

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 141: A Toothpick Can Take a Life

“Coach, what did you do before?” Su Jie wanted to ask for specifics. “Your brother is too dangerous; he could take my life at any moment. If your intention is to train me, then I’ll accept this task. But knowing myself and my enemy ensures victory in every battle. You at least have to tell me what his characteristics are. If he uses any poison or hidden weapons, I won’t be able to defend myself.”

In the war-torn land, Su Jie had witnessed an officer under Awasi being assassinated.

The opponent used a poisoned blow dart, invisible and formless; just a slight touch would mean certain death.

Moreover, truly formidable individuals could kill with a mere piece of paper.

When Su Jie was a child, he often cut his fingers on the pristine pages of books. Now, with his strength and skills, he could definitely slice an enemy's throat.

Although Su Jie had never learned these killing techniques, he had to understand them; otherwise, being targeted would be terrifying.

“Of course, I will teach you to guard against some killing techniques,” Gu Yang said. “This is also part of Martial Arts; just watch.”

Upon hearing this, Su Jie suddenly felt a wave of danger approaching, sending chills down his spine.

Instinctively, he shrank back, like a little monkey, moving to the other side.

Trrrrnnn!

A toothpick was embedded in the wooden door behind him.

The toothpick had pierced deeply, going three inches into the wood.

It turned out that while they were talking, Gu Yang had somehow launched the hidden weapon toothpick. If Su Jie hadn't honed his Martial Arts skills, that toothpick would have likely pierced his skin and blood vessels.

“Coach, I clearly didn't see you move just now. How did that toothpick come out?” Su Jie asked, his mind flashing back to the scene. “I guess you hid it in your palm and suddenly flicked it out.”

“Your observation skills are quite strong,” Gu Yang stepped forward and pulled the toothpick from the door. “In fact, a true assassin can kill with anything around them; a toothpick is a lethal weapon.”

“A wooden toothpick has such power? What if it were a metal needle?” Su Jie exclaimed. He picked up the toothpick, weighing it in his hand; it was just an ordinary toothpick, nothing special.

Bang!

He held it in his hand and mimicked Gu Yang, suddenly flicking it out.

Swoosh!

The toothpick hit the wooden door and bounced off, not piercing it.

“Your technique is right, but you didn’t control the angle well,” Gu Yang took the toothpick back and flicked it again, not even showing any movement in his hand. It was much faster than some magic tricks; only a high-speed camera slowed down could capture it.

Pfft!

The toothpick again pierced into the wooden door.

“This is actually an angle issue. Your strength is already sufficient; it’s just that your technique and angle need refinement,” Gu Yang said. “It’s like in acrobatics, where a needle must be perfectly vertical to the glass to release energy at that point for an instant strike. An ordinary person can achieve this with long-term training and intuition, but using a toothpick to kill is different; it requires great personal strength and precision. Because a toothpick is lightweight, it will drift in air resistance.”

“Your hand speed is really fast,” Su Jie watched it twice before he had an impression in his mind.

“This is a technique of force application; you can think of it as a lethal magic trick,” Gu Yang said. “Of course, hidden weapons also require the unity of spirit, energy, and essence. At the moment of flicking, all your focus must be on the hidden weapon itself, exploding suddenly, like gunpowder boiling inside, propelling your own launch. This is the principle of Martial Arts; you should understand.”

Su Jie nodded.

“Look,” Gu Yang held the toothpick, flipped his palm, hiding it behind, then flipped again, revealing it in his palm. Then, with his middle finger, index finger, ring finger, and thumb, he pinched it, building up force with incredible speed, then buzzed it out, the toothpick again sticking into the wooden door.

“The reason you chose a toothpick is that it’s not metal, making it easy to hide. For example, bringing a few toothpicks on a plane is no problem, but if you brought a few metal needles, they would definitely be checked,” Su Jie said. “If it were a metal needle, how much more powerful would it be?”

“Killing would be no problem,” Gu Yang said. “Do you want to learn this hidden weapon technique?”

While speaking, he poured out a dozen toothpicks from a nearby table, hiding them in his hand, and moved again.

Whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh...

In just a few seconds, all the toothpicks were embedded in the wooden door, each one driven in like nails. If one hadn’t seen it with their own eyes, they would never believe such magic.

“Using fists to kill is simply too slow,” Gu Yang said. “Look, even if I faced more than ten people, I could instantly take them all out. In ancient times, there were

forest bandits known for their golden blades and three golden darts that overwhelmed countless heroes from both land and sea; it's not impossible."

Su Jie already knew that hidden weapons were the true kings of combat.

Zhang Jinchuan was good with hidden weapons, but compared to Gu Yang, he was just a small fry.

If even a toothpick could be wielded so skillfully, how much more powerful would flying knives or blades be?

