THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 121: A Mastermind's Brilliance Stirs Envy

Self 5 Elivy
China, countryside.
Inside the Xu family's ancestral home.
Xu Zhizhi was reporting the latest developments to Xu Qiaomu, who sat in a wheelchair.
"Grandfather, this time our counterattack was a success. The Feng family took a heavy loss—they've even been forced to give up the shares they swallowed. More
importantly, we've secured quite a few foreign trade orders overseas. This year's overall profits will probably jump to a whole new level."
A trace of excitement flickered across Xu Zhizhi's face.

In recent days, he had suffered torment but also basked in triumph. Having seized the reins of the Xu family and been named heir, he faced plenty of resistance—but also plenty of flatterers.

And in his struggle against the Feng family, as well as while reorganizing the Xu family, his abilities gradually came to light.

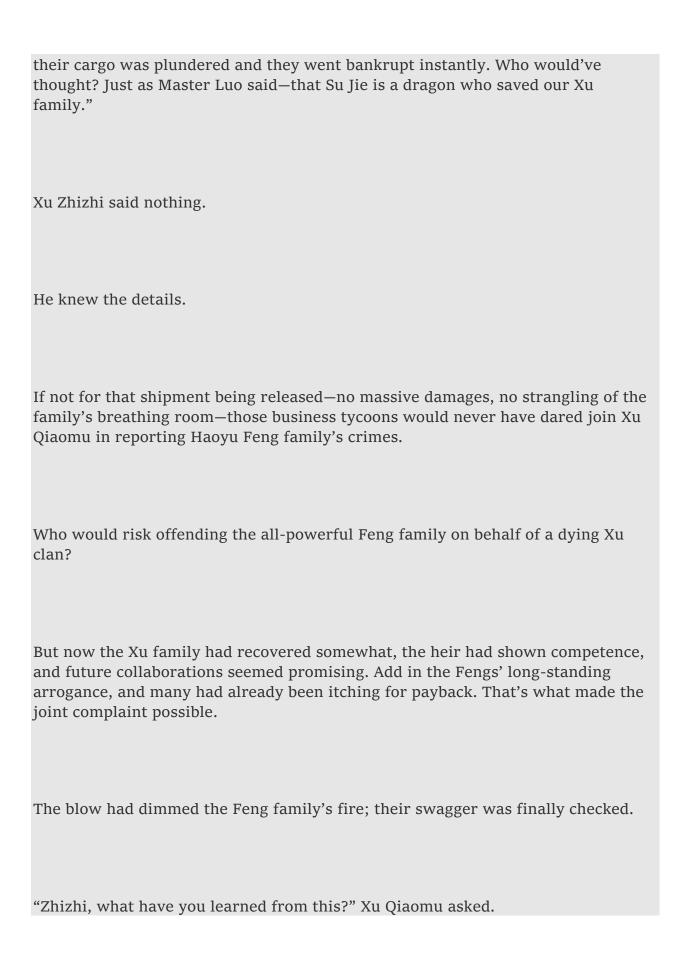
At first, people just stood by and watched. But step by step, he consolidated power, reassigned responsibilities, placed his own people, audited accounts, cut unprofitable projects, and expelled idlers. He was tough when he needed to be, flexible when he had to be. Within a short time, many of the Xu family's companies looked completely renewed. That made people reevaluate him.

The sharp-eyed sighed one after another: Master Luo's fortune-telling was indeed accurate.

It looked as if the Xu family, once flourishing but hollow at its core, was about to decline. Yet with a casual finger-point toward an inconspicuous junior, the family suddenly found new vitality.

Even if one couldn't yet call it rising higher than before, there was at least no trace of looming collapse.

"A single seed well-placed brings new life—that is the Xu family's fortune." Xu Qiaomu narrowed his aged eyes. "The key is that shipment of goods detained overseas was unexpectedly released so quickly, without breach of contract. Had there been a breach, we'd have suffered catastrophic losses, and that whole foreign trade channel would've been cut off. Foreign trade is profitable, but dangerous—like those Shanxi merchants of the Qing dynasty hauling tea, silk, and porcelain to Mongolia and Russia. If successful, they grew rich overnight. If not,



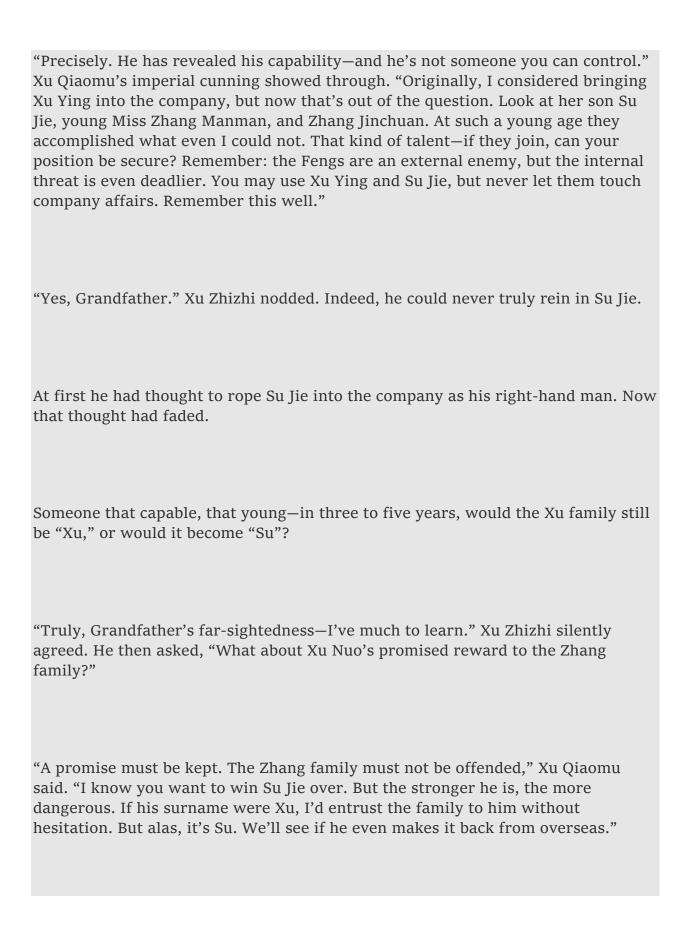
"Grandfather, this ordeal tempered me greatly. Before, I thought myself capable—enough to reorganize the family, expand outward. Now I see much of it still came down to luck. Heaven does not wish the Xu family destroyed."

That answer seemed to satisfy Xu Qiaomu. "Good. Small money comes from effort, great fortunes come from luck. Families have their fate, nations their destiny. That you grasp this shows precocious maturity. I can rest easier entrusting the family to you. These days I've seen your ability firsthand—cutting useless projects, selling what should be sold, discarding what should be discarded. You've stripped us of burdens, let us advance light and swift. Very good. As for those six who once came to demand repayment—how much blood did they secretly drain from the family for their own gain? I turned a blind eye, thinking feeding a dog made it docile. Who knew they'd conspire with outsiders to bite me? Master Luo truly saw with piercing eyes."

"They still haven't settled down. After being bailed out, the Feng family invested in them, set up a department just to dig into our foundations." Xu Zhizhi shared the intelligence he'd gathered.

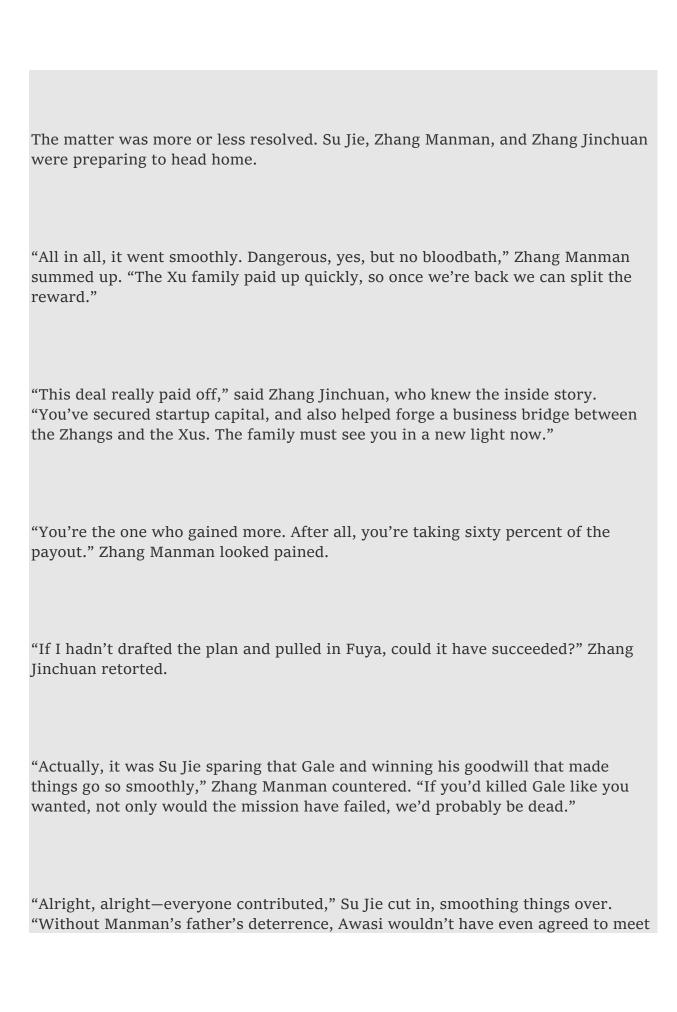
"These people must be eliminated," Xu Qiaomu said coldly. "And you must also beware Su Jie and Xu Ying."

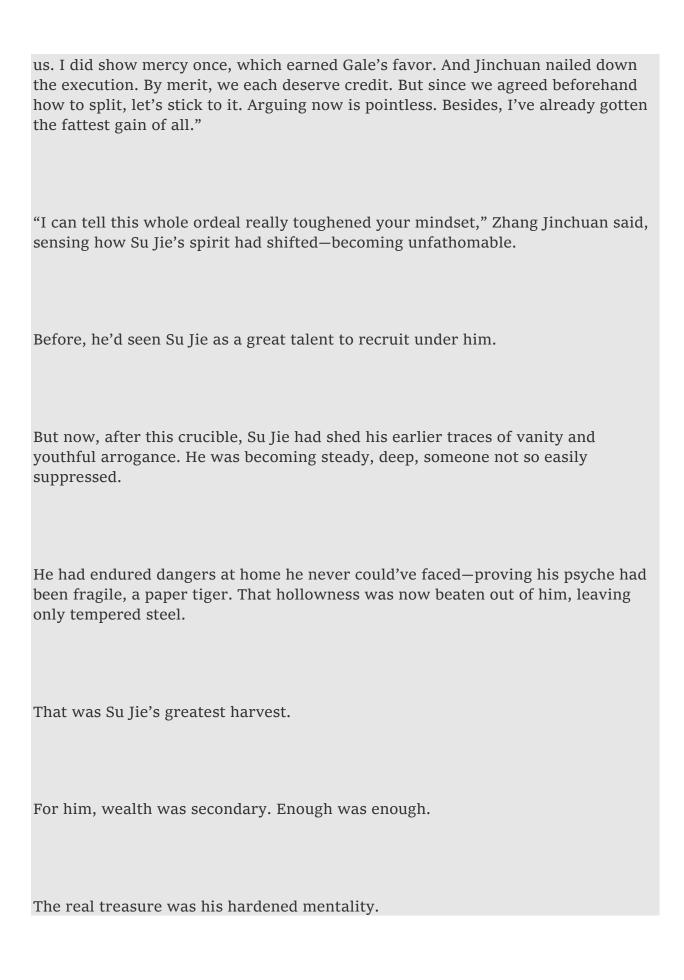
"Why? Didn't Su Jie just help us enormously?" Xu Zhizhi asked, puzzled.

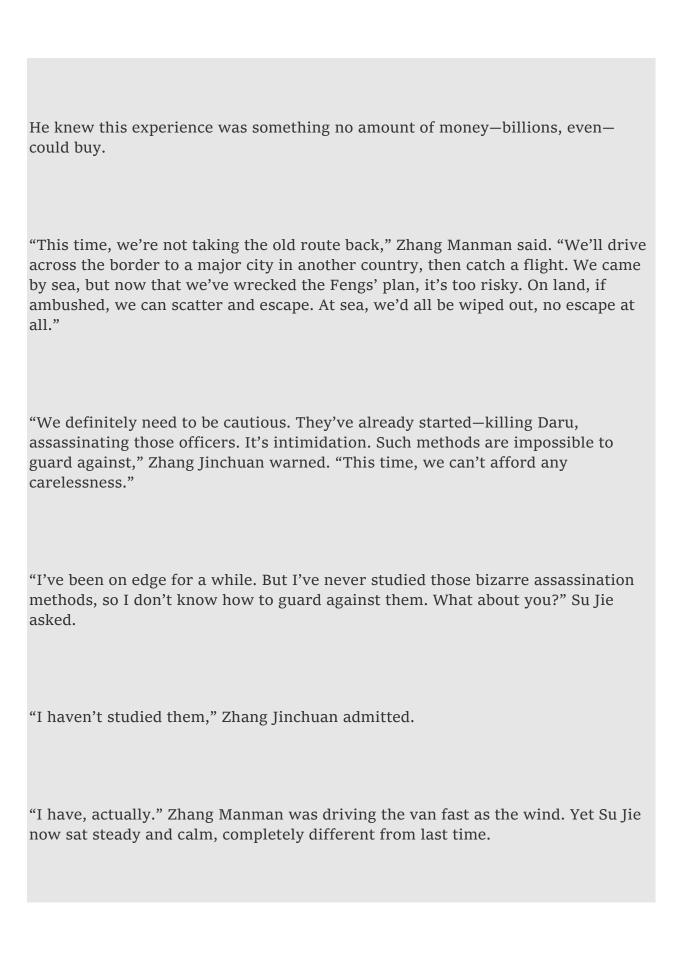


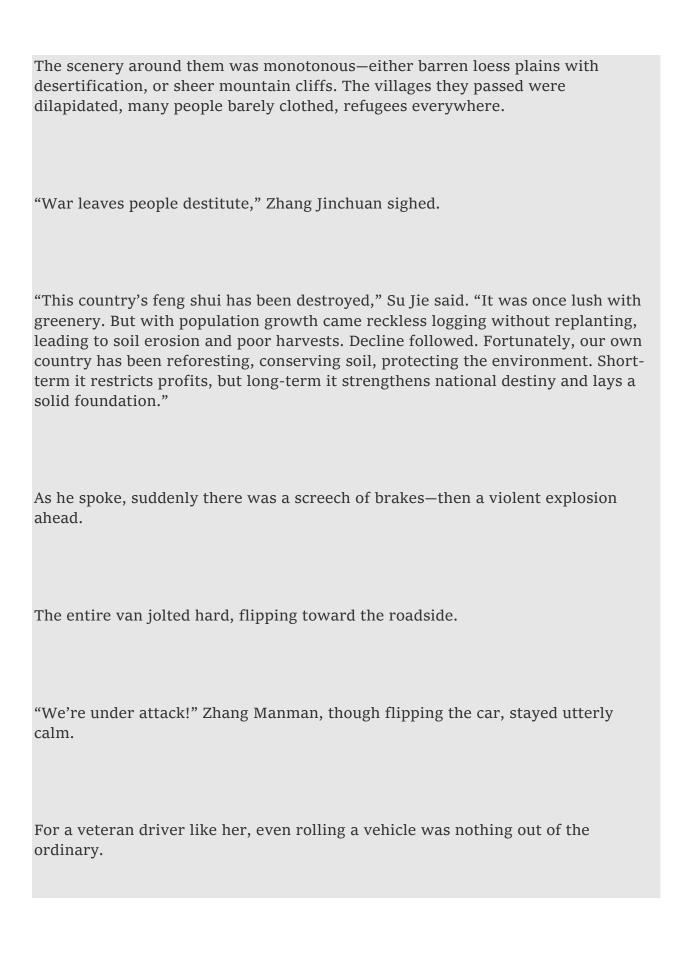
"What do you mean?" Xu Zhizhi was startled.
"The Feng family is not so easily thwarted." Xu Qiaomu closed his eyes. "They invested heavily in this venture, yet failed. At home they don't dare use certain underhanded means. But abroad? Who can say?"
"Should we help?" Xu Zhizhi asked quickly. "We have plenty of people over there." Follow current novels on Nov3lFire.Net
"No." Xu Qiaomu waved it off. "We can't squander our manpower. Besides, the Zhangs aren't to be underestimated—they're far stronger than us. We signed a contract with them. Pay what we owe, and let the rest be. You focus on stabilizing our domestic business and consolidating loyalty."
"Yes." Xu Zhizhi, seeing his grandfather ready to rest, tiptoed out.

Overseas.
In the compound, the van started up again.

