected to the highest forms of prenatal and postnatal training, drilled relentlessly from the womb to adulthood. What a terrifying thought.

Su Jie, by contrast, had only trained under Typhon Training Camp's strongest instructor, Odell, for one month. Adding his own self-discipline and hard work, he had managed to reach his current level in under a year.

But if he had enjoyed the same conditions as Feng Hengyi, with training beginning even before birth — he couldn't imagine what level he'd be at now.

Su Jie and Masters Ma and Luo had studied fetal development extensively.

Data showed that when a mother's nutrition is optimized during pregnancy, combined with targeted regimens to nourish, protect, and strengthen the fetus, the child's physical foundation could be vastly improved.

This was what people called an “innate foundation.”

How to ensure a baby was born strong and healthy was a deep field of knowledge.

And research also showed that babies with prenatal training were significantly stronger than their peers throughout life. Mainstream institutions had not studied this in depth — but Typhon Training Camp had.

Su Jie knew his own physique wasn't particularly strong. First, he missed the prenatal stage; second, he missed training during the tooth-changing stage at age seven. Only in the third stage, at sixteen, when he was still growing, had he encountered Odell — barely catching the last train.

Feng Hengyi had completed every stage.

Even now, Su Jie felt that against Feng Hengyi, he had no chance.

“You seem to have figured something out?” Zhang Manman leaned in to whisper.

“Likely Feng Hengyi.” Su Jie nodded.

“General, several more of our officers have been killed.” At that moment, several vehicles pulled up. Intelligence officers got out, handed over a tablet, and played a video.

Several officers were patrolling a rural town with their men.

The town was untouched by war, bustling with people and markets. The officers moved with soldiers guarding them, so no one could get too close.

Then suddenly, one officer seemed to suffer a seizure, collapsed slowly, and lay still.

No one had touched him. No gunfire. No wounds.

He simply died.

Moments later, more officers fell the same way.

The scene was chaos.

The video replayed the moment again and again.

Su Jie and the others watched. His intuition told him these officers were murdered, but how, he couldn't discern.

"It must be a blowpipe dart coated with neurotoxin," Zhang Jinchuan explained. "A trace amount piercing the skin, contacting bodily fluids, paralyzes the nervous system instantly. Within seconds, the paralysis spreads throughout the body. They can't even speak — and then the heart stops. If I'm not mistaken, the killer was that old peddler. In truth, he's disguised — likely a young man pretending to be elderly. When he covered his mouth and coughed, he fired the dart."

Indeed, in the video, an inconspicuous old man was hunched at his stall. At one moment, he coughed into his hand — and at a distance, an officer froze and fell.

After coughing a few more times, the old man vanished.

Now Su Jie saw it too.

But he couldn't tell it was a disguise.

Modern prosthetics and makeup could transform someone into an entirely different person, even with polymer masks — like the “Painted Skin” of old ghost tales. Such techniques were used in big-budget films, though expensive.

“A blowpipe dart—impossible to guard against.” Su Jie grew wary. He remembered Huang Dingyi saying that Typhon trainees could assassinate from afar in ways even coroners couldn't detect — usually with blowpipes.

Silent, swift, effective. With special crafting, range and accuracy improved too.

With his lung capacity, Su Jie could fire such a dart far and fast — impossible to dodge. If tipped with poison, it was unstoppable.

But this wasn't martial skill — it was assassination. Ordinary people could learn it with practice.

This killer's movements were so natural that even Su Jie missed them at first. His disguise and sleight of hand were flawless.

Not once did Su Jie spot the blowpipe itself.

Against such assassins, his martial prowess felt fragile. Iron-body training could resist fists and kicks, but not nerve toxins, nor even a small blade — let alone a tiny needle.

“We need to leave here quickly,” Zhang Manman said. “Clearly this mysterious evil force is retaliating with murders. We’re flesh and blood — we can’t defend against it.”

“I agree,” Zhang Jinchuan said. “Against such a vast dark force, we have no chance. The more chaotic the region, the stronger they are. Back home, they can’t penetrate as easily.”

At home, national security bore the burden.

Su Jie realized the truth: domestically was like a “safe zone” in a game — untouchable.

But here, offending a powerful family like the Fengs could mean instant disappearance.

Back home, even the Fengs would find it hard to eliminate him physically.

And in this war-torn land, he also realized he wasn't as strong as he thought. A few soldiers with rifles could mow him down in seconds. This content belongs to novel ♦fire.net

"Let's return," General Awasi said grimly, ordering his troops to withdraw.

Su Jie and the others said their goodbyes to Gale.

Though Gale was reluctant, he didn't press them to stay.

"When I have time, I'll go to China to study," Gale said bluntly. "But since you're leaving, I'll send escorts. Things are chaotic now, and I suspect those people may target you too."

"We'll handle it. But be careful," Su Jie patted Gale's shoulder. "Don't go out these days — assassins like these are impossible to guard against."

“I understand.” Gale nodded, then hurried off with Awasi to crack down internally, bolster defenses, and hunt assassins. They no longer had the capacity to protect Su Jie’s group.

The three of them drove their van back to their compound.

“Tomorrow we leave,” Zhang Manman told Uncle Xi and the others. “Stay behind for backup. What’s the situation with the Xu family?”

“Here’s the news I just got.” Uncle Mang handed over his phone. Even though the signal was poor, he had downloaded relevant reports.

Su Jie scanned through the domestic news:

“The Xu family’s goods passed inspection with no contraband. Customs cleared them for on-time delivery. Contracts signed with local authorities — expected to greatly increase annual foreign trade profits. Stock price of their listed company is rising.”

“The Xu clan, together with several major groups, reported Haoyu Group for malicious acquisition and monopoly.”

“Authorities launched investigations into Haoyu. The company claimed it was only normal investment, no hostile takeover, and said they welcomed joint development.”

“After investigation, Haoyu was found guilty of malicious acquisition and monopolistic practices. Heavily fined. Main executives banned from securities markets for three years...”

Su Jie studied the reports carefully.

As expected, though Xu Qiaomu was old and frail, once he caught his breath his counterattack was ruthless.

“Haoyu really took a heavy loss,” Zhang Jinchuan mused. “Interesting. Xu Qiaomu truly is a wily old fox. Even Haoyu can’t swallow him whole.”

“Not so simple,” Zhang Manman said. “If I were Feng Shoucheng, I’d wait until Xu Qiaomu was dead to move. Even if Xu Zhijie inherited, he wouldn’t have the clout to rally so many big names to his side. These tycoons respect Xu Qiaomu personally, not Xu Zhijie.”

“In truth, the turning point here was us,” Zhang Jinchuan added. “We played one move — and the whole board lit up.”

“That’s one way to see it,” Su Jie said. “But ultimately, it’s the strength of the nation that matters. Awasi treated us fairly because of that. Otherwise, he wouldn’t hesitate. As for Feng Hengyi—killing Daru, then assassinating officers as a warning—we’d better come up with a plan. Otherwise, we’ll be next.”