"There's really too little teaching on hidden weapons; even searching online yields nothing," Su Jie said. "I could learn this; if I encounter a dangerous situation, it could come in handy."

Thinking about the war-torn land, unarmed, or facing thugs, a master of hidden weapons wouldn't fear being surrounded.

Of course, hidden weapons were just tools; to enhance one's own qualities, one still had to rely on physical training and mental fortitude. Su Jie wouldn't lose sight of the fundamentals.

“I can teach you,” Gu Yang said. “It’s hard for ordinary people to learn, but with your comprehension and physical quality, as long as you master the techniques and practice a bit, you can wield great power. In fact, there are countless hidden weapon techniques; how to hide hidden weapons, make hidden weapons, utilize hidden weapons, find angles, and master mechanics all require continuous exploration and thought.”

Su Jie picked up a toothpick, learning Gu Yang’s technique, repeatedly flicking it out, trying to pierce the wooden door. At first, he didn’t succeed at all, but during practice, he gradually found the feeling.

“You should first practice with iron nails, then with sewing needles, and finally with toothpicks,” Gu Yang said. “Even if you’re talented and your Martial Arts are well-developed, mastering this technique won’t happen in just a few days.”

Gu Yang took iron nails out of a drawer.

The iron nails felt heavy in Su Jie’s hand, much easier to use than the toothpick.

He flicked his finger, and the iron nail flew out, pfft!

It deeply embedded itself in the door.

“Iron nails are definitely better,” Su Jie thought he could really kill someone instantly with an iron nail.

“Your speed is too slow, and the movements are too obvious, making it easy for others to dodge,” Gu Yang said. “The most important thing about launching hidden weapons is that your body must not move; you must strike suddenly, and in an instant, the hidden weapon has already penetrated the opponent’s body.”

“What’s the name of this technique?” Su Jie asked while connecting the dots. “I see many hidden weapon techniques have various names, like ‘Peacock Spreading Its Tail’ or ‘Rain of Flowers’ or ‘Pear Blossom in a Storm.’”

“Heart-Piercing Needle,” Gu Yang said. “Actually, the name doesn’t matter. What’s important is the technique—accuracy and force.”

“I found that the hoe head technique can also throw hidden weapons,” Su Jie suddenly slipped, his arm shooting up, and at that moment, the iron nail flew out.

It actually pierced through the wooden door, not knowing where it went.

“This technique is originally about building up force and the process of explosion. It’s best for throwing daggers; its power is much greater than flicking techniques, but the downside is that it’s easy to be discovered, allowing the enemy to dodge with a trace,” Gu Yang said. “Of course, using this technique to launch hidden

weapons is far more powerful than using bare hands, and in close combat, it's even scarier than a gun."

"By the way, Coach, you need to tell me about your companion," Su Jie said. "His code name is 'Punishment,' right? What's his real name?"

"We belong to a multinational organization; you can think of us as elite agents, but we're not from the Typhon Training Camp," Gu Yang said. "My code name is 'Judgment,' his is 'Punishment,' and there are others like 'Crush,' 'Subvert,' 'Profane,' 'Tear,' and 'Destroy.' Our group has a total of seven members, with these code names. I'm their captain, but it's not that meaningful; I'm not doing it anymore. They're looking for me everywhere, wanting me to return to the team, that's all."

"Could it be the Honey Badger Training Camp?" Su Jie asked.

"You actually know about the Honey Badger?" Gu Yang was surprised. "But we're not from there; our influence is similar to the Honey Badger, second only to Typhon. We were originally on par with Typhon, but they somehow created virtual currency, harvesting the international financial market, and now they have a lot of money, surpassing us. But you don't need to know more about this; just help me straighten out my brother's thoughts."

As they chatted, Su Jie practiced and pondered the hidden weapon techniques while Gu Yang taught him how to dodge hidden weapons and even bullets.

Observing the trajectory and the opponent's subtle movements, he had to make judgments in an instant about the angle from which they were launched.

"Anyway, you'll be here for the next two months; I'll find time to train you well," Gu Yang said. "If you can dodge my hidden weapons, then no one will be able to hit you in the arena, including Feng Hengyi."

"That would be great," Su Jie said, overjoyed.

"Tonight, go find my old buddy; he's staying at a hotel in town," Gu Yang said.

"He's not hiding and is actually staying at a hotel? That's bold," Su Jie said, surprised.

"That's nothing; he doesn't have a criminal record and has many identities. Generally, only our people know he is Punishment," Gu Yang said. "His real name is Kong Dian; he's ruthless. If you can make him lose his temper and dodge his various killing moves, then you'll have truly trained well."

"Coach, you really found me a good opponent," Su Jie thought he was just lacking a formidable opponent for technical honing.

Once his technique was perfected, his mental fortitude would surely improve again.