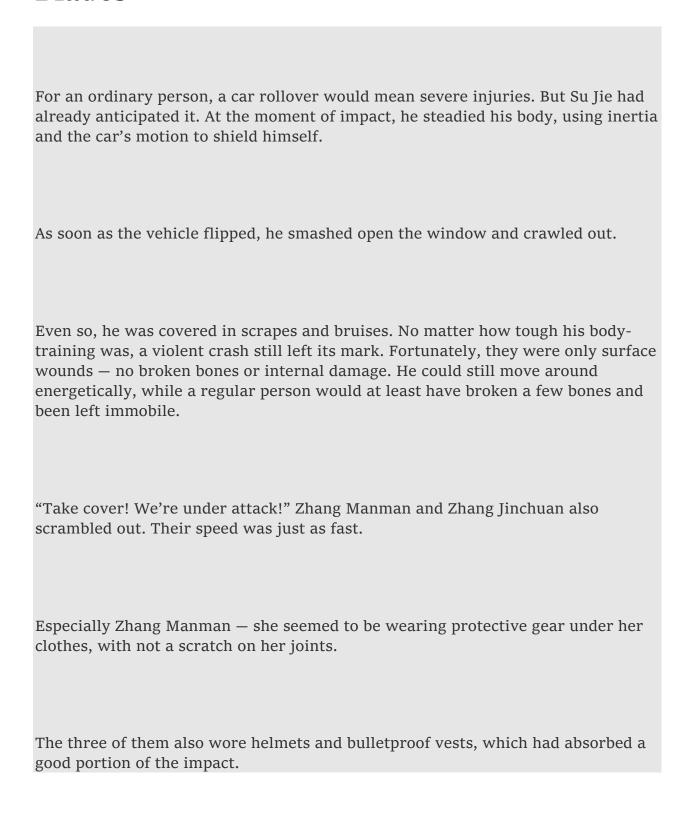


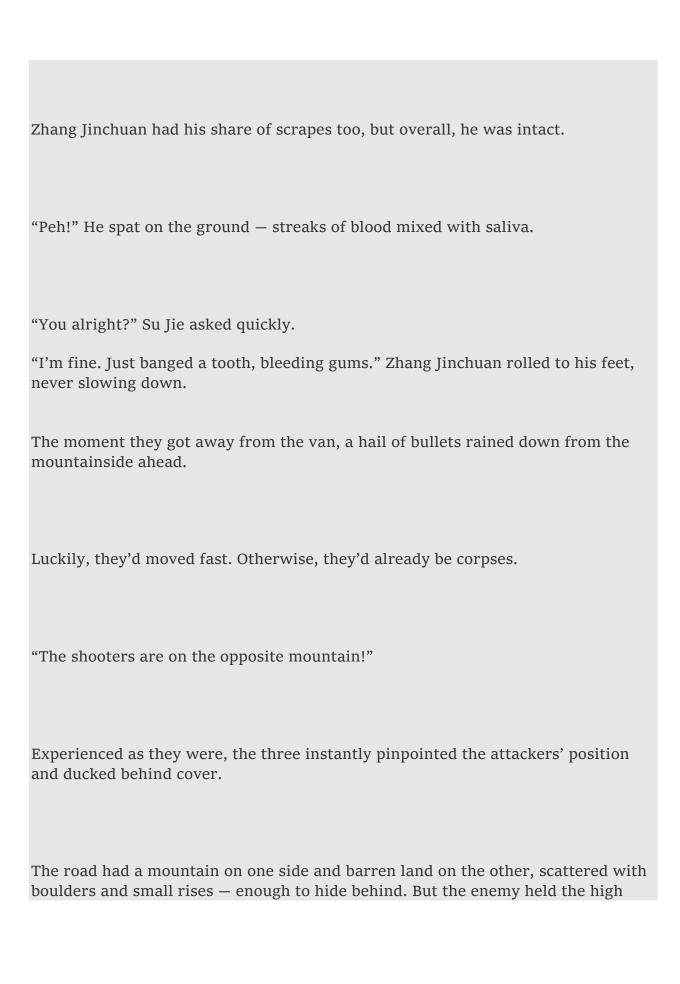






Chapter 122: A Narrow Escape: Bullets and Blades





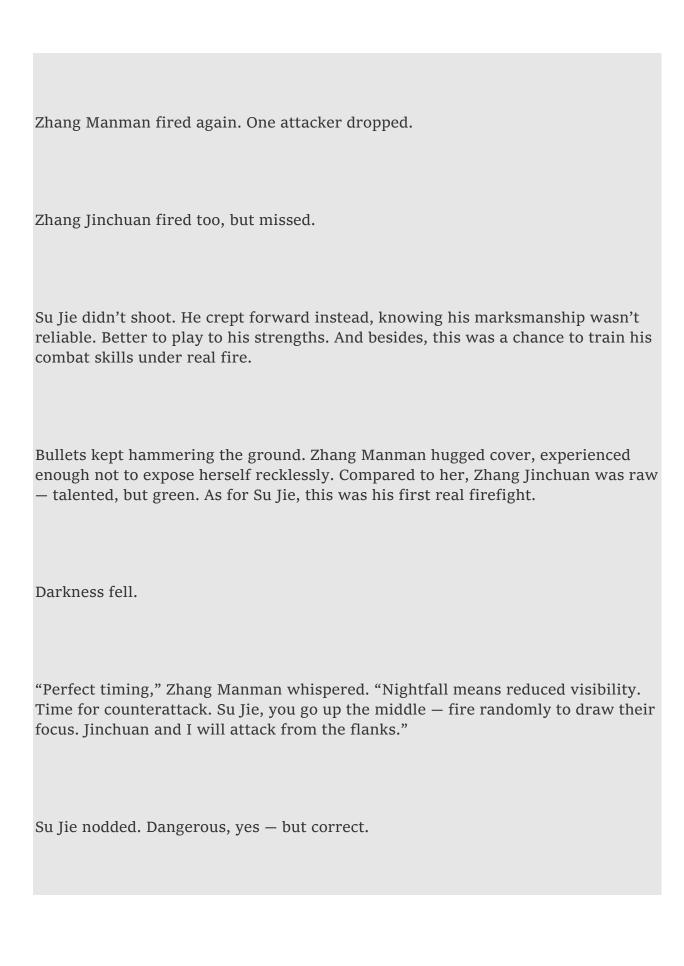
ground and could fire down at will, making it extremely dangerous for Su Jie and his companions.
"What do we do? The ambush came as expected." While Su Jie's mind was racing — gauging the enemies' positions and listening to the surrounding noises — he asked Zhang Manman and Zhang Jinchuan, hoping their input might spark a plan.
"There are six attackers, spread across the mountainside," Zhang Manman said, raising her watch. Tiny red dots glowed on its display, marking their positions.
"What kind of black tech is that?" Zhang Jinchuan blurted out.
"A compact military detection radar. Not perfectly accurate in positioning, but good enough to confirm their number," Zhang Manman explained. "Could be applied to self-driving systems in the future."
Bzzz
Suddenly, a sound like a swarm of mosquitoes filled the air. Zhang Manman's face changed. "Domn — that's an armed drone!"
Sure enough, a drone buzzed into sight, gun barrels glinting as they aimed down a them. No cover would protect them now.

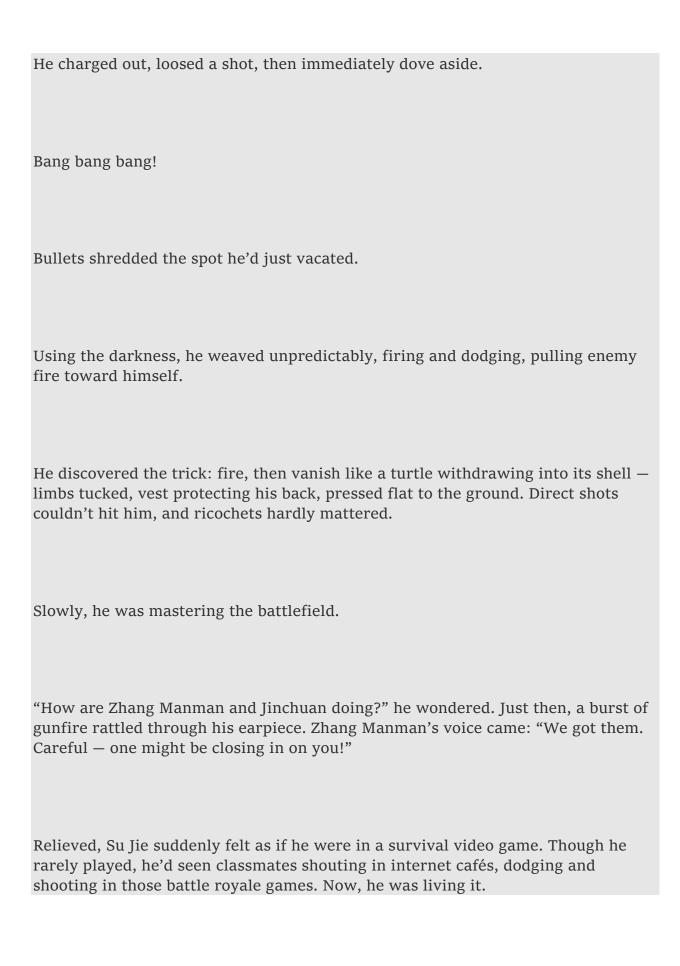
"Shit!" Su Jie cursed outright.
He'd only seen things like this in movies. Against human opponents, he wasn't afraid — but a machine? In the sky? What was he supposed to do, throw rocks at it? That was suicide.
"Run!"
Without hesitation, Zhang Jinchuan bolted to the side.
Adrenaline flooded Su Jie's veins. In an instant, his mind calculated the drone's flight path, muzzle positions, and bullet trajectories, simulating them to preemptively dodge.
Ratatatata—
The drone opened fire, bullets tearing up the ground.
Su Jie sprinted like lightning, but the drone locked onto him, chasing relentlessly. Zhang Jinchuan and Zhang Manman, however, weren't immediately targeted.

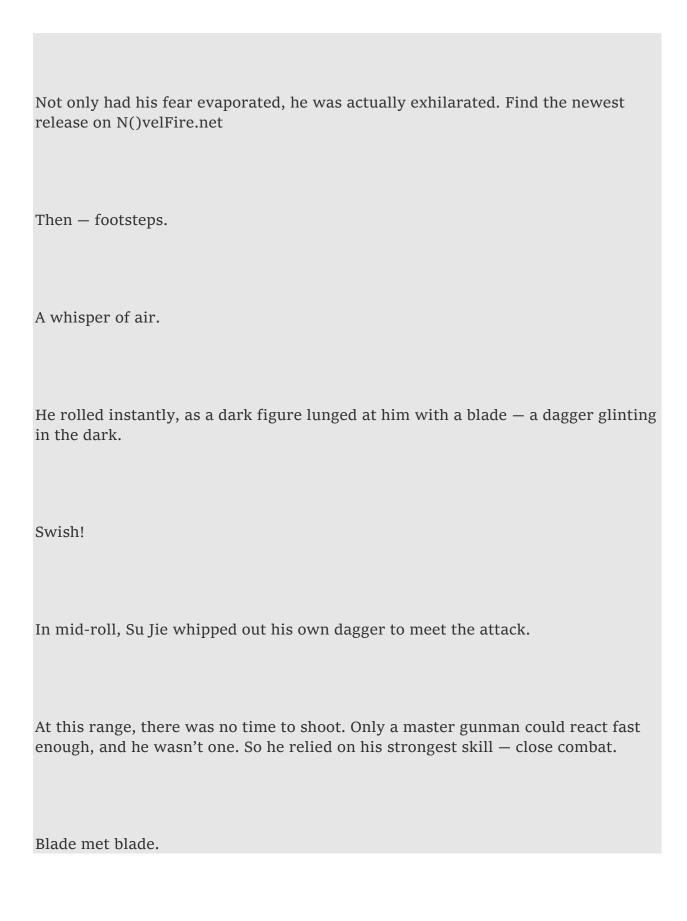
Clang!
Something slammed against Su Jie's helmet and chest, nearly making him black out. A ricocheted bullet had struck him.
Fortunately, he was armored — bulletproof vest and helmet both. A direct shot would've punched clean through, but a ricochet had far less force. He survived the hit.
"God, that hurts." He felt the brush of death again. Without his gear, he'd already be a corpse.
Bang!
A shot rang out. The drone shuddered mid-air and plummeted.
Zhang Manman had drawn a pistol — he hadn't even noticed when — and with a single precise shot, took it down.

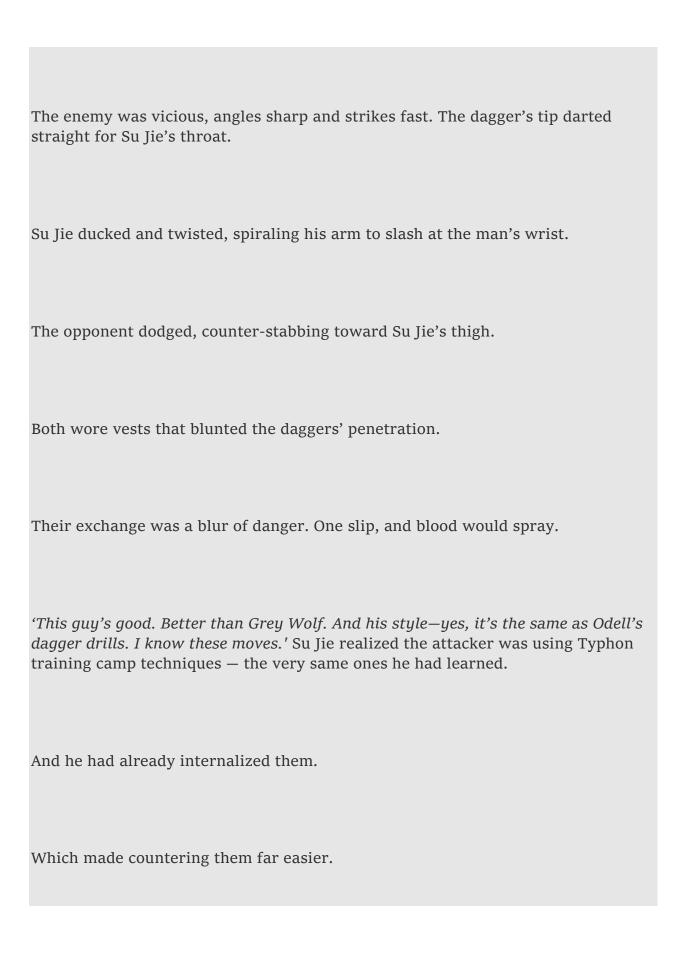
"No worries. Drones like this are expensive, but they're not cutting-edge. The recoil from their guns still throws off their accuracy." At that moment, Zhang Manman revealed her bounty hunter's nature. She tossed two pistols to them. "Su Jie, Jinchuan — let's flank them and wipe them out. These guys are probably internationally wanted criminals. Take them down, and we'll earn a fat bounty."
Su Jie caught the pistol and familiarized himself with its weight and function in less than a second.
He'd practiced shooting before. Not an expert, but definitely better than a novice.
In this situation, martial arts meant agility. The real killing would come from bullets.
"We'll circle around and close in," Zhang Jinchuan said. He crouched low, moving with a rat-like scuttle, slipping between cover.
Su Jie suddenly realized something: in this kind of firefight, modern combat footwork was useless. Instead, traditional martial arts movements — like monkeystyle dodges — worked wonders. Ancient techniques designed to evade arrows were now saving him from bullets.
His fear faded. After having multiple muzzles pointed at him, he grew accustomed, his nerves hardening like steel.

He matched Zhang Jinchuan and Zhang Manman's pace, darting cover to cover.
Bang bang—
Gunfire roared back from the opposite hillside.
Several shots nearly hit Su Jie. Ricochets slammed into his vest again, but he endured it, prepared this time.
"These vests and helmets are godsends," he thought. "No wonder soldiers rarely drop from direct hits. It's the stray rounds that get most of them. Basic military knowledge — useful after all."
By standard stats, it took tens of thousands of bullets on a battlefield to kill a single enemy. Of course, some unlucky souls got hit right off the bat.
Su Jie was quick, agile, and lucky. He pushed closer, eyes sharp as an eagle, spotting shadows of the gunmen.
Bang!









Chapter 123: The Mastermind Begins to Emerge

'If I expose this opening, he'll definitely go for a throw and that's when my chance comes.' Su Jie suddenly stepped back.
As expected, his opponent seized the moment—flipping his dagger forward, aiming it right along Su Jie's retreating motion.
But Su Jie dropped low instead, surging forward close to the ground. Using the move "Black Dog Burrows Under the Gate," he slipped under his enemy's legs. With a swift slash, his blade severed the tendons at the man's thigh and calf.
Thud!
The opponent collapsed instantly.
Su Jie followed up with a hard kick to the temple, knocking him out cold and ensuring he could cause no more trouble.
"All done on my side," he messaged.

Soon after, Zhang Manman and Zhang Jinchuan came over, pulling lighting equipment from their packs.

The man Su Jie had subdued was in his thirties, his face sharp and cruel—the textbook image of a professional killer.

"This is Hungry Wolf, the one who slipped away. He's the strongest of the lot, and you actually knocked him out," Zhang Manman said, giving Su Jie a look. "He's one of Feng Hengyi's most trusted men. Even under these circumstances, you didn't kill him. Truly, your righteousness is unmatched."

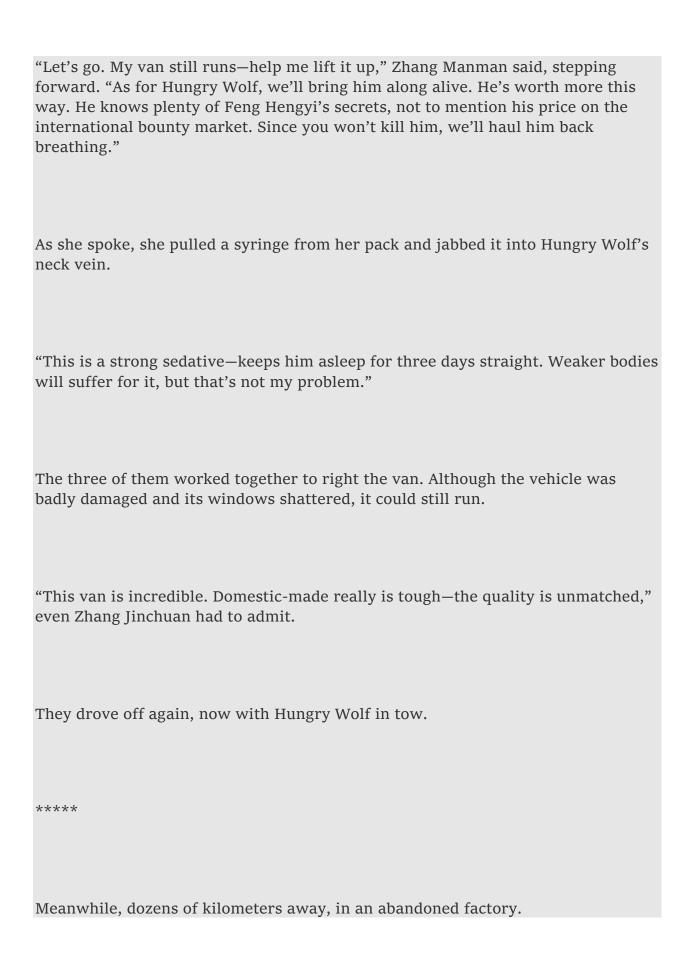
Su Jie couldn't tell if she was mocking or praising him. "So what now? This group was just a small ambush. If Feng Hengyi himself comes after us for killing Dalu, we won't stand a chance. We'll really die here."

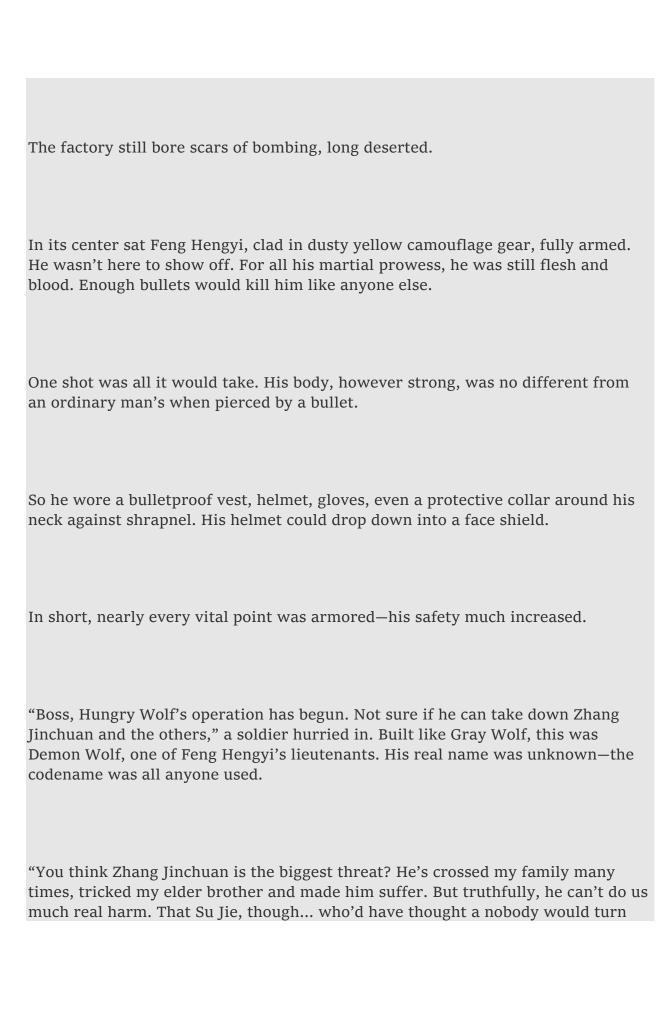
"Relax. I already notified my dad—he's sent people, and he might even come himself. If Feng Hengyi dares to show up, my father will see to it that he dies here. It'll be the perfect chance to get rid of a plague."

"I really want to meet your father one day, to see just how high his level truly is." After these days together, Su Jie had learned that Zhang Manman's father was a formidable figure in the mercenary and security worlds. Even powerful warlords respected him. He had served as a senior instructor at several world-class training camps. Both Master Ma and Master Luo had mentioned him by name—Zhang Hongqing—a name spoken in the same breath as Odell.

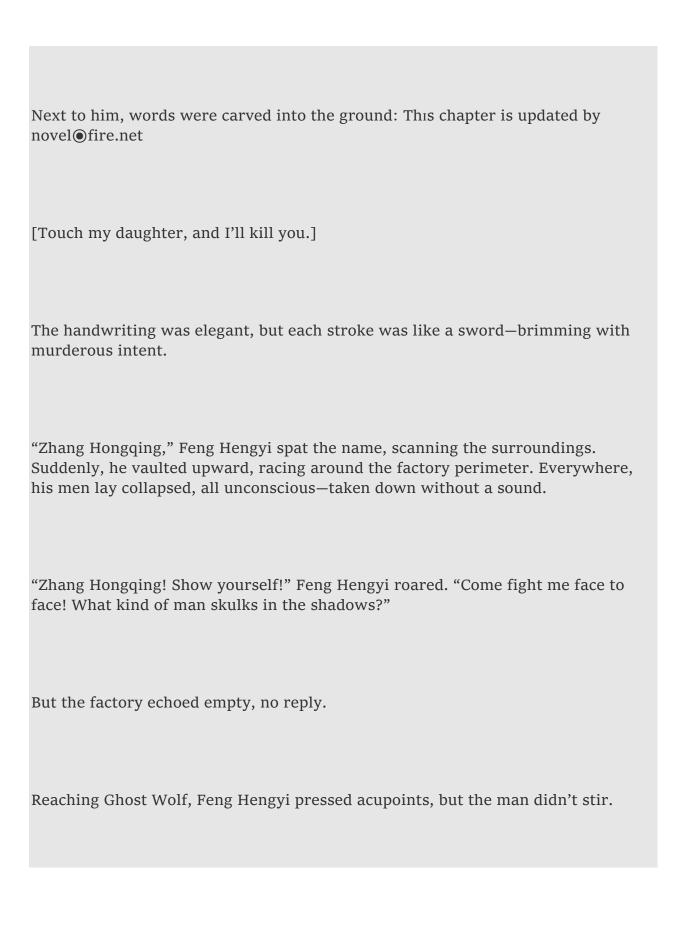
But while Odell occasionally appeared in the media as a coach for world champions, Zhang Hongqing never once showed up in public reports.
Even the Zhang family didn't seem to run any companies—no one knew what they actually did—yet they were extremely wealthy.
That kind of background placed them firmly in the realm of underground power.
"Su Jie, you're still too soft. These people came here to kill us. If you don't finish them, they'll just keep coming after you. Don't tell me you think he'll turn out like Gale—someone you can reform with compassion?" Zhang Jinchuan said coldly. "Gray Wolf, Hungry Wolf, Ghost Wolf, Nether Wolf, Demon Wolf, Cunning Wolf, Evil Wolf—these seven wolves are Feng Hengyi's real enforcers. They're vicious, their hands stained with countless crimes. Killing them a hundred times wouldn't be excessive."
"I've been thinking—sometimes, restraint is harder than killing," Su Jie replied calmly. "I'm actually training my own mentality. When a person feels the urge to kill, in a law-governed place, acting on it is hard. But in a lawless land, that impulse is easily unleashed. Take now—I could kill Hungry Wolf. In fact, I probably should—it would save me endless trouble. But if I can restrain myself here, it strengthens my mind."
"Your thinking is contradictory," Zhang Jinchuan frowned. "That's not good. Training martial arts requires unwavering resolve."

Su Jie shook his head. "I wonder—if martial arts pursued something other than killing, could they still reach the highest realm? A new era needs a new spirit to replace the old one. When the world is peaceful, with no killing anywhere, will martial arts lose their meaning? I don't think so. Martial arts will always exist, but killing skills will not. One day, killing arts will vanish, while true martial arts endure. Without relying on slaughter, martial arts can still reach their peak."
"So that's your pursuit," Zhang Jinchuan exhaled deeply. "It's true—since ancient times, martial arts were killing skills, born on battlefields and in gang fights. Even in the West, their origins lie in war, gladiator arenas, even man's struggles with beasts. History proves that pure health practices and performance arts can't match real combat styles. But you raise a good question—peace is the trend of the future. If war disappears, will martial arts stagnate? Even for you now, though you don't kill, just facing constant threats to your life hones your skill. But if no one fights at all one day, how will you improve?"
"That's exactly what I'm exploring," Su Jie nodded. "Others may be searching their own paths. This is mine. I just hope I can walk it to the end."
"You might get yourself killed," Zhang Jinchuan said. "Aren't you afraid?"
"Of course I'm afraid. But after facing so many bullets, my fear has lessened." Su Jie's answer was honest.
"Hahahaha!" Zhang Jinchuan burst out laughing.





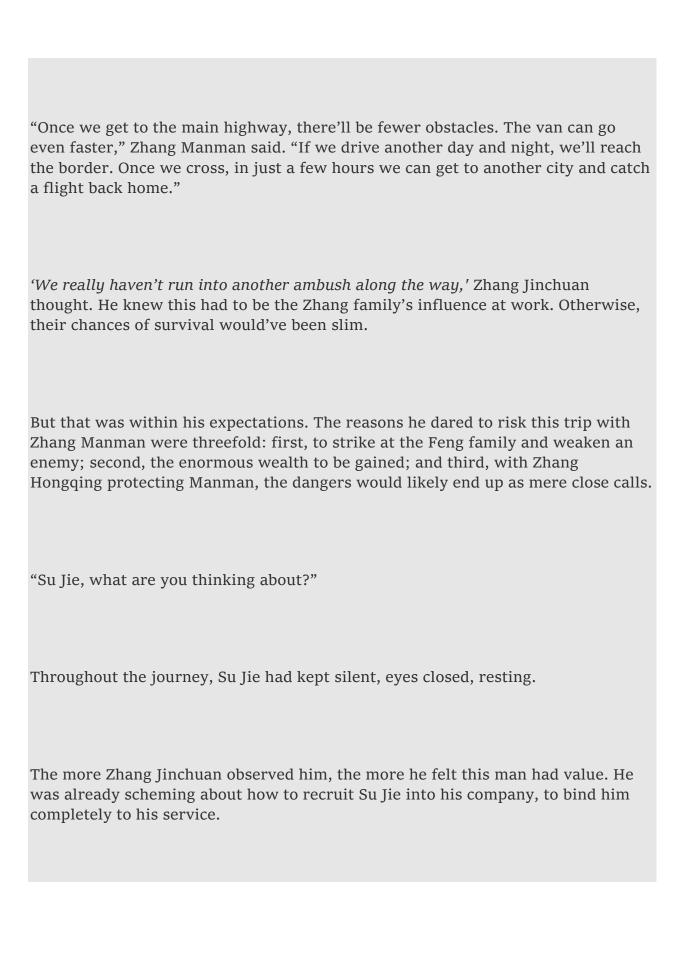
out decent? Back at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, I should've crippled him completely." Feng Hengyi stood.
"When do we move, Boss?" Demon Wolf's masked face was unreadable, his voice low and sinister, like the devil his codename suggested.
"Wait for news," Feng Hengyi said. "What's the word from Awasi? I killed his top fighter, Dalu. He ought to show some response. That man made Awasi a fortune. Without him, he'll lose face in the arena against the neighboring warlords."
"I'll call in Ghost Wolf—he's in charge of intel." Demon Wolf turned to leave, but rushed back moments later, his voice ice-cold. "Boss Boss"
"What is it?" Feng Hengyi shot up to his feet.
"Ghost Wolf and all our patrols—they've all been knocked out. Next to Ghost Wolf, words were written on the ground. I didn't dare touch anything. You should see for yourself."
Expression unreadable, Feng Hengyi strode out.
At one of the defensive points, sure enough, Ghost Wolf lay unconscious. No bullet wounds. No knife cuts. Just gone, without even a chance to cry out.

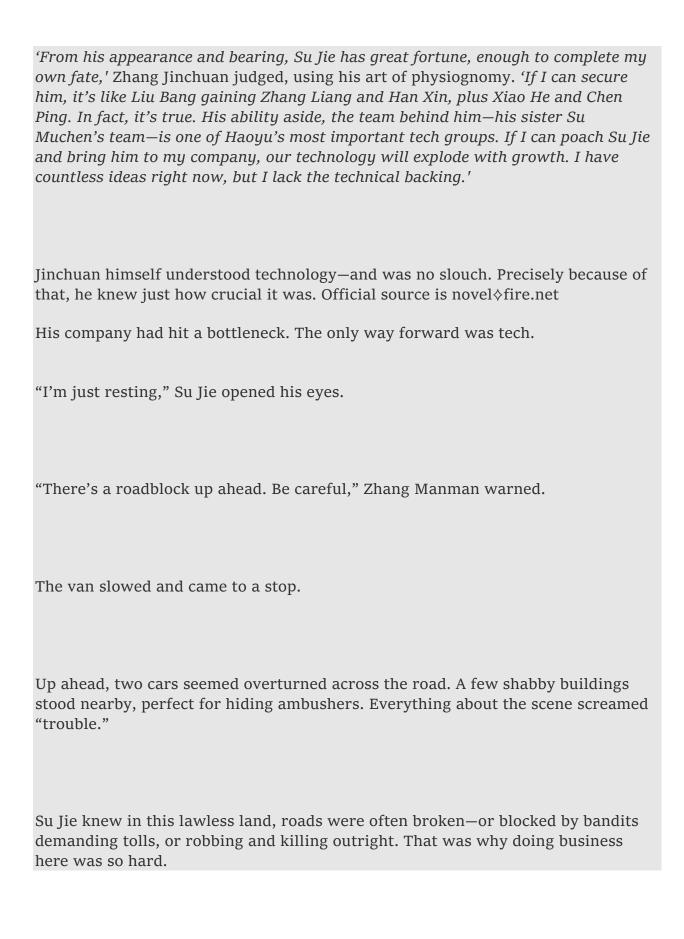




Odell

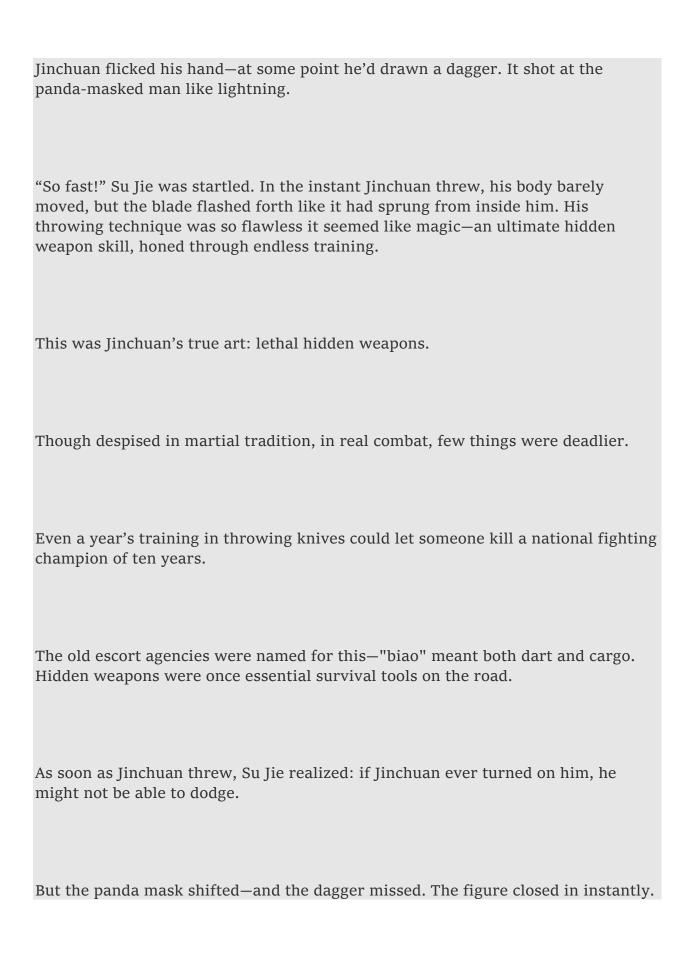
The battered van sped down the winding road. Despite its condition, its speed was still astonishing. Every now and then, other cars appeared, but they only saw the van whoosh past, leaving them in a cloud of dust.





Of course, the blocked transport routes also meant sky-high prices. Anyone who could deliver goods stood to make a fortune.
"No one around," Zhang Jinchuan reported after sliding out, crawling to cover, and scouting.
Su Jie and Zhang Manman exited instantly, splitting up to survey the area.
Manman checked her watch—her infrared radar showed no heat sources. No one was lying in wait.
"Should we move the cars and keep going?" Su Jie asked. He didn't act yet; he knew danger often hid in the obvious.
"Careful. Could be mines or bombs among them. Let's check again. High-tech jammers could also block the sensors." After a moment, Zhang Manman pulled a grenade from her pack and lobbed it at the wrecks.
Boom!

The cars blew apart somewhat, no secondary explosions.
"Seems safe." After a while longer, and with Su Jie double-checking, Manman nodded. "Now we can clear the way."
The three moved to drag the wrecks aside.
"Someone!"
Jinchuan froze, alert.
Manman and Su Jie sensed it too. Before one of the houses by the road, a figure had appeared—tall, masked. The mask was a panda's face, cartoonish and absurd, like a theme park mascot.
But none of them felt like laughing.
Whoosh!



His movements were ghostlike, almost ignoring gravity. If he used that footwork to dance, he'd outdo Michael Jackson's moonwalk.
'So that's how the moonwalk can be used in fighting?' flashed through Su Jie's mind.
But this man's "moonwalk" was fused with combat footwork—sliding, gliding, weaving like a boxer's butterfly steps. He seemed weightless, flickering like a phantom.
In barely a second, he was upon Jinchuan.
Wham!
A palm pressed his neck—pinching a nerve. Jinchuan collapsed without a sound.
Su Jie moved to help, Manman raised her gun—but the panda-masked man ducked before she could fire, slid forward, bumped her gently, and she dropped unconscious.

Su Jie felt danger like never before.
In the blink of an eye, both comrades were down—dead or alive, he couldn't tell. He couldn't even lock onto the opponent's position.
Still, he resolved to fight to the death.
He roared—a dragon's cry, a tiger's roar. He inhaled deep, then blasted it out from gut to throat, shaking his body and spirit.
In that instant, he forgot fear, forgot life and death. Time and space vanished. His psyche reached a realm he had never touched before.
He couldn't even feel his body anymore.
He launched—the "Hoe Strike."
In the face of his comrades' defeat, his will flared fiercer than under gunfire. Spirit, energy, intent—everything rose higher.

Boom!
This strike, he believed, could tear apart mountains.
But when it hit, it was like striking the mythical pillar holding up the heavens. The man didn't budge.
Shhht!
The panda-masked man caught his move, seized his clothes, and with a mighty heave, flung him.
Su Jie hit the ground, rolled several times. Momentum slammed his head into a rock—blood flowed down his face. His bones were intact, just torn skin. Thanks to his hard-trained body, what would've cracked an ordinary skull left him only bloodied.
Drenched in blood, numb to pain, Su Jie got up. Eyes fixed on the panda mask, ready to fight again.
At that moment, grief and resolve welled in him—the feeling of being the last soldier after his homeland had fallen and comrades all slain.

Nothing left.
Only a warrior's death remained.
But then, the panda-masked man waved—and removed the mask.
Su Jie's eyes widened.
It was Odell!
The God-Maker.
His first coach, his mentor.
"Didn't expect you to become this strong," Odell said. His β eijing-accented voice was firm and resonant. His stubbled face looked weathered, yet his eyes shone with deep clarity.

"Coach... it's you." Su Jie wiped blood from his eyes with his sleeve. To outsiders, his face was ghastly, but he didn't care. "Why did you... them..."