Chapter 142: The Intent of Jeet Kune Do

After dinner, Su Jie and Gu Yang took a short break before leaving the Minglun Martial Arts Academy to head into town.

The town was becoming increasingly lively and prosperous, filled with foreign tourists everywhere.

Some areas were built in an ancient style, with storefronts mimicking the charm of the past, and the tourism industry was booming. D City had the best Martial Arts atmosphere and resources, along with a thousand-year-old ancient temple, the roots of martial arts.

Countless foreigners who loved Martial Arts came here every year to "pilgrimage."

Haoyu was investing here, intending to create a Martial Arts town, buying land and starting large-scale construction.

Everywhere, one could see Haoyu's billboards.

As Su Jie arrived in town, the food he had eaten was long digested, making it suitable for action.

He was here to find "Punishment."

In a high-end hotel in town, luxurious and grand, "Punishment" was residing there, holding a foreign passport and considered an international friend.

Su Jie learned from Gu Yang about his room and went straight up to knock on the door.

The door opened automatically. Inside the room, a person was sitting on the sofa.

It was none other than "Punishment," whose real name was Kong Dian, the one who had fought with Su Jie during the day.

Seeing Su Jie arrive, he showed no signs of panic, squinting his eyes: "Did Gu Yang send you as a negotiator? Let me be clear, he cannot escape the organization. Just come back with me obediently, or next time there will be more than just me looking for him. The only thing that surprises me is that he could teach a disciple like you. Your strength is decent, but don't think that just because you exchanged a few moves with me in the Martial Arts Academy, you're invincible. I'm just afraid you and Gu Yang might team up to attack."

In truth, "Punishment" Kong Dian was greatly shocked by Su Jie's strength.

"Let's have another match," Su Jie said. "If you win, I'll leave immediately. If you lose, you'll join Gu Yang and turn over a new leaf. How about that? It's Gu Yang's wish; he doesn't want you brothers to keep fighting and killing."

"Nonsense." "Punishment" Kong Dian spat: "What am I even saying to a kid like you? You think you can just walk away after losing? In our world, there's no win or lose, only life and death."

"Fine," Su Jie replied. "Let's go find a quiet place outside."

"If you want to die, then I can't help it." "Punishment" Kong Dian knew that this hotel was not a place for fighting.

If it were abroad, he would act without restraint, but domestically, he still had some reservations.

Su Jie walked straight out to the outskirts of the town, into the wilderness.

It was summer, and the weather was hot; the fields were filled with the sounds of chirping insects and croaking frogs, with many mosquitoes buzzing around.

The wilderness wasn't completely dark; the light from the town allowed one to vaguely see faces.

Su Jie stopped on a ridge, watching "Punishment" Kong Dian approach from a distance.

Kong Dian had a dagger in his hand, sizing up Su Jie from five steps away: "Gu Yang sent you to find me, wanting to use my hands to train you. It's a good idea, but doesn't he fear that the seed he painstakingly nurtured might just be destroyed? Or does he believe I can't kill you?"

"No killing, please." Su Jie also drew a dagger, knowing that going unarmed against Kong Dian would be futile: "There are many things in this world worth fighting for. For example, this dagger in my hand will never kill you. In my heart, if this dagger can lead you to turn over a new leaf, it's equivalent to saving many people."

Dagger against dagger, there was a significant opportunity.

However, he didn't intend to harm Kong Dian; he wanted him to realize that Gu Yang's disciples could surpass him, prompting a change in his mindset.

"The former Judgment, Gu Yang, I don't know how many people he has assassinated. Yet, his disciple is so naive?" Kong Dian let out a sharp laugh, his tone dripping with sarcasm: "Don't blame me if you die later."

Whoosh!

He lunged forward.

The dagger sliced toward Su Jie's ribs at an awkward angle.

With his strength, if it struck, Su Jie's kidneys and intestines would likely spill out.

Kong Dian's strikes were ruthless and practiced; Su Jie felt that he attacked without any psychological barriers, like a butcher who had worked in a slaughterhouse for a lifetime, as if it were part of his job.

Any normal person would hesitate when picking up a knife to attack; even the most vicious criminals would only muster the courage to strike, losing their rationality in the process.

But Kong Dian's attacks were fluid and natural, even possessing an artist's mindset, terrifyingly calm.

He was a true world-class killer.

Su Jie felt a strong sense of impending death, the mindset of someone who had survived in a war-torn land, where one could fall at any moment under a hail of bullets, returned to him.

This mindset made him more focused than ever.

He didn't condense his killing intent but instead concentrated all his attention on Kong Dian's dagger. In his eyes, there was no longer "Punishment" Kong Dian; there was only the dagger.

Clang!

His dagger struck out precisely, intercepting "Punishment" Kong Dian's dagger.

The two daggers clashed, creating a shower of sparks.

"Punishment" Kong Dian twisted his dagger, aiming for Su Jie's eyes.