"They're fine. Just unconscious," Odell replied, studying Su Jie closely. "The account I gave you—you never logged in, yet you've trained to this level? As for why I'm here... it's because of that girl's father."

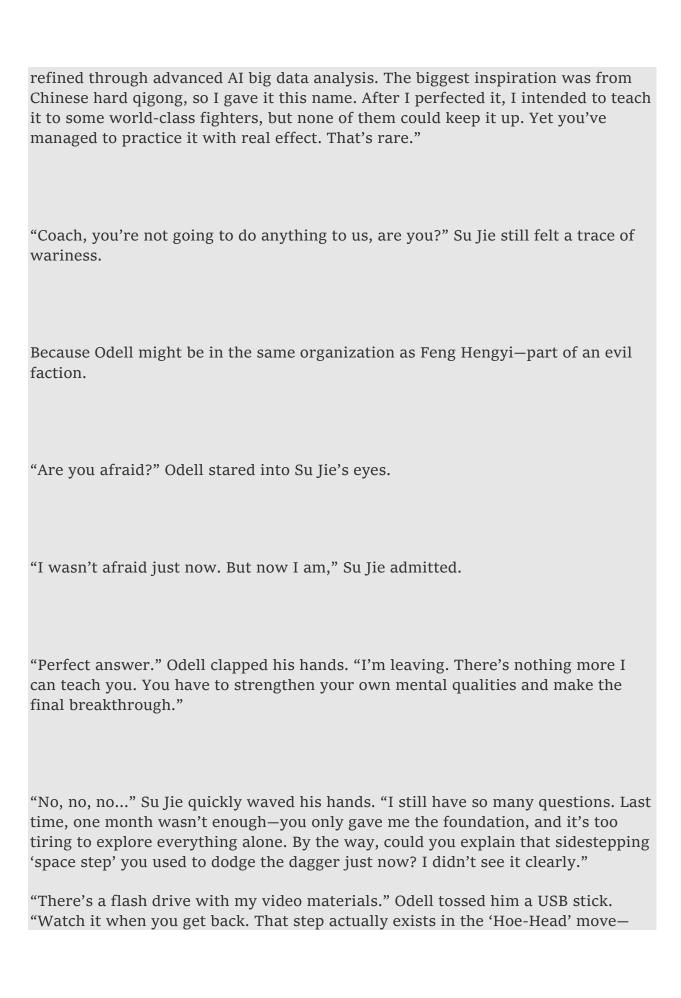
He pointed at Zhang Manman.

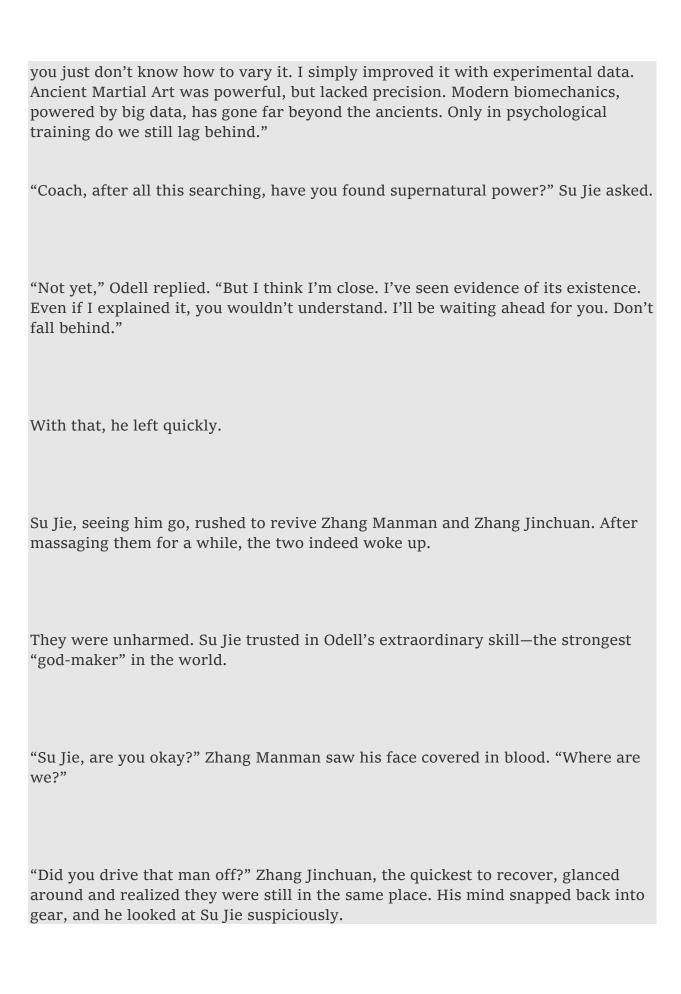
Chapter 125: A Sudden Premonition

"His father killed many of our people. I was called in to deal with him. But in fact, he and I have been long-time friends in spirit," Odell said. "I was only playing around, really. Then I happened to find you, so I wanted to test your skills. You didn't disappoint me. In less than a year, you've already become a warrior. Though still immature in places, the form is there. And you've broken away from my teaching, heading toward a higher path."

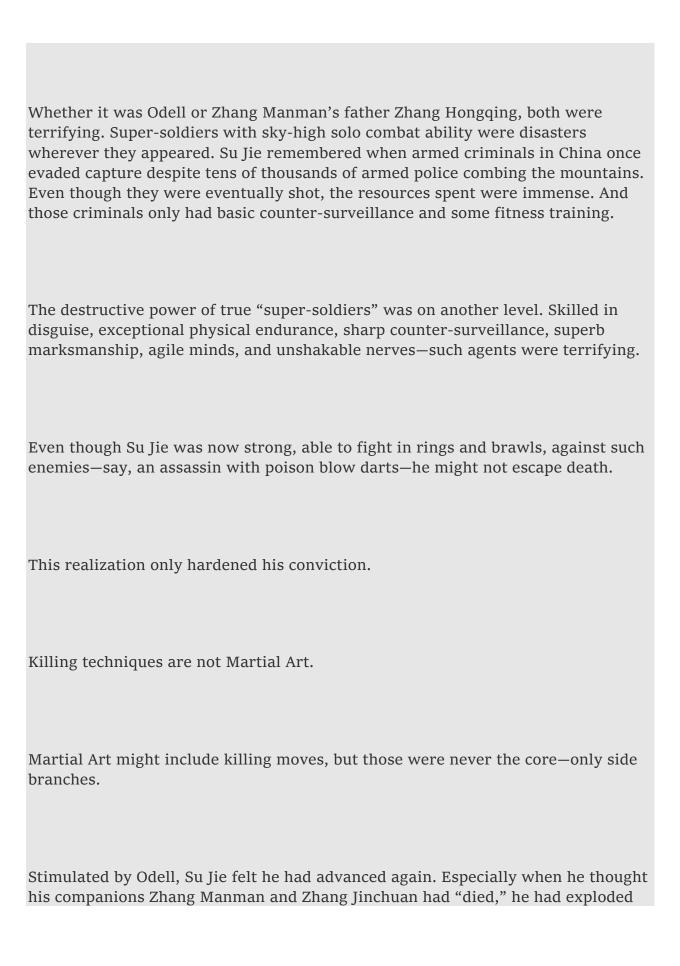
"I've been studying Coach's advanced technique—the 'Thirteen Protectors' Golden Bell Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong,'" Su Jie let out a breath of relief.

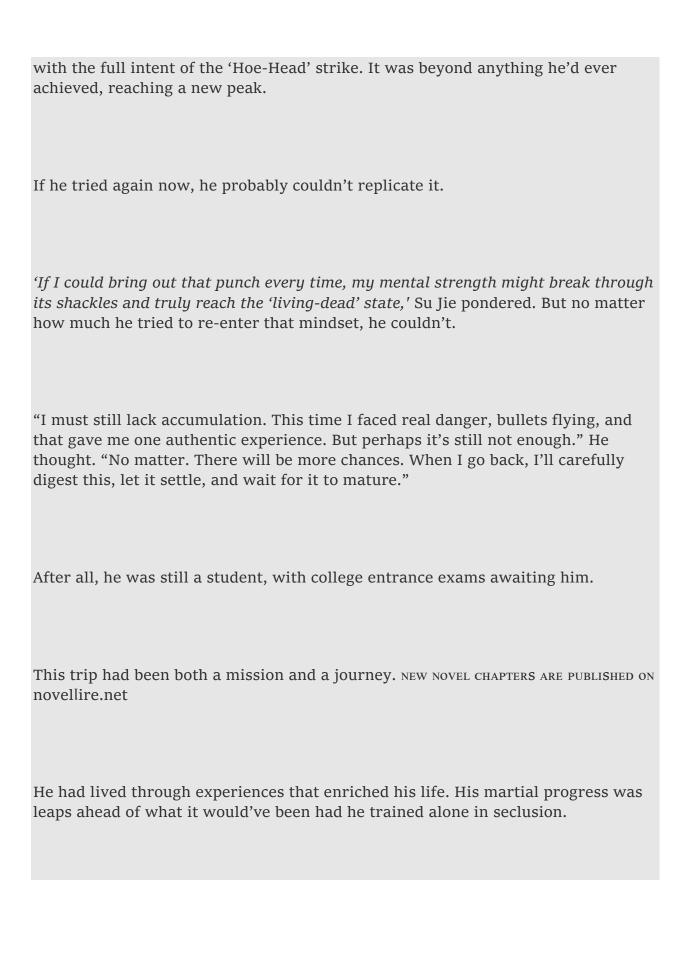
"Oh? That set of external training." Odell thought for a moment. "It's not easy to master. It includes psychological suggestion, vocalization, strike absorption, control of skeletal and muscular systems, and even keeping the rhythm of internal organs. I created it by combining anti-impact training from around the world,



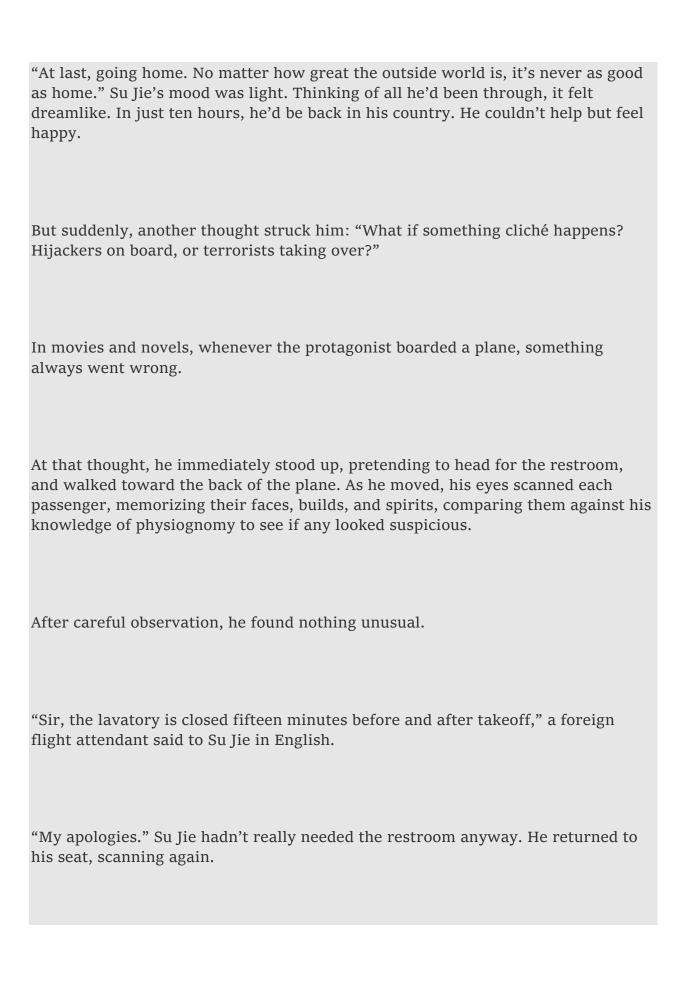


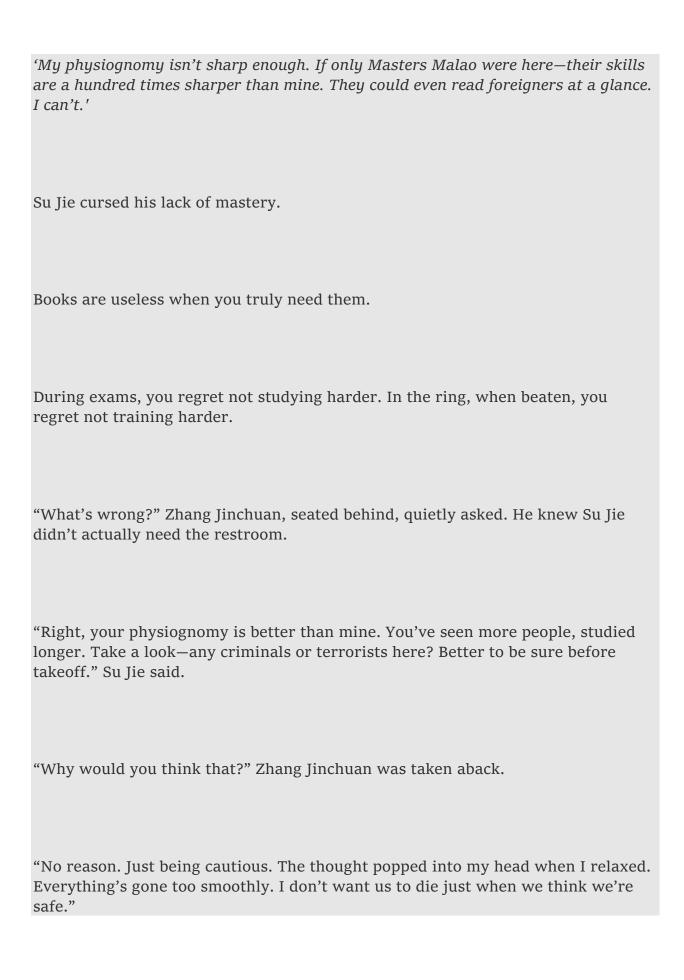






For the first time, he truly understood the saying: "Reading ten thousand books is not as good as traveling ten thousand miles."
As they neared the border, Zhang Manman stashed guns, ammo, grenades, and knives in the van, waiting for pickup. Sure enough, members of the Zhang family arrived to receive them, even taking the "Hungry Wolves" into custody.
"These men all carry sizable bounties. Once we're back, the money will be wired to you," Zhang Manman said. "Now let's change clothes for the airport."
The three changed outfits. Su Jie put on a simple tracksuit, Zhang Jinchuan a suit and tie, instantly charming and eye-catching.
Before long, they reached the airport, boarded with passports, and got on an international flight.
It wasn't a bad plane, though their seats weren't together. Zhang Jinchuan was in the back, Zhang Manman in the middle, and Su Jie in the front. It was going to be a long trip—over ten hours, with stops in several foreign countries.
Once seated, Su Jie finally relaxed. His head wound had already healed well, thanks to disinfectant, medicine, and his strong constitution. Surface injuries always healed faster on him than on others.





"A sudden premonition?" Zhang Jinchuan's face grew serious. He too began scanning. "You may be right. I hadn't thought that far, assuming it was over. Actually, your physiognomy knowledge isn't beneath mine. But this is an experiential science. You need practice. In business, recruiting talent, spotting reliable people, that's what trained my eye. You lack that kind of experience."

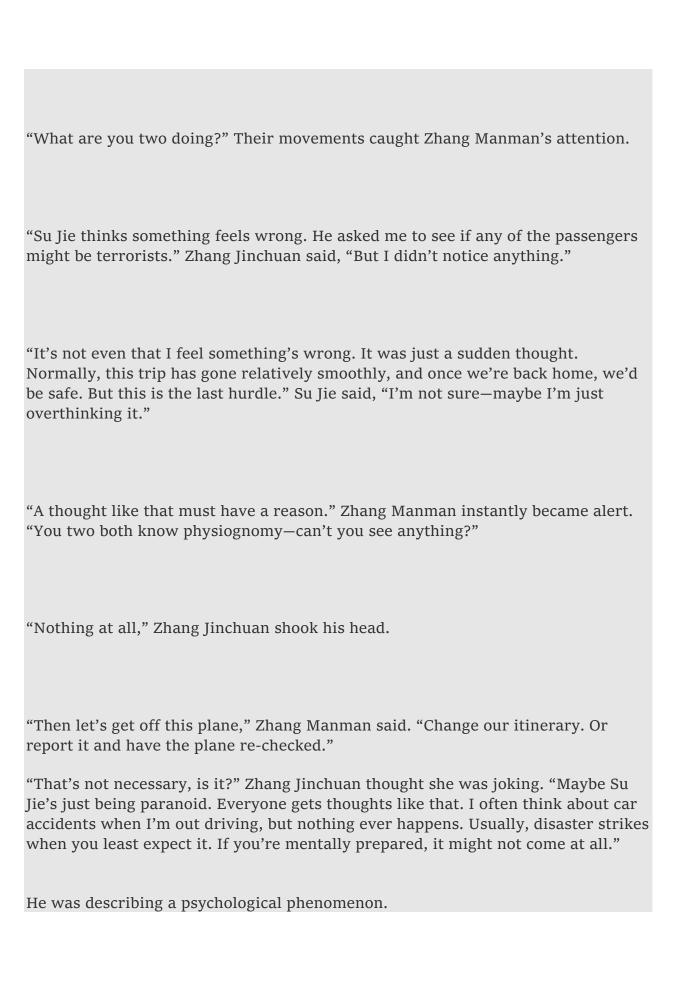
Zhang Jinchuan had interviewed and selected thousands, even tens of thousands of people to build his company of hundreds. Naturally, his experience outstripped Su Jie's.

Chapter 126: Fortune and Disaster Hang by a Thread

At that moment, Zhang Jinchuan also began to deliberately observe.

He strolled around, taking the chance to carefully size up each passenger, but he found nothing unusual. It all seemed normal.

"Foreigners' faces are different from ours. The records in physiognomy might be incomplete; we'd need a large dataset of foreigners to fill the gaps." After a quick sweep, Zhang Jinchuan spread his hands helplessly. His physiognomy skills were stronger than Su Jie's, but still far from flawless.