Su Jie barely glanced, raising his arm to block the dagger again. But Kong Dian's move was a feint; he withdrew his dagger like a mirage and suddenly launched a thrust, the dagger aimed directly at Su Jie's heart.

This method of using the dagger was akin to the "flying sword" from ancient myths, wielded at will, directed by intent rather than controlled by the arm.

It was this incredible technique with the dagger that made Su Jie deeply feel the terror of these super killers. If a fighting champion clashed with them on the street, they would be killed in one move without any suspense, and there would be no chance for any empty-handed disarm.

If Su Jie hadn't had a dagger in his hand, he would have likely fled in panic by now.

"Punishment" Kong Dian's strength surpassed even that of Dalu, and it was unclear how he had been trained.

In a moment of peril, Su Jie suddenly rolled and jumped out, dodging the lethal strike. After all, he had trained with the God Maker Odell in dagger techniques and had now mastered his own Martial Arts, but he still couldn't withstand Kong Dian's dagger.

If it were an ordinary person wielding a dagger, Su Jie could use various techniques, even directly pinning them down with muscle.

But Kong Dian's dagger was too cunning and fierce; to resist it with flesh and blood was tantamount to seeking death.

He could only use a dagger against a dagger.

Kong Dian's dagger came at him like a shadow.

Su Jie raised his hand to intercept!

He applied all his skills from the "hoe and shovel" technique to the dagger, treating the dagger as a hoe.

However, he never aimed to attack Kong Dian; his main goal was to intercept and deflect the dagger.

The cold light flickered.

The two men moved like rabbits, and in just a few breaths, their daggers had clashed over ten times.

No matter how Kong Dian attacked, Su Jie accurately intercepted his dagger, preventing any lethal strikes from landing, which frustrated Kong Dian. But as a killer, he was extremely patient; this minor annoyance didn't affect his mood at all.

He was looking for Su Jie's angles and flaws.

Under this pressure, Su Jie felt increasingly exhilarated, and suddenly, he understood the meaning of "Jeet Kune Do."

When the enemy approached, relying on the advantage of short distance, quickly intercepting the enemy's attack, and then counterattacking.

Because the enemy attacks you from a distance, when they reach you, using your own hands to intercept their incoming punches theoretically gives you an advantage, but in practice, it is extremely difficult; even practiced fighters cannot intercept accurately.

In many cases, it's just that you fail to intercept, and the opponent's punches come at you, leaving you flustered and then knocked to the ground.

But Su Jie had also gone through many life-and-death battles, with abundant physical strength, a calm mindset, and clear Divine Consciousness.

In this process of repeatedly intercepting daggers, he felt that "Punishment" Kong Dian had become a good coach for him, with each strike rapidly improving his skills.

Even training with Gu Yang couldn't achieve this effect, as Gu Yang wouldn't harbor any killing intent towards him, leading to distorted training.

But "Punishment" Kong Dian was deadly serious; every strike was a lethal attack, forcing Su Jie to concentrate all his spirit and think of every possible way to cope.

Kill!

"Punishment" Kong Dian moved left and right, finally seizing a flaw in Su Jie, stabbing the dagger toward his throat.

Su Jie felt a chill in his throat, but at that moment, his mind calmly broke through a certain critical point. As he shrank his neck down, the dagger seemed to magically appear at his throat.

The dagger seemed to have suddenly appeared, as if it had "transformed" from somewhere else.

He accurately intercepted Kong Dian's dagger.

Clang!

The two forces collided, and both daggers broke into two pieces.

But just as the daggers shattered, several cold flashes shot out from Kong Dian, aiming for Su Jie's eyes, carotid artery, arms, and even the tendons in his feet.

Hidden weapons!

Su Jie found himself once again in a life-and-death situation, but this time, his footwork was like magic. Just as the hidden weapons were about to reach him, he suddenly stepped, appearing on the other side.

This was a true breakthrough of the brain and eyes' "instant movement."

After mastering Odell's "Magic Step," even in the eyes of experts, it was like "instant teleportation."

Six blades appeared on the ground.

These blades looked extremely sharp, and at high speed, cutting through human blood vessels was no problem at all.

But Su Jie still managed to dodge.

"Kong Dian, this ends here for today. You can't do anything to me, and I haven't gained anything either. I'll come find you again tomorrow." Su Jie smiled, exerting himself to run, already sprinting dozens of meters away. His speed in the hundred-meter dash was astonishing; if he were to compete, he could probably reach ten seconds in the hundred meters.

Seeing Su Jie run away, Kong Dian knew it would be hard to catch up, narrowing his eyes into a slit.

Chapter 143: Retreating in Disgrace

At night, Su Jie was sleeping in Odell's small courtyard room.

He had just fought against "Punishment" Kong Dian, facing numerous dangers, yet deep within, he felt as relaxed as if he were solving a simple problem. He was no longer afraid of life and death, not even a trace of worry crossed his mind.

Offending a killer like this, one would expect even ordinary people, let alone the powerful and influential, to lose sleep over it. But Su Jie continued to eat and sleep as usual, showing no signs of discomfort.

His mental resilience had improved significantly compared to his experiences in war-torn areas, gradually approaching a state of perfection.

As he switched between the "Great Corpse State" and "Infant Curling" while sleeping, a shadow appeared outside the courtyard.

This shadow moved lightly, resembling a raccoon, and reached the base of the courtyard wall, effortlessly flipping over without any visible effort. If someone had recorded it, they would have exclaimed that it was indeed lightness skill in action.

The shadow entered the courtyard, listened for a moment, and pinpointed which room Su Jie was sleeping in.

It stealthily approached the door, pulled out a piece of iron wire, and with a slight twist, the lock clicked open.

The door was pushed open without a sound.

In the darkness, it could clearly see that Su Jie was sleeping on the bed.

The shadow moved its hand.

A few cold flashes shot out, revealing hidden blades aimed at killing Su Jie.

But in an instant, Su Jie moved with the speed of "Teleportation," rolling out from under the bed and lunging at the shadow.

"So it really is a killer, coming to kill me," Su Jie realized it was "Punishment" Kong Dian. This guy truly lived up to his reputation as a high-level killer, a

brother of Gu Yang. His assassination skills were nearly impossible to defend against; if Su Jie hadn't been sharp-eyed and quick-witted, sensing the murderous intent approaching in an instant, he might have been successfully assassinated.

Clang!

A flash of cold light appeared in Kong Dian's hand, and a dagger reappeared, clashing against Su Jie.

The two daggers had already broken during their earlier confrontation, but as a killer, one could never have just one. Su Jie was also prepared, hiding a defensive weapon on him.

The two engaged in a dagger duel in the pitch-black room once again.

Su Jie became even more cautious, knowing that the opponent's dagger could cut through his veins at any moment. In their exchanges, he couldn't afford to show any weakness or distraction.

Swish, swish, swish!

The two wielded their daggers, each unleashing their full martial arts and techniques, pouring their Qi into the blades.

Su Jie utilized his skills from playing with the Crystal Ball, making the dagger in his hand transform like magic. With each battle, his technique improved a notch.

This was the benefit of real combat, unlike the "feeding moves" style of training.

Competing against a real killer was far more thrilling than the training Odell had put him through.

After all, being hunted down and undergoing simulated training were vastly different experiences.

'Fortunately, I played with the Crystal Ball for so long, integrating that agility into my dagger, allowing me to withstand Kong Dian's assassination attempts,' Su Jie thought at that moment, feeling as if the dagger in his hand had transformed into a Crystal Ball, translucent and seemingly glowing, illuminating the surroundings, making every movement of Kong Dian fall into his "sight."

To be precise, it wasn't falling into his "sight" but into his "heart."

Even with his eyes closed, Su Jie could sense Kong Dian's movements, predicting where he would attack. It was a remarkably magical sensation.

It was like someone who had been blind for a long time, eventually being able to simulate what the world looked like deep within their soul. Through continuous exploration, the world they simulated in their heart became increasingly close to the real world.

Uncle Mang was like this.

To put it in more mystical terms, it was about "seeing the world with the heart," becoming clearer and more aware.

In scientific terms, it was the mental simulation highly overlapping with reality during the exploration process.

Su Jie's mind became sharper; even without his senses, he felt he could simulate what the real world was like.

In a daze, he began to understand the realm of the "Living Dead."

Pfft!

The daggers clashed again.

Su Jie accurately blocked "Punishment" Kong Dian's dagger, then, without a sound, spun around, using his footwork and body technique to slice through Kong Dian's clothing.

Although he didn't injure the opponent's flesh, Kong Dian was still startled.

He retreated sharply, dashed out the door, and disappeared over the wall, arriving quickly and leaving just as fast.

Seeing him leave, Su Jie didn't pursue; he closed the door and continued to sleep, as if he had just chased away a mouse, feeling relaxed and carefree.

The next day.

Su Jie found Kong Dian in another remote farmhouse.

Kong Dian was no longer staying at the high-end hotel, seemingly afraid that Su Jie would find him again. After two encounters, he had begun to fear Su Jie.

The two exchanged no words and engaged in battle once more.

The perilous fight began again.

After dozens of rounds, rolling and tumbling, Kong Dian suddenly let out a muffled groan, launching numerous hidden blades that nearly injured Su Jie.

Su Jie didn't continue to waste time and immediately left, with Kong Dian unable to catch up.