"There's also Murphy's Law—the more you worry about something, the more likely it is to happen." Su Jie analyzed his sudden thought. "But we've already boarded the plane. We can't exactly get off now."
"It's fine." Zhang Manman said, "Both Master Roma and Master Luo saw something special in you, so you must have some hidden luck. I'll go speak to the stewardess." She stood up, walked over, and whispered a few words in English.
The stewardess conversed with her at length, then nodded.
Sure enough, before long, a group of police boarded the plane for another security check.
But the first people they inspected were Su Jie, Zhang Jinchuan, and Zhang Manman.
After thoroughly checking the three and finding nothing, they moved on to the others and even unloaded all the luggage for re-inspection.
The passengers grew nervous seeing this.

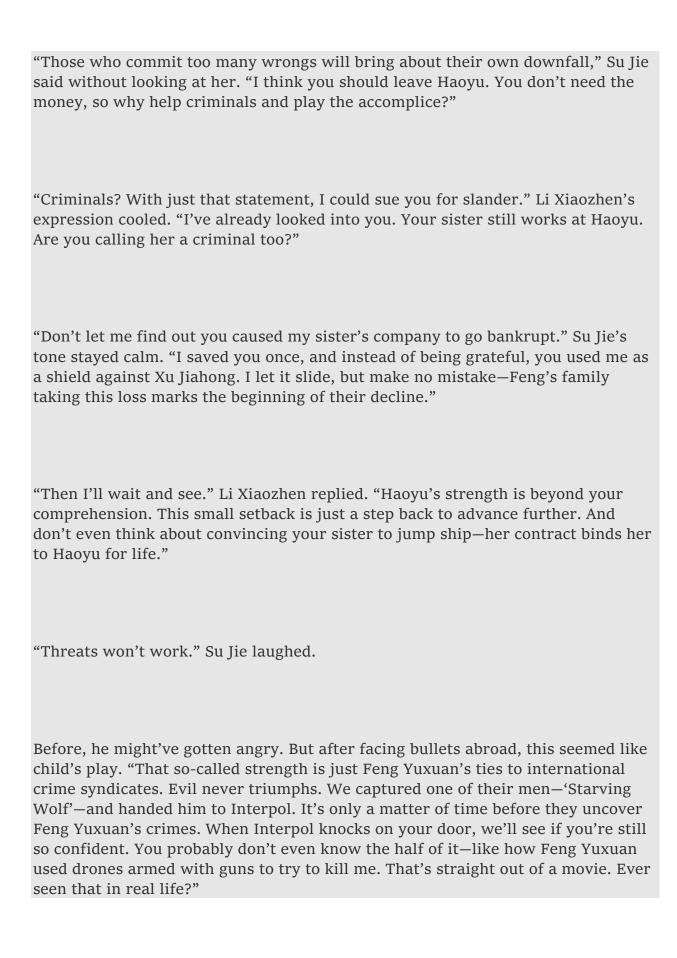
But again, nothing turned up.
Then, an officer gave a brief order to his subordinate.
Soon, a police dog was brought on board.
The dog sniffed around, then suddenly lunged at an inconspicuous woman, barking furiously and nearly attacking her.
"Don't move!" Several officers instantly drew their guns and aimed at her.
The woman, however, suddenly grabbed a nearby passenger and twisted his neck. She wore a ring, and from it sprang razor-sharp blades—something the security checks had completely missed.
Shhht! Shhht!
But before she could act, the police fired their tasers. The electrodes shot into her body, and she convulsed violently before collapsing unconscious with the hostage.

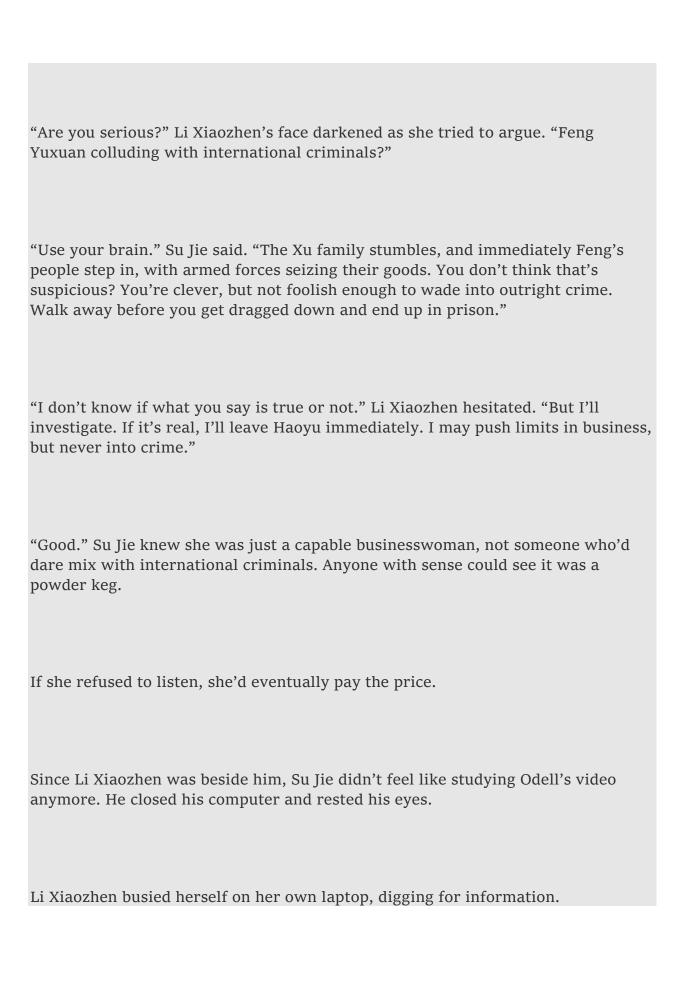
"That's how the police operate abroad. Especially here—taking hostages is useless. Sometimes they'll even kill the hostage along with the criminal." Zhang Manman was unfazed. "But Su Jie, you really are a lucky star. If not for you, things could've ended badly. I took a risk too—if nothing had been found, I'd probably have ended up in detention. Luckily my dad has connections with airport security, or they never would've brought a dog aboard." "I can't believe there really was a terrorist. Was it truly my sixth sense or just coincidence?" Even Su Jie was shocked. "Incredible." Zhang Jinchuan gave him a thumbs-up. "I thought once she grabbed a hostage, there'd be a standoff and we'd have a chance to shine. I didn't expect the police to be so ruthless, not even caring about the hostage." "That's how it always goes in stories: hijackers on a plane, the protagonist fights them off, rescues everyone, and wins the girl's admiration." Su Jie laughed, feeling genuine relief for the first time. "You two are worse than a dog," Zhang Manman said. "And you call yourselves students of Masters Roma and Luo?" "The police dog was definitely sharper than us." Su Jie had to admit.	
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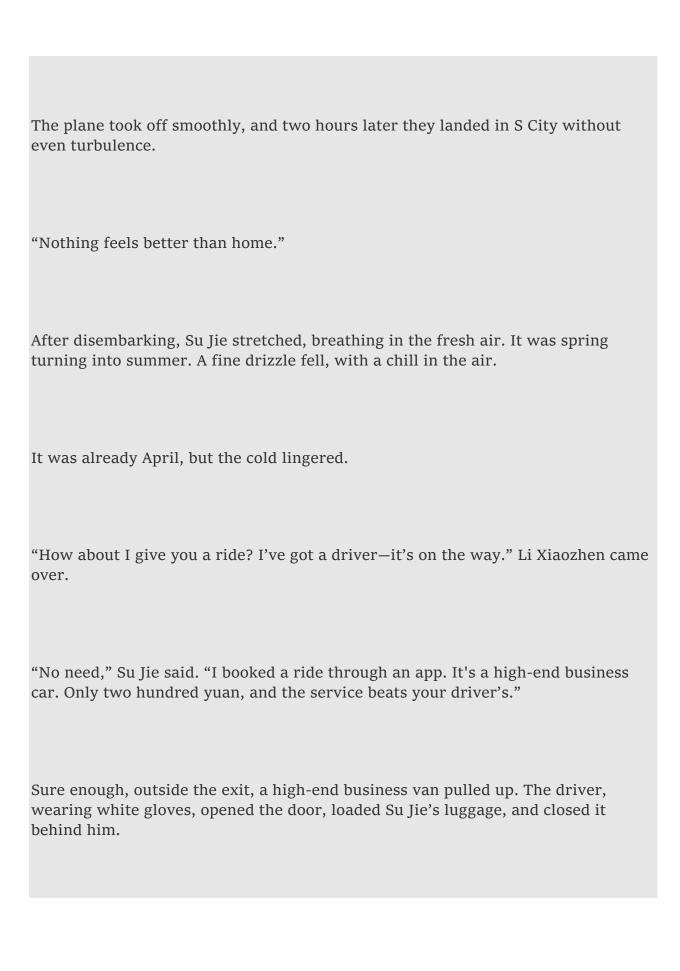


Not that the exam itself worried him, but he still had to decide which university to attend.
Boarding the flight from B City to S City, Su Jie finally relaxed. Traveling abroad had shown him that home was where true peace lay, where he could actually sleep soundly.
He bought a first-class ticket, reclined in the spacious seat, and pulled out his brick-like AI learning device. Plugging in the USB drive Odell had given him, he was ready to study the "Space Step."
This footwork was as swift and elusive as a phantom—an illusion of weightlessness. It looked like moving forward but was actually retreating; looked like retreating, yet advanced instead. It was clearly one of Odell's latest creations, and extremely difficult.
Just as Su Jie was about to start the video, a waft of perfume brushed past him. A tall woman in professional attire—a sharp-looking elite—sat down beside him, as if fresh from a high-stakes negotiation.
"So it's you?" she spoke first.
Su Jie had already recognized her: Li Xiaozhen.

Last time, when she was drunk, he had rescued her and taken her home, and that was the end of it.
Later, while reading about Haoyu Group's acquisition of the Xu family, he saw that she was the one leading the negotiations. In life, she was a mess who couldn't clean her house; in business, she was sharp, precise, and a formidable opponent.
Feng Yuxuan had two key women under him: one outward-facing—Li Xiaozhen; and one inward-facing—Tang Tian, who gathered intelligence, managed departments, and monitored employees.
It was said that Haoyu Group had three powerful career women: Li Xiaozhen, Tang Tian, and Fang Jia.
Li Xiaozhen and Tang Tian worked for Feng Yuxuan, while Fang Jia worked for Feng Qianzang.
"So it's you." Su Jie didn't even sit up, replying lazily.
"I really underestimated you." Li Xiaozhen stared at him as if flowers bloomed on his face. "You actually handled the Xu family's seized goods overseas without a word. Thanks to you, I not only failed to complete the acquisition but cost my company money. Tell me—how are you going to compensate me?"







Li Xiaozhen could only watch as Su Jie disappeared into the distance.

Chapter 127: Hardship in the Bustling City

When Su Jie got home, it was already two in the morning. His parents were asleep, and his older sister, as usual, had spent the night at the company.

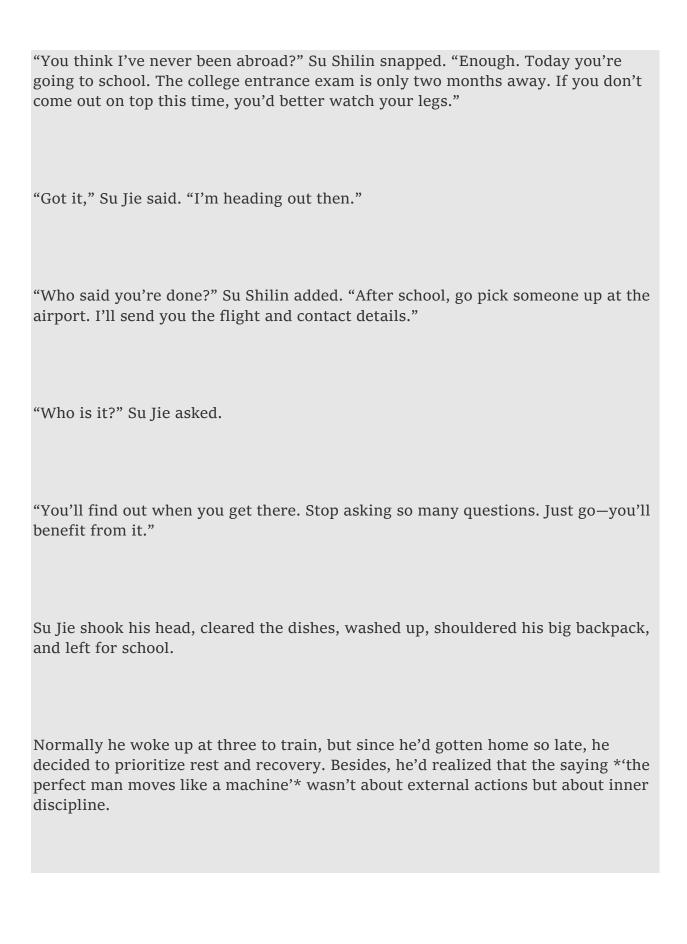
He didn't wake his parents. After a quick shower, washing up, and tidying things, he lay down and went straight to sleep.

Four hours later, at six o'clock, he got up. The sky was bright, the streets already crowded with commuters hurrying to work.

Traffic in City S was notoriously bad. Some people who lived in the suburbs had to get up at five and spend two or three hours on the road just to get to work—it was exhausting. Su Jie quickly washed up and ate breakfast. His breakfast was simple: military field rations, plus an egg and a glass of boiled water.

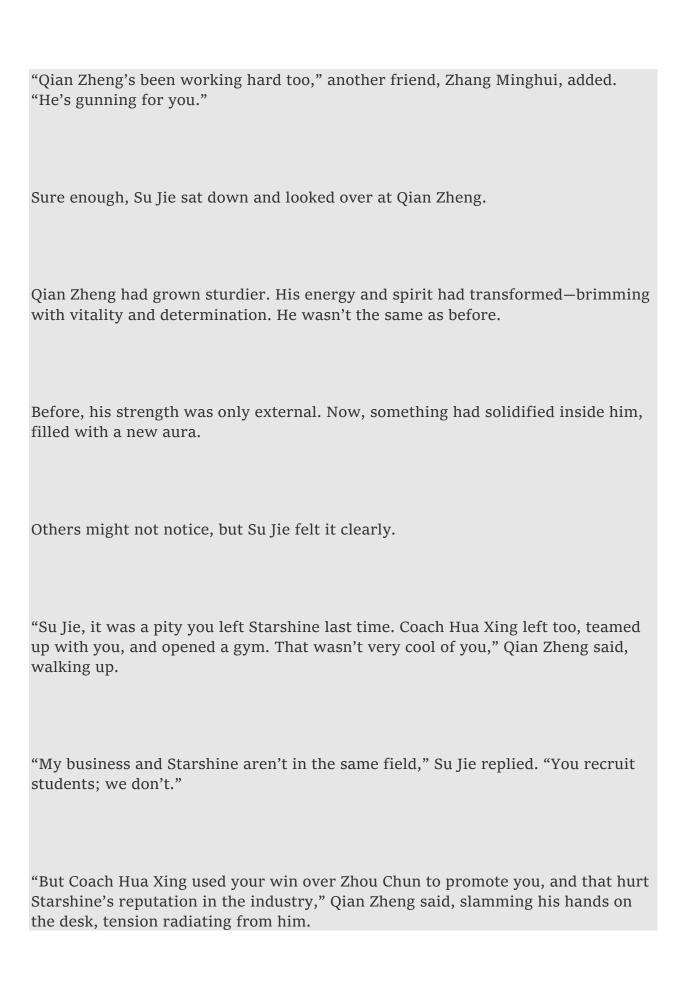
He'd gotten home too late yesterday to buy groceries and cook. Fortunately, while the field rations didn't taste great, they were rich in nutrition, packed with the vitamins and supplements soldiers needed in combat—perfect for someone training intensively.

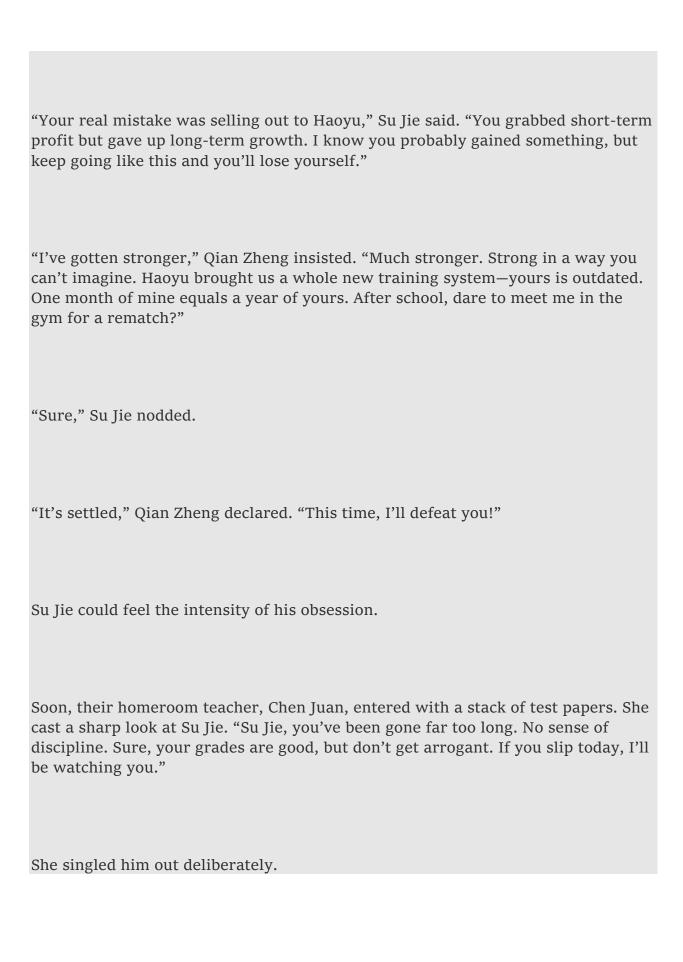
These rations were actually expensive and unavailable on the market. They were designed for convenience, their only drawback being the flavor.
Zhang Manman had once said that these were developed by advanced nutrition labs specifically to address soldiers' needs in war zones. Su Jie ate them happily—he didn't care about the taste, only that they replenished his body.
"This stuff isn't bad."
While he was eating, his father, Su Shilin, got up. He glanced at the metal can on the table, scooped a bit with his finger, and tasted it. "You've been saying you were studying in City B these past few months. When did you go to a war zone? Are you trying to get yourself killed?"
"Dad, that's disgusting," Su Jie frowned as he watched his father dig his finger into the can.
"You little brat, you dare complain?" Su Shilin barked. "Forget that—what I want to know is, did you get shot over there?"
"Of course not," Su Jie replied, feigning nonchalance. "It was just business negotiations. Dad, don't imagine a war zone is as dangerous as it sounds. Haven't you seen the videos online? People open restaurants there, screen movies, take on construction projects, run export businesses—the economy is booming. Even the foreign mercenaries there told me, 'Bro, no problem.' It's not as bad as you think."