Half a month passed, and it seemed like Su Jie and Kong Dian were mortal enemies, either seeking each other out or being sought out. Especially Kong Dian, who seemed to have ignited a real fire, looking for opportunities to assassinate Su Jie several times, but each time, Su Jie managed to evade, and he sensed that Su Jie was becoming increasingly adept at dodging his assassination attempts.

He simply couldn't do anything about this "sticky candy."

Fortunately, Su Jie had no intention of killing him.

That night, Su Jie was sleeping as usual.

Kong Dian arrived outside the door, not climbing over the wall but directly kicking the door open, stepping into the courtyard: "Kid, today we will truly have a contest. If you can kill me, then I will leave here and not trouble Gu Yang."

"Alright!"

Su Jie stepped out from the room, staring at "Punishment" Kong Dian, not daring to relax even a little.

He sensed that today's "Punishment" Kong Dian was different from usual; the murderous intent had reached its peak, with only a slight change remaining. The man was unnervingly calm, like a vengeful spirit finally making a decision to take the life of his enemy.

Kong Dian's murderous intent had reached its limit.

He was fed up with Su Jie.

If he didn't eliminate Su Jie, he wouldn't be able to complete his mission.

A disciple taught by Gu Yang was playing him for a fool; how could he deal with Gu Yang?

Kong Dian looked at Su Jie, his dagger sliding into his grip.

Without even looking, he sprinted towards Su Jie.

During his run, cold flashes shot out, and the hidden blades were already in front of Su Jie.

This was a true killing technique, with speed and power significantly enhanced compared to before.

"Wait, his speed and power have both increased. Over these days of fighting him, I've sensed he hasn't been hiding his strength; he couldn't have improved

so much all at once. That's it, he must have taken stimulants," Su Jie thought in an instant, a flash of insight hitting him.

As the blades approached, he quickly dodged behind the fish tank in the courtyard.

The blades struck the fish tank.

Sizzle... the entire large ceramic fish tank was embedded with blades, cracking extensively, water gushing out from the cracks, causing further damage, and then it shattered with a loud crash.

The goldfish inside flopped onto the courtyard floor, struggling and wriggling.

At that moment, Kong Dian's dagger reached Su Jie again.

Pointing, prodding, stabbing, poking, slashing, and scraping, all techniques flowed seamlessly, blocking all of Su Jie's escape routes.

Su Jie's body surged, the dagger carrying a cold light, like a firefly, flashing and disappearing.

He accurately intercepted all of Kong Dian's dagger attack routes.

Through these days of combat and training, he had indeed improved a lot. The pressure from Kong Dian's assassination attempts had led to a genuine transformation. Before this, even if he had mastered his Martial Arts to the point where his body resembled the "Golden Body" described by Uncle Mang, he still had no confidence against Feng Hengyi.

But after half a month of "training" with Kong Dian, Su Jie felt that now, even facing Feng Hengyi, he had some confidence, though not in defeating him, but in having a chance to protect himself.

"Kill!" Kong Dian let out a long howl, his dagger shooting forth like a comet striking the moon, reminiscent of the legendary assassin Jing Ke attacking the Qin emperor, his momentum unyielding, forcing Su Jie to retreat fiercely.

As a killer, one should ideally kill silently, without making any noise; otherwise, if outsiders were alerted, even if the assassination succeeded, escaping would be difficult. But now he actually began to howl, indicating that even if he died here, he would take Su Jie with him.

Like Jing Ke, knowing that regardless of success or failure, death was inevitable.

Su Jie felt the intensity of it all.

Yet his heart was calm.

Like a frozen lake, without any ripples.

As the dagger approached.

He crouched, spiraled, and raised his hand.

Once again, he executed the "Hoe Technique."

The dagger spun like a lightning bolt, shooting through the air, silver snakes dancing, a thunderous crash.

Clang!

He knocked Kong Dian's dagger away, then swung down, pointing it at Kong Dian's eyes; with a gentle push, it could pierce deep into his eyeball.

But Su Jie did not stab down.

"Very good, very good!" Kong Dian's body retreated rapidly, leaving through the main door without saying a word.

He knew he couldn't kill Su Jie.

After Kong Dian left, Su Jie picked up the goldfish from the ground, filled a basin with water, and placed them back into the pond outside, allowing them to return to freedom, while he began to clean up the shattered fish tank.

At that moment, Gu Yang walked in, nodding with an appreciative look: "Kong Dian's assassination skills are exceptionally high, and his abilities are among the best of many killers, yet he couldn't kill you and was even counter-killed. He knows that if this continues, he won't be your match, and he finally left. However, I must admit that I've caused you a lot of trouble; in the future, there may be more people like Kong Dian or even stronger ones coming after you. You must be vigilant at all times."

"Coach, how strong are you really?" Su Jie asked curiously. "How do you compare to Zhang Hongqing and Odell?"

He understood that Coach Gu Yang must know about these two figures.