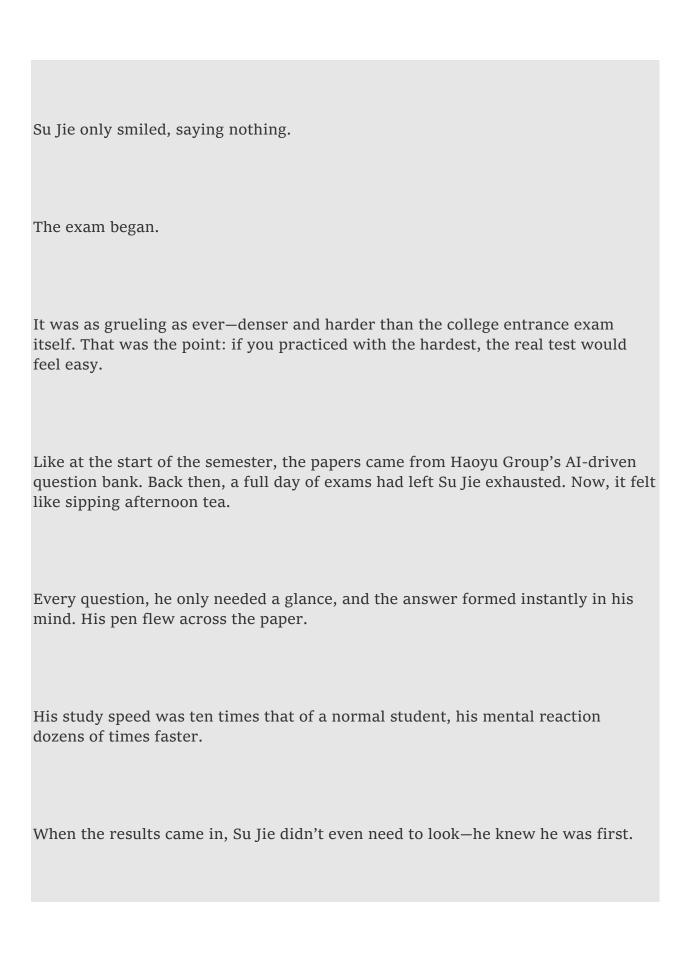


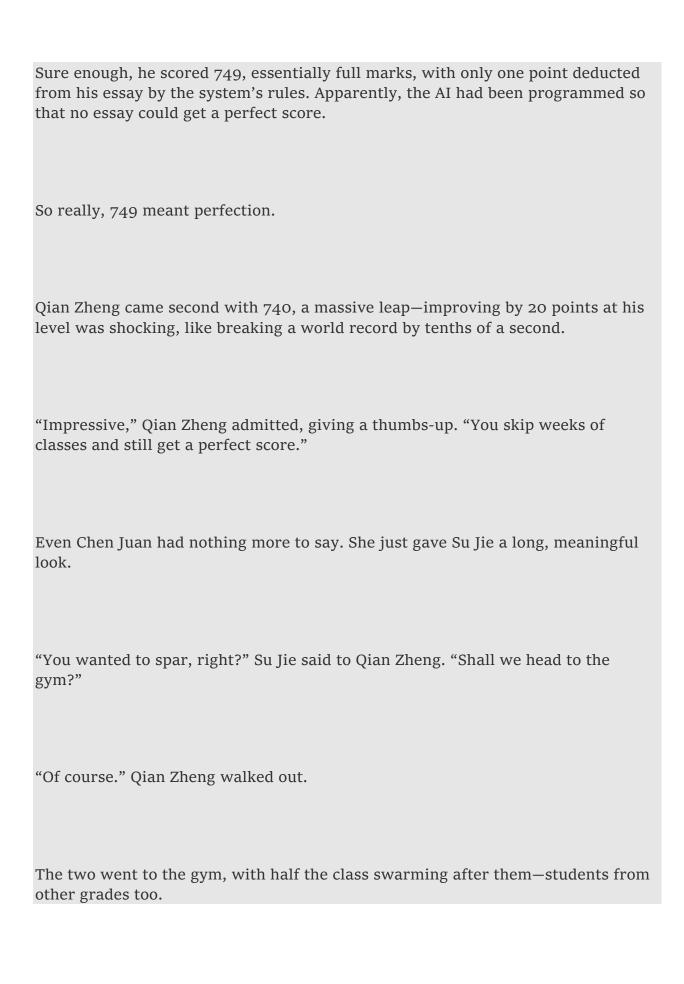
"Still, I'll have to resume training tomorrow. Can't slack off. But where am I supposed to train?" Su Jie worried.
Before, his morning workouts were simple—joint stretches, push-ups, Tiger's Rest, running, jump rope, punching, kicking. Even though they were intense, doing them quietly in the park never disturbed anyone.
But now, that sort of exercise no longer did much for him.
He was practicing the "Thirteen Protectors' Golden Bell Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong."
This kind of external hard-style training required stripping down, covering himself in ointment, and taking heavy blows that sounded like firecrackers going off. On top of that, he had to roar like a beast.
Tiger's roar! Dragon's cry! Furious shouts! Roars! Eagle's screech! Crane's call! Ape's howl! Elephant's trumpet! Horse's neigh! Bull's bellow!
These sounds, combined with the explosive movements, pushed his body to the limit—so that in the chaos of ten thousand troops, he would remain unshaken; against crashing waves, stand like a rock; amidst quakes and floods, laugh as if nothing mattered.

But in the city? Impossible to practice.
He'd thought about it many times but never found a solution. And he couldn't skip training—this was his prime time for growth.
The only option was retreating to deserted mountains and forests, where he could unleash himself fully. He'd already noticed that training in the wilderness was far more effective than in a soundproof room. Out there, he could let his wildness out and be closer to nature.
'If nothing works, I'll just have to take leave again—and maybe head back to the Minglun Martial Arts Academy. There are mountains nearby, and I could talk more with Uncle Mang and Gu Yang,' Su Jie thought as he arrived at school. But the idea of taking leave again made him wince.
In senior year, with exams looming, asking for leave all the time was unheard of.
If he didn't always rank first, the school would've expelled him long ago.
When he entered the classroom, his classmates gave him thumbs-up. His old buddy Qi Shuai said, "Bro, you're a legend—one leave lasts half a month. Today's the mock exam. If you bomb it, the homeroom teacher's gonna eat you alive."







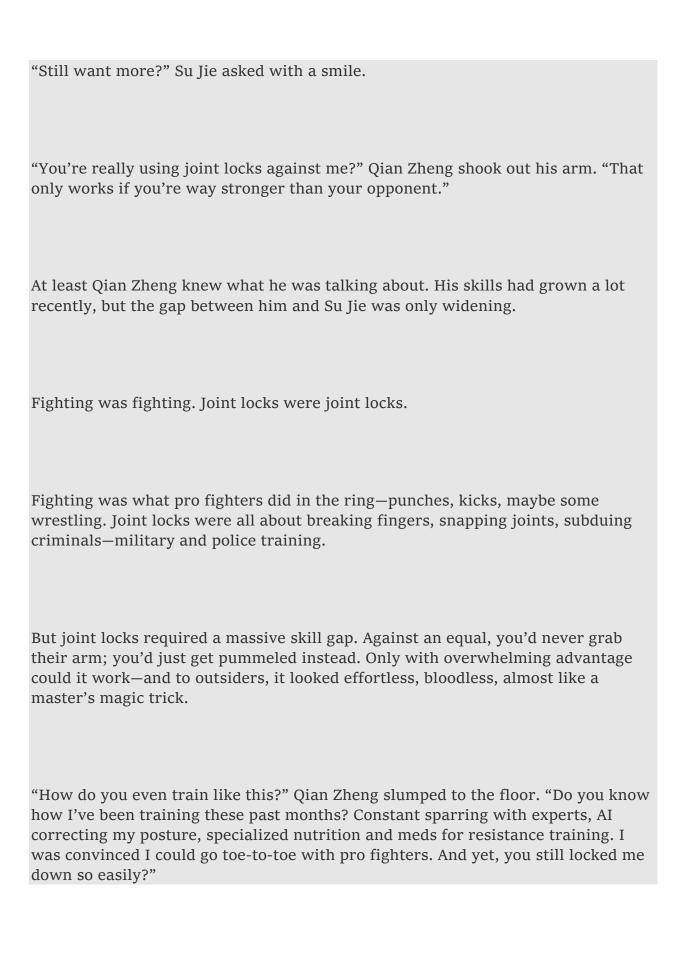


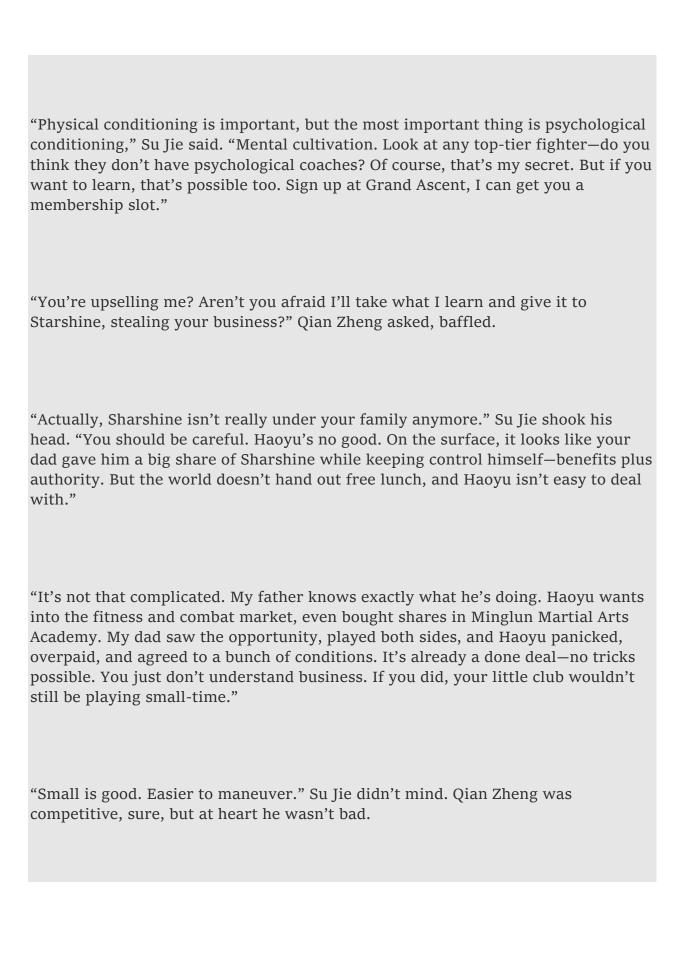
"I wanted you to be my coach once, to learn your methods. But after Haoyu invested and brought in the new system, I realized yours is outdated," Qian Zheng said as they faced each other.
Su Jie waved him on. "You ready? Let's start."
Roar!
Qian Zheng's feet blurred, like gears spinning at high speed. His upper body barely moved, but in less than a second, he'd closed the distance, fists flying at Su Jie's head, chest, and legs.
In that instant, Su Jie was reminded of Feng Hengyi's two-punch knockout back at the Minglun Martial Arts Academy.
Chapter 128: Confidence Shattered, Doubt
Begins

Qian Zheng's skills had indeed improved tremendously.

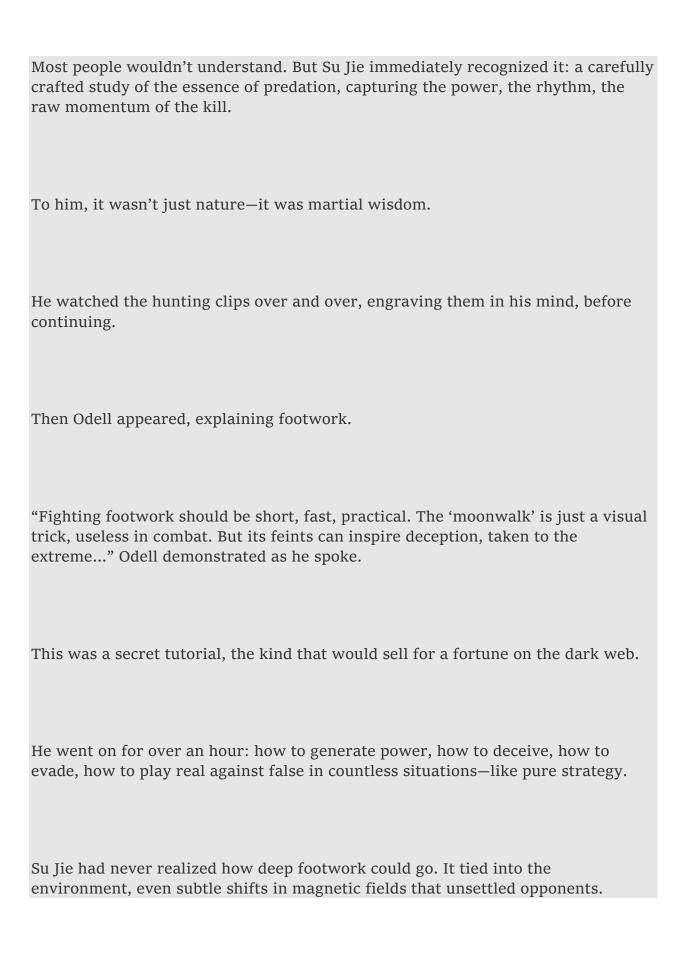
But in Su Jie's eyes, he wasn't even a "paper tiger."
Before Su Jie went abroad, he himself had been a "paper tiger." He thought he was a master, sometimes even feeling nearly invincible, his ego swelling every moment. But once he was thrown into the hail of bullets overseas, he realized just how fragile his psyche was—fear, worry, anxiety, panic, helplessness—negative emotions were everywhere.
Of course, he still felt those emotions now, but far less than before.
So when Qian Zheng's fist came at him, Su Jie's brain registered it as nothing more than a baby waving its tiny fists—not frightening, just childish.
And the speed? Painfully slow.
Smack!
Su Jie casually raised his arm.
Forearm clashed with forearm, intercepting Qian Zheng's strike. Then Su Jie's fingers hooked in like an eagle's talons, clamping muscle and bone, yanking downward.

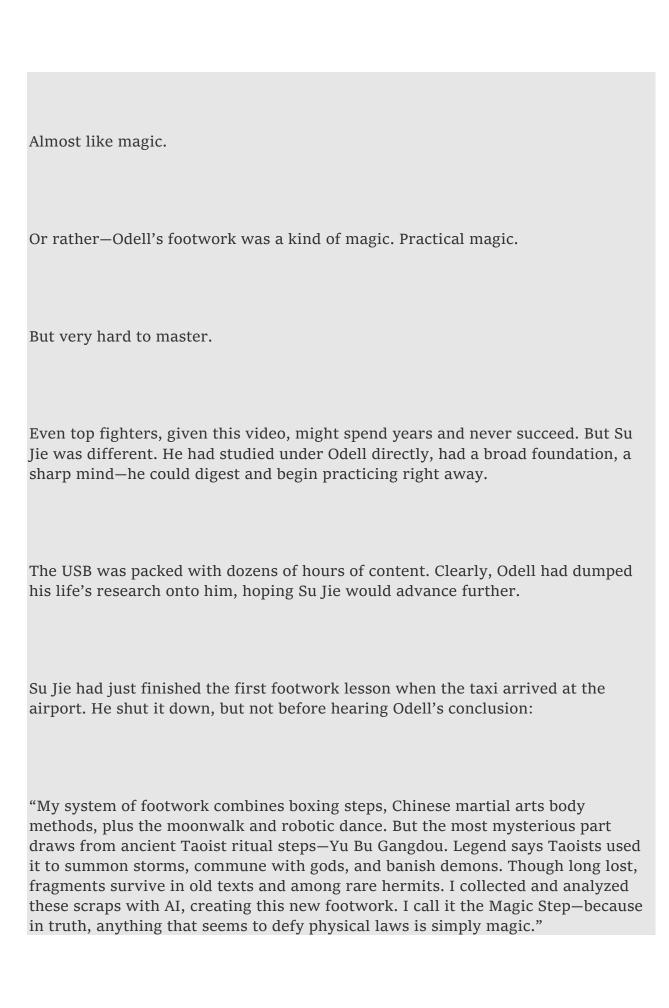
"Ahh!" Qian Zheng cried out in pain. His knees buckled, and he dropped to the floor, unable to stand. Pure leverage.
Su Jie had turned his arm into a lever—any struggle would only risk snapping his bones.
"Let's reset. Come again." Su Jie released him.
Qian Zheng shook his wrist to dull the pain, glared fiercely, then lunged again—this time hands and feet together, feinting below while striking above.
Crack!
The instant he attacked, Su Jie's arm swept up, clashing against his again, then snaked in and clamped down.
It was like a mantis chopping down a cicada, or a crab seizing prey, or a tiger pinning down its kill
"It hurts, it hurts!" Qian Zheng couldn't stop himself from crying out, no matter how hard he tried to keep face.

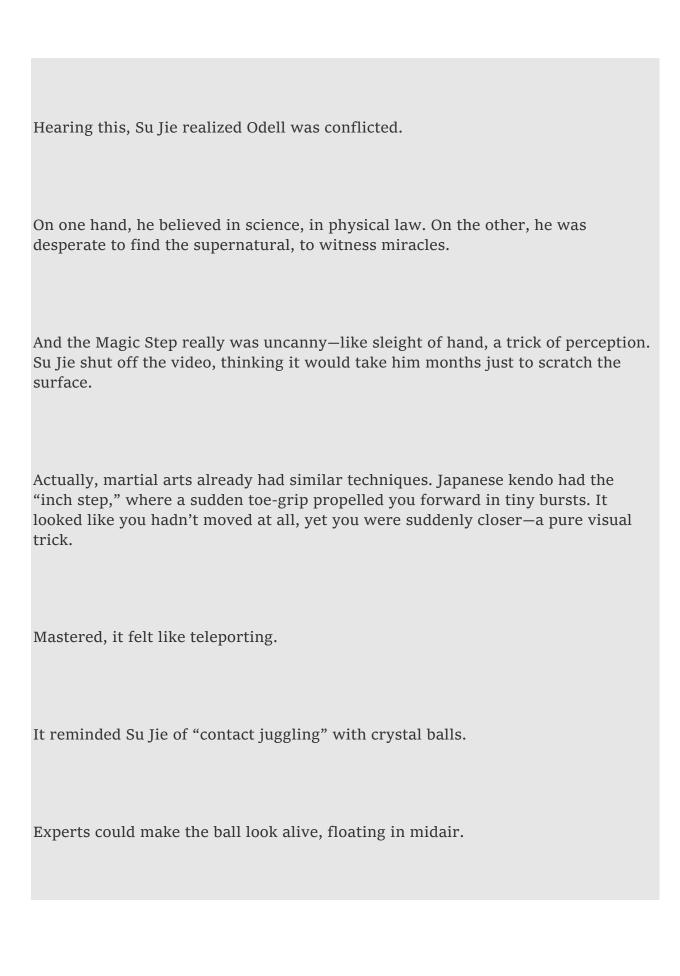




"I'll drop by your club sometime. Even if the public hasn't heard of it, there's some mystique about it in the industry." Qian Zheng got up and left in a rush, clearly off to consult someone about why he'd lost today.
Su Jie didn't linger either. He grabbed hot water from the cafeteria, ate a military ration can, then checked the time and headed for the airport by taxi.
On the way, he pulled out his brick-thick tablet, inserted Odell's USB drive, and started watching his instructional videos.
The opening three minutes showed slow-motion, high-definition footage of animals hunting.
A tiger ambushing an antelope—the real wilderness. The tiger crouched, hidden in the grass, then suddenly sprang. Its spine coiled and released like a spring, body surging upright almost like a man, forelimbs locking onto the prey's head, all its force exploding in that one pounce, accompanied by a roar that froze the victim in sheer terror.
There were mantises hunting, vipers striking, eagles diving, wolves and leopards chasing, gorillas brawling
Almost every fierce predator in nature appeared in that montage.







He searched for "Magic Step" online—nothing. On foreign sites, though, he found some news.
Latest headline: "MMA newcomer David Laki wins first championship belt." In the fight, he used illusion-like footwork to confuse the ex-champion Cole, then defeated him. Afterwards, Laki credited his coach entirely: "My Magic Step comes from him." His coach? The godmaker himself—Odell.
Another: "Champion Pascchi asked if he's the strongest man alive." Pascchi answered, "The strongest is my coach, Odell." When asked why Odell didn't fight himself to make money, Pascchi laughed: "A third of my fight earnings go straight to him. He doesn't need to fight."
Chapter 129: Random Matchmaking
Upon arriving at the airport, Su Jie stopped looking at his computer, turned it off, and stuffed it into his bag. At that moment, a message from his father, Su Shilin, came through on his phone.
"Song Qiong, phone number xx flight number"
The message contained detailed information about picking someone up.

"Who exactly is this person?" Su Jie wondered. "Is this a task from the company? By the way, it seems the boss recently switched security jobs, moving from his previous company to Zhonglong Group as the head of security, and apparently got promoted."

In fact, Su Jie was also concerned about his family's situation. During these days

In fact, Su Jie was also concerned about his family's situation. During these days away, his mother, Xu Ying, was still a university professor, but it seemed she was partnering with some friends on projects.

As for his father, Su Shilin had changed companies. Originally, his father's company wasn't very large, but the work was quite relaxed. Now, Zhonglong Group was extremely vast, with a global influence surpassing that of Haoyu, being a well-established enterprise. The last time Su Jie used a ride-hailing app to mock Li Xiaozhen, it was a product developed by Zhonglong Group.

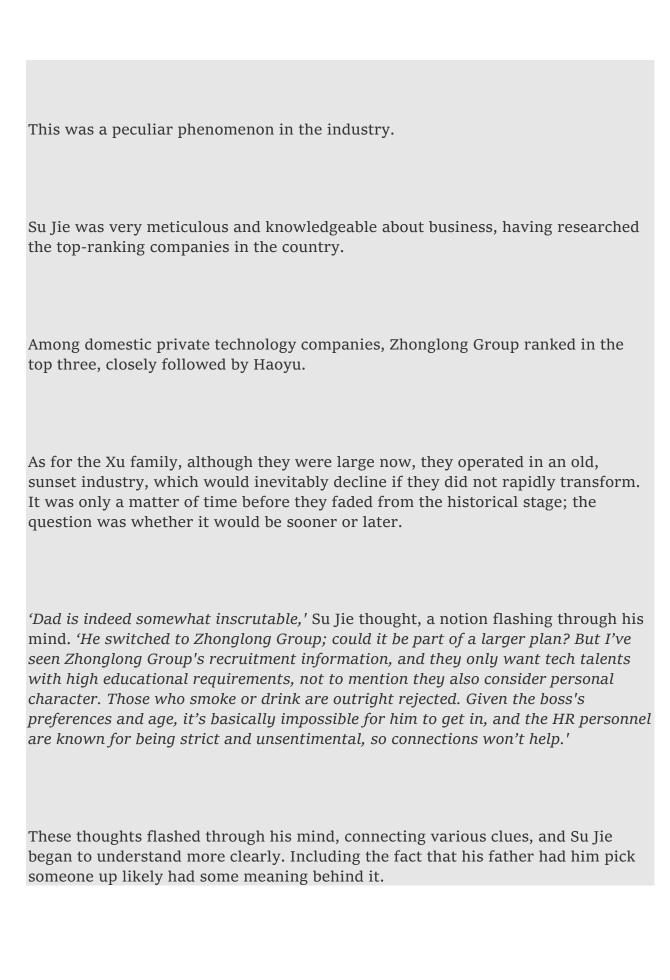
To enter this industry, Haoyu had also developed software but couldn't compete with Zhonglong, ultimately having to exit the market in disgrace. This was one of Haoyu's more unsuccessful investments.

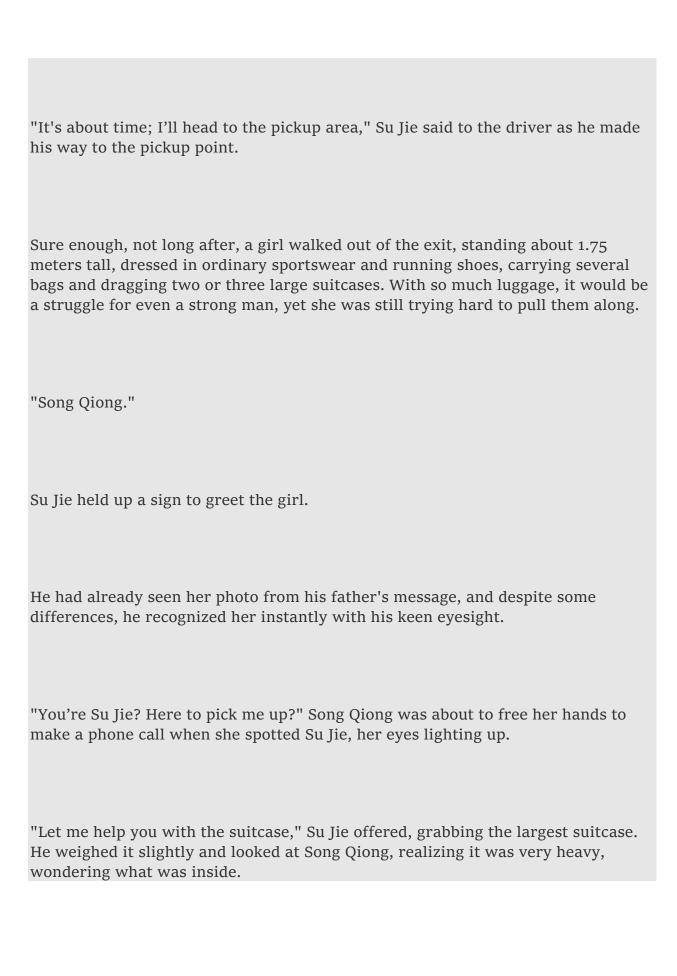
However, when Zhonglong Group tried to enter the gaming market, they were severely beaten by Haoyu.

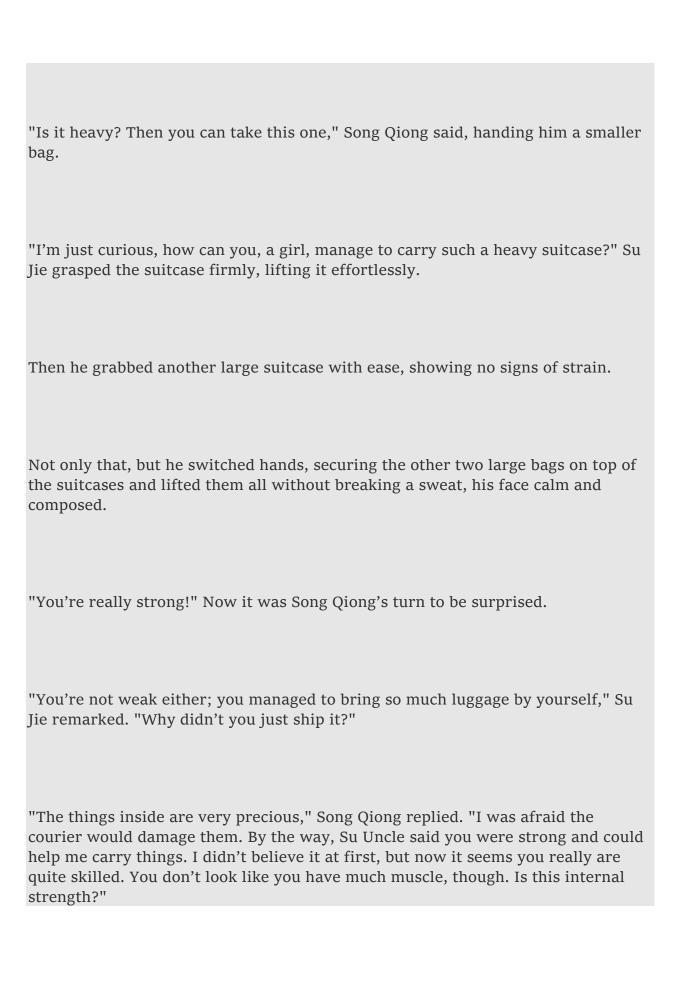
The two sides had clashed several times, each with their victories and defeats.

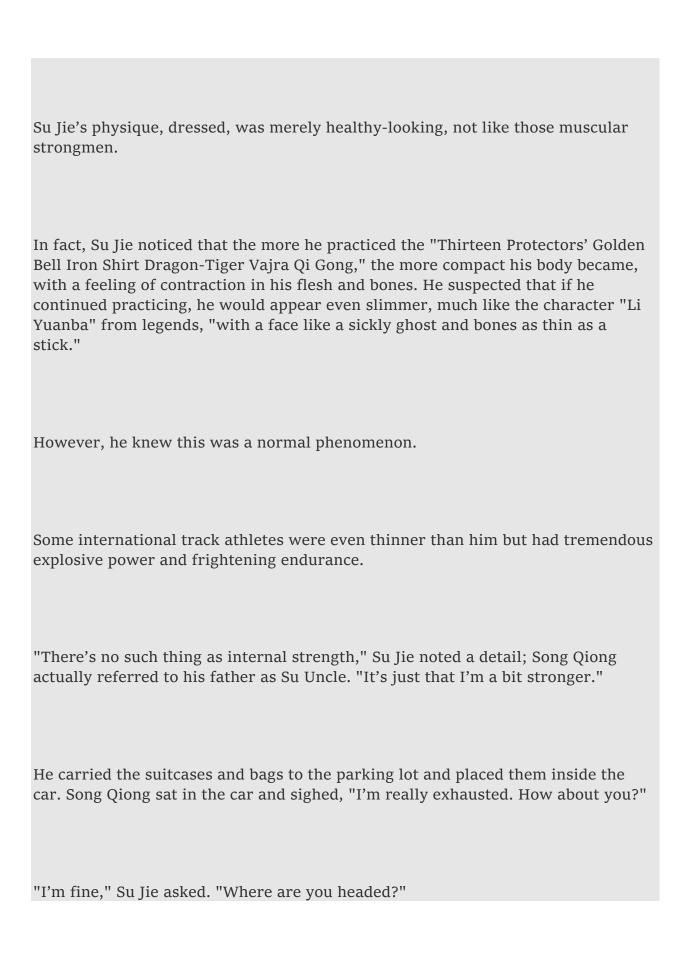
Zhonglong was the old big brother, while Haoyu was the suddenly rising newcomer.

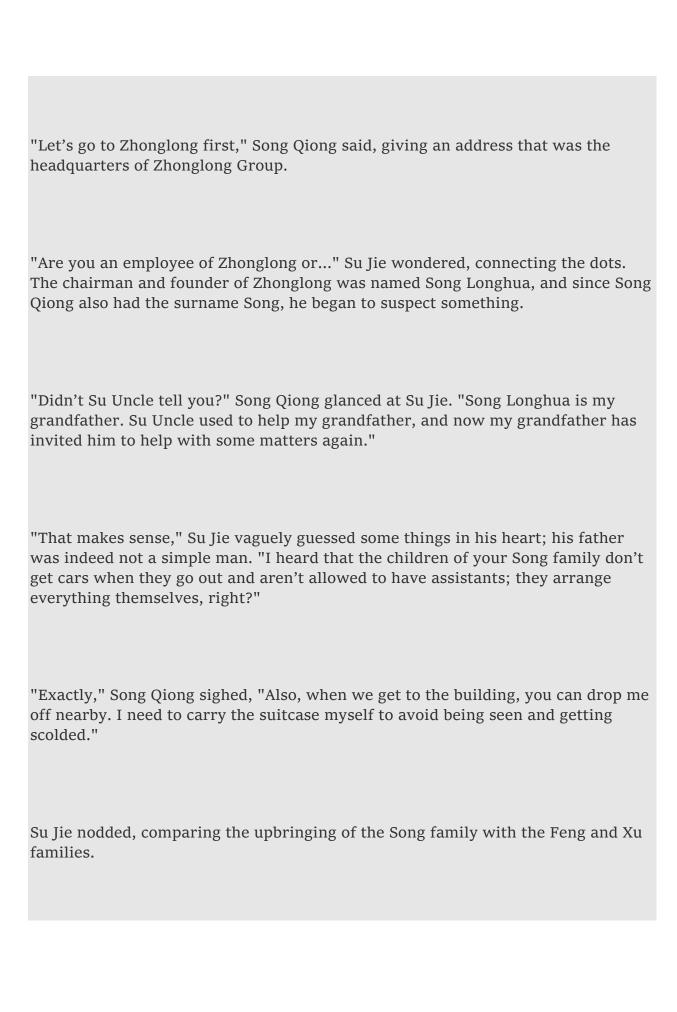
Now, both sides had acknowledged each other's status.
The chairman of Zhonglong Group was named Song Longhua, a legendary figure who had grown up in poverty, later served in the military, and upon returning to civilian life, started a business that spiraled into a massive commercial empire. Moreover, he was low-key and rigorous in his style; it was said that he would go out alone with just a suitcase, taking taxis and standing in line. His clothes and shoes were all old and very simple, no different from an ordinary person.
His children were also very low-profile, never showing their faces, making it difficult for the media to know who they were. Unlike the flamboyant young masters of Haoyu Group, who were constantly surrounded by scandals, Song Hengyi rarely made an appearance.
Zhonglong Group's management was extremely strict, making it hard to get hired However, once hired, the benefits were excellent, with the company covering almost everything.
Song Longhua even developed real estate not for external sale, but as rewards for internal employees.
In contrast, Haoyu was quite stingy, offering low salaries and requiring frequent overtime.
Strangely, however, applicants for Haoyu kept coming in droves.

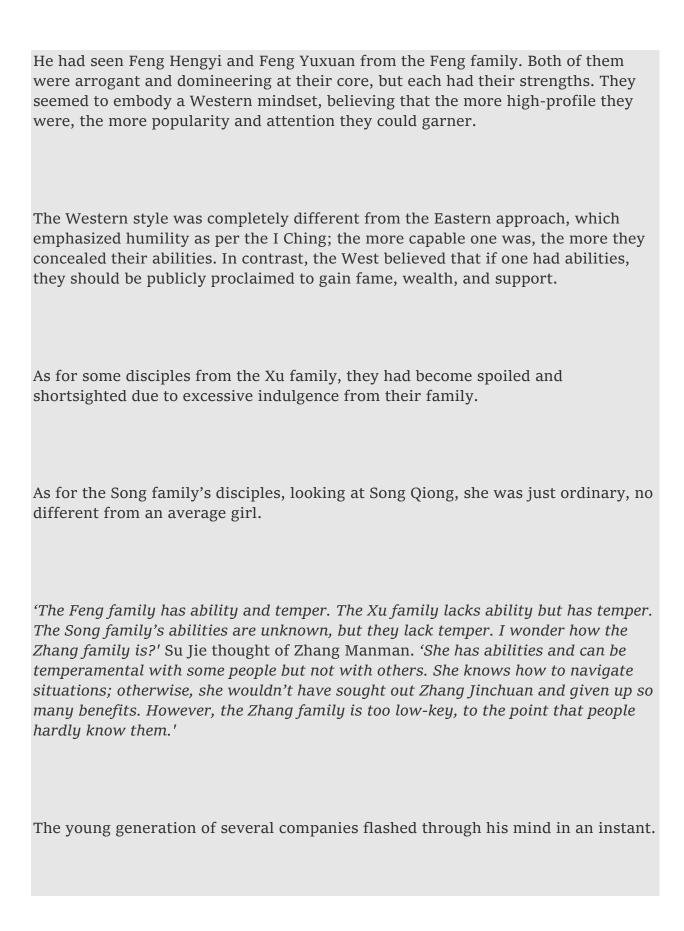










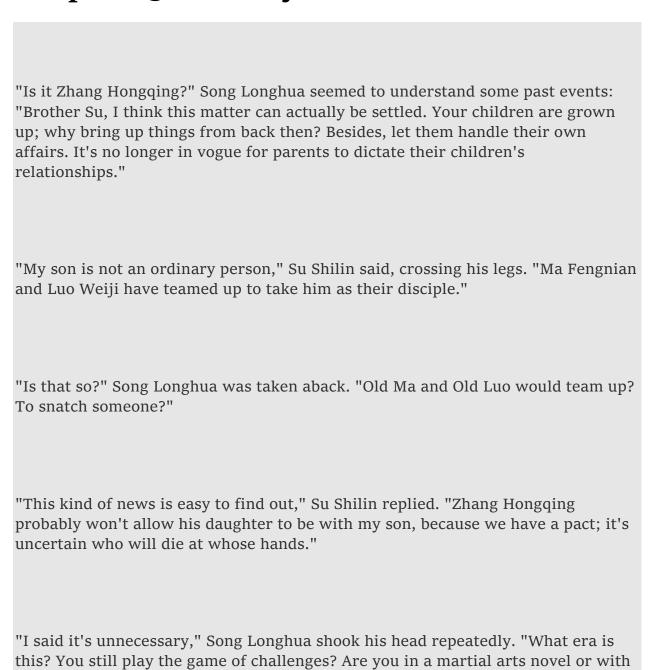


Suddenly, he thought about national fortune and human fortune.
'If the cultural atmosphere of the country fully aligns with the West, the Feng family's style could truly explode and become mainstream. If the cultural atmosphere of the country maintains its traditions while developing its own characteristics, then the Song family will gain the upper hand.'
Nation, family, and people.
Su Jie increasingly understood some things.
In the car, Su Jie and Song Qiong chatted casually.
Meanwhile, in the Zhonglong Group office, Su Shilin was chatting with a "middle-aged man" in his seventies.
This "middle-aged man" was Song Longhua.
He was already over seventy years old but looked like he was in his fifties, adept at maintaining his health.