Chapter 144: Returning to the Fields

"Zhang Hongqing, Odell." Coach Gu Yang murmured these two names, "Zhang Hongqing is Zhang Manman's father, right? If I'm not mistaken, around this time last year, you should have been learning from Odell. Only he,

the 'God Maker,' could elevate you to such a level in such a short time. Both of these individuals are above my realm. In fact, in terms of mental state, you and I are about the same; it's just that my technical experience is richer than yours."

"Coach Gu Yang, you haven't broken through to the Living Dead realm yet?" Su Jie asked.

"Not so easily. This realm is akin to the road to heaven. Once you break through, both your physical and mental qualities will undergo a qualitative leap, equivalent to understanding the Dao." Gu Yang waved his hand dismissively, "You're still young, and your Martial Arts are already at a high level, with physical qualities surpassing mine. It's just that the killing techniques I possess make it hard for you to defend against them."

"So how does the coach compare to Uncle Mang?" Su Jie pondered the realms of Uncle Mang, Master Ma, Coach Gu Yang, and Master Luo. They all seemed similar, yet their strengths varied.

Having the same realm didn't mean their strengths were close.

“Uncle Mang is into research, while I’m into killing. Each has its specialization; it’s hard to compare the two.” Gu Yang explained, “I contribute nothing to human society, while Uncle Mang has made significant contributions.”

Hearing the phrase “each has its specialization,” Su Jie wanted to laugh, but for Gu Yang, killing had once been his profession.

“Starting today, we will train comprehensively,” Gu Yang declared. “I will impart what I’ve understood to you while also enhancing your technical skills. I can’t teach you about physical and psychological qualities; I can only guide you on various techniques. From tomorrow, you will accompany me to the countryside to do farm work.”

“Farm work?” Su Jie was puzzled.

“Yes, the technique of wielding a hoe is something you can only truly grasp in the fields. You’ve already mastered it to perfection. It’s time to return to simplicity and gain its true essence through labor, which is also an excellent training for your character,” Gu Yang said.

“I understand.” Although Su Jie had helped Gu Yang resolve the issue of ‘punishing’ Kong Dian, he still felt deep gratitude towards Gu Yang. If it weren’t for the many days of sparring with Kong Dian, his skills wouldn’t have reached this level.

The next day, Su Jie and Gu Yang arrived in the countryside.

Some houses in the countryside were very dilapidated and uninhabited. However, there were also beautiful small villas, where every household had moved in, living in close proximity.

Su Jie knew this was part of the country's new rural construction.

However, much of the farmland had been abandoned, lacking labor to cultivate it. The young people living in the countryside had all gone to the cities, leaving only the elderly and children who couldn't handle the heavy farm work.

"Today, we will help the elderly in the village with their work, clearing the abandoned land, removing weeds, watering, and planting. I will teach you the specific methods of farming," Gu Yang said, carrying a hoe and some farming tools, greeting the elderly in the village.

The elderly in the village were very grateful to see him come, knowing he was there to help them.

Some elderly people even offered tea and eggs.

"Old Master Hu, I've brought a young man today; he's quite capable of working," Gu Yang said to a respected elder in the village.

This elder, named Old Master Hu, had white hair and beard, but his teeth were still intact. Gu Yang claimed he was a hundred years old, but Su Jie found it hard to believe; he looked more like he was in his eighties.

"Youth? You can't work right now." Old Hu scrutinized Su Jie. "Don't be fooled by how well they eat and how strong they look; deep down, they're weak. They can't carry loads or dig. Back in my day, I could carry over a hundred pounds for miles without breaking a sweat, and I even went up the mountain to burn incense at the temple... Young man, be careful, don't strain your back."

"Gu Yang, don't let anything happen to this young man; the kids in the city are precious," another old man warned while puffing on his pipe.

Several old men gathered around, chattering away, but it was clear they meant well. They were simply advising Su Jie not to overexert himself. In their eyes, the children from the city were all well-nourished and tall, but they couldn't handle hard work.

Su Jie just smiled, finding their concern quite endearing.

"We need to turn over this piece of land, clear the weeds, and unblock that drainage ditch. Many of the irrigation channels in the village have fallen into disrepair. Later, we'll draw water from the well and help everyone water their vegetable patches," Gu Yang said.

Without a word, Su Jie picked up a hoe and got to work. The hoe flew through the air, and with each strike, large chunks of earth were turned over. Even the hardest soil felt as soft as tofu under his hoe. There were plenty of weeds on the ground, and he bent down effortlessly to pull them up, tossing them aside in a pile.

"We can bury these weeds in the soil, and after adding some dry branches and leaves to ignite, the ash can fertilize the fields," Gu Yang explained.

The old men were left dumbfounded. They had spent their entire lives as farmers, and they could tell at a glance whether someone was good at work. Su Jie was nothing short of a master at farming—his speed was astonishing, the soil was turned evenly, and the weeds were cleared thoroughly. He was far more capable than the old farmers they had known in the countryside.