Su Shilin sat boldly across from him, lighting a cigarette and taking a puff.
Outside the door, several assistants were wide-eyed, knowing that smoking was completely banned in Zhonglong Group. Even if an executive lit a cigarette, they would be immediately fired. Yet here was a man in a security uniform smoking in the chairman's office, and the chairman was smiling.
However, beside Su Shilin, a large-capacity air purifier was running, sucking up all the "secondhand smoke," ensuring that Chairman Song Longhua wouldn't be affected health-wise.
"Little Su, you finally agreed to help me this time," Song Longhua said, watching Su Shilin smoke three cigarettes in a row before stopping. "Now tell me, what kind of treatment do you want? You don't want money?"
"Nothing much," Su Shilin flicked the cigarette butt, which accurately landed in a distant trash can, the ember extinguishing mid-air, and it was unclear what technique he used. "I don't want money; it's just that my fate seems to dictate I can't have money. Every time I have money, something unfortunate happens."
"You believe in fate?" Song Longhua asked.
"Not really," Su Shilin took a big sip of tea. "But not believing it can also lead to trouble. To be honest, I'm here to help you so that my son can meet your granddaughter. I've discovered something troubling: my arch-enemy's daughter is

about to get close to my son. If this blows up, whether he kills me or I kill him, it's going to be a big problem."

Chapter 130: Family Traditions Differ



those ruffians? Everyone has settled down and is living honestly; isn't that

better?"

"You don't understand our matters," Su Shilin said. "Old brother, you just focus on your health. There's no need to get involved in this killing and fighting, which shortens life. But if something happens to me, I need to make arrangements for the future and give you a big gift. That is, my pair of children. My son Su Jie goes without saying; my daughter is a troublesome matter. She works at the Feng family and can't get out now."

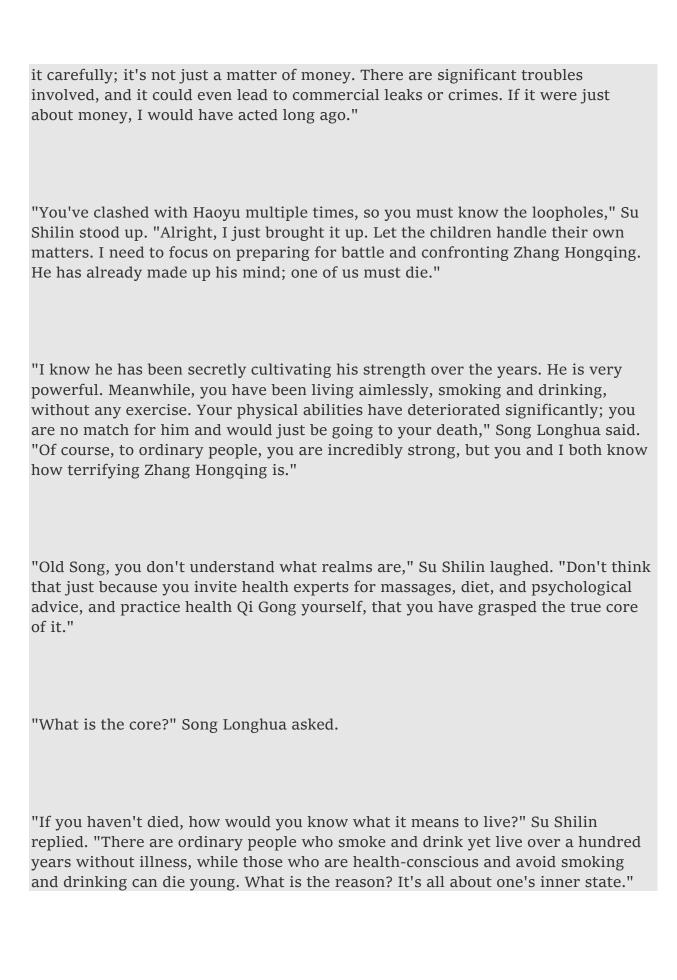
"With your abilities, getting your daughter out shouldn't be too difficult," Song Longhua said. "Actually, that girl Muchen is indeed impressive. It's a pity I didn't notice her earlier; otherwise, I would have brought her into the company to avoid all this trouble." Song Longhua regretted, "Brother Su, this is your fault for not keeping an eye on your children."

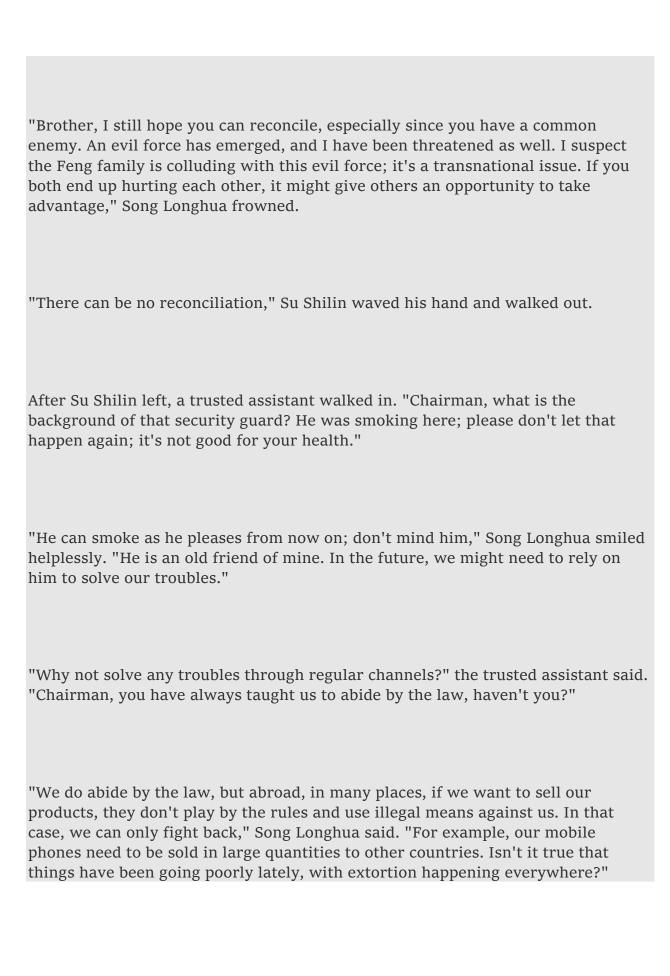
"It was my oversight," Su Shilin said. "But they need to go through some trials. For example, my son, I never taught him anything. He somehow ended up at the Martial Arts Academy to learn martial arts and met some masters. Now he is gradually making a name for himself. If I had taught him, he might not have achieved what he has now."

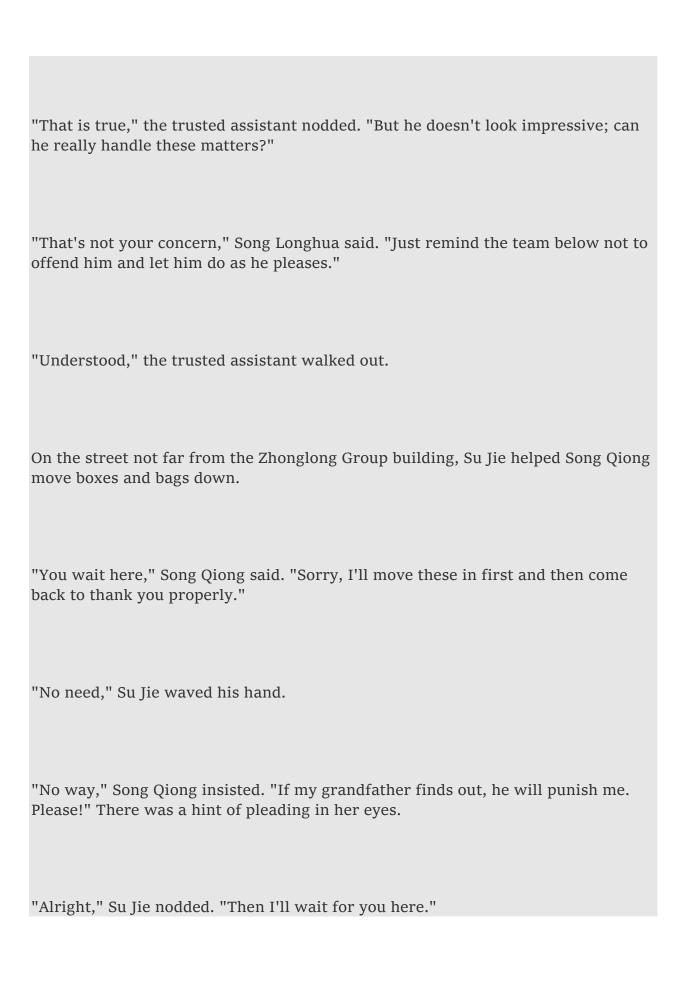
"Whatever you say goes," Song Longhua replied. "If you need money or want me to help your daughter switch from Haoyu, I would be very willing."

"I said I don't want money. Every time you give me money, I end up in trouble," Su Shilin reiterated. "Also, if my daughter switches from Haoyu to Zhonglong, it should be a huge profit for you. Why does it seem like I'm taking advantage of you?"

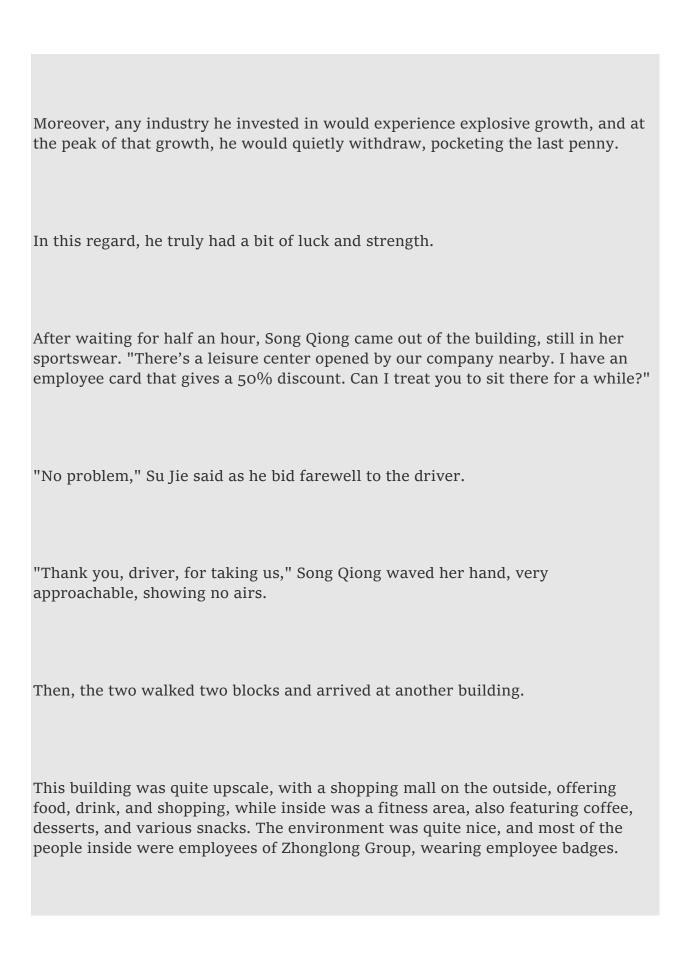
"Alright, alright..." Song Longhua seemed to be at a loss with Su Shilin. "Do you think I don't want to poach the team from the Morning Dawn Studio? It's not just Zhonglong; even other old foxes are eyeing that studio. I've had the team research

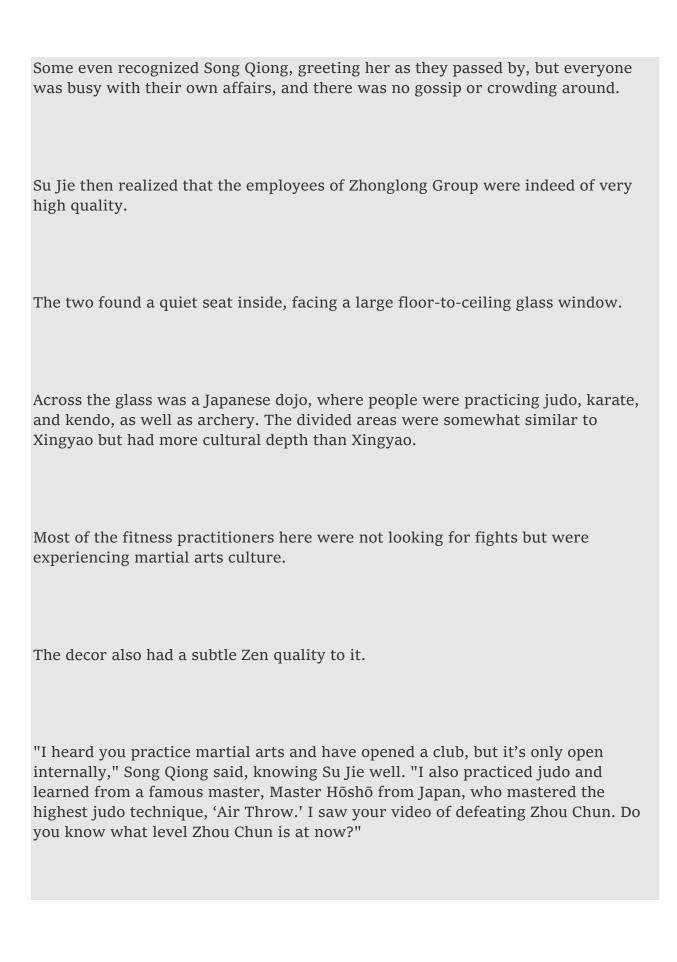






Song Qiong struggled to drag the large bags and boxes into the Zhonglong Group
building.
"This family discipline is really strict," the rental car driver commented. "We also rely on Zhonglong's ride-hailing app for our livelihood. The platform is indeed fair and often gives us subsidies. Such a company doesn't go bad. Unlike before, Haoyu also had a ride-hailing app, and at first, they offered huge subsidies to attract us. But when they started losing money, they began cutting our pay and frequently had problems. In the end, they had to sell it off. I still have a few thousand yuan stuck in there; I might as well feed it to the dogs."
stuck in there, I might as well leed it to the dogs.
"Haoyu has a terrible reputation," Su Jie knew that in business, Haoyu was like a locust, leaving nothing in its wake, devouring everything, but one had to admit Feng Shoucheng's sharp vision.
Especially his three sons, though arrogant and notorious, were extremely profitable and did not squander their family wealth.
Take the second son, Feng Qianzhang, for example; entertainment news was always about him being photographed with some female star at a hotel or vacationing with some female internet celebrity, his private life a complete mess, yet he would spend millions to book out a bar.
But every movie or TV series he invested in would become a hit.





"I haven't kept track these days," Su Jie replied.
"Yesterday, Zhou Chun won the championship at the He Shan Cup National Fighting Championship, defeating the domestic third-ranked Gao Jianhong. His ranking has now entered the top three in the country, and his strength is fierce and domineering; he has completely transformed into a different person," Song Qiong took out her phone and opened a news article. "Look, this is a video of his match."
Su Jie watched the video and noticed that Zhou Chun's combination of punches and kicks, and his fighting style, indeed seemed to have changed. Almost every dodge was exceptionally precise, and during his attacks, he clearly exuded a fierce killing intent. This killing intent was not just a show of bravado but had a tangible bloody quality to it.
<i>'Zhou Chun has killed before. And not just one person,'</i> a fleeting thought crossed Su Jie's mind.
Having returned from a war-torn area and learned about physiognomy, he could, on a certain psychological level, discern whether someone had killed before.
Killing is prohibited in any country; it is a psychological and moral shackle. Once someone breaks through this moral barrier, their mental and spiritual quality will subtly differ on some level.

Ordinary people find it hard to sense this difference, but Su Jie could clearly feel it.
Even when he faced attacks in war-torn areas, he had never killed anyone.
For example, "Gray Wolf" only injured, and "Hungry Wolf" also only injured, without ever harboring thoughts of killing.
In a way, Zhang Jinchuan said that his mercy would lead to great losses in the future.
Su Jie also believed he might suffer losses, but deep down, he still held onto the idea of maintaining a certain moral and civilized bottom line.
Zhang Jinchuan actually acknowledged that martial arts is a killing technique; ring fighting does not count as martial arts; it is merely a performance. Only by truly engaging in combat, having blood on one's hands, can one break through certain psychological defenses and attain true martial arts.
Su Jie understood this principle, but he wanted to try something new.