Watching as large patches of hard ground were cultivated and the soil became loose, Old Hu shook his head. "This young man has incredible strength, stronger than an ox. I reckon ten strong laborers wouldn't match him alone; he isn't some reincarnation of Zhu Bajie, is he?"

"Indeed, the reason Zhu Bajie was welcomed into Gao Laozhuang in 'Journey to the West' was because he could work. One man with a rake could turn over thousands of acres," one old man seemed to be narrating a story.

"What are you talking about?" Su Jie felt both amused and exasperated. These old men compared him to Zhu Bajie just because he worked well. However, he understood that in the countryside, especially in the past, a strong laborer represented a family's livelihood. A household without labor power faced dire straits.

After two or three hours, they had turned over large areas of land and cleared the weeds. Then, he and Gu Yang worked on the drainage ditches, clearing away some weeds and shrubs.

"This is how you break branches with a hoe," Gu Yang snapped a branch and demonstrated how to work quickly without injuring oneself, showcasing the technique of using the hoe.

The two of them went to the well to draw water. The well had an old-fashioned pulley system, which they operated with a rope and handle. Gu Yang turned the "pulley," creaking as he pulled up a bucket of water.

"This is the intention behind the hoe's technique of using the pulley; you also need to know how to operate it," Gu Yang explained to Su Jie.

Su Jie nodded, grasping the concept, and began drawing bucket after bucket of water to water the vegetable patches. The village had running water, but it was meant for drinking; using it to water the fields was too extravagant. Typically, the water for irrigation came from wells or ponds.

Thus, Su Jie and Gu Yang took on all the farming tasks in the village—digging, turning soil, pulling weeds, clearing ditches, drawing water, and watering the fields. Their speed left the village elders in awe.

At this moment, some of the elders no longer underestimated Su Jie; instead, they regarded him as a "hero." In the eyes of the village elders, knowing martial arts meant little; being able to work hard was what truly mattered. Working quickly and efficiently was crucial for a family's livelihood.

Life in the countryside was bustling with activity; there were chores to manage in front of and behind the house, fields to tend to, and the timing for planting and harvesting had to be meticulously observed. It was not a simple task at all. After a few days of hard work, Su Jie deeply understood that rural life was far busier than life in the city. Many city dwellers, with their romanticized notions of "pastoral living," would soon realize just how tough and exhausting it truly was once they arrived in the countryside.

However, he integrated the martial arts skills he had learned with the hoe and shovel into his farming tasks, completely forgetting about fighting and any thoughts of combat. Surprisingly, he found a precious sense of peace and fulfillment deep within himself. It was at this moment that he grasped the true essence of the "hoe and shovel." Over the course of the month, he had effectively become a farmer, taking on all sorts of dirty and laborious jobs, even clearing out septic tanks without a second thought. At times, he would sit

in the fields with a large bowl of noodles, looking every bit the part of a seasoned farmer.

A month passed quickly, and there was hardly any work left to do in the village. One day, Gu Yang asked, "Have you gained any insights?"

"Not really," Su Jie replied, brushing off the dirt from his clothes. "I just find that I'm getting better at farming. I've completely forgotten about fighting, and even how to brawl."

"That's good. Forgetting will lead to deeper understanding," Gu Yang chuckled. "If fighting requires too much thought, your speed will slow down significantly. Come on, for the next month, I will teach you various techniques for hidden weapons and how to defend against lethal skills. Lethal techniques are hard to guard against; even the strongest cannot escape their fate when faced with them."

Su Jie and Gu Yang returned to the Minglun Martial Arts Academy. It was now August. Gu Yang, once a top assassin, not only taught Su Jie the true techniques of hidden weapons but also how to make blow darts. A simple pen tube combined with a sewing needle became a deadly weapon. In addition, various everyday items like scissors, belts, chopsticks, paper, clothes, stones,

combs, glass shards, and even mobile phones could be used to kill without anyone noticing.

Of course, Su Jie viewed these techniques primarily as a means of understanding how to defend himself against potential attackers. His main focus remained on improving his physical abilities and mental resilience. Gu Yang's ultimate technique was not just any killing method but the heart-piercing needle. Using a toothpick to kill was Gu Yang's true specialty. Su Jie quickly learned this skill.

Now, he could confidently shout on the streets, "I can take on ten, even twenty at once!" As long as he had a toothpick in hand—preferably a nail or a sewing needle—he could strike swiftly and efficiently, taking down opponents one after another.

During this time, he also participated in a small-scale Arena Competition at the academy. It goes without saying that he was unstoppable; no one could defeat him, and he easily earned over two hundred thousand. His personal account now boasted around two million. The first million came from a bet with Zhou Chun, and the rest was accumulated through teaching. The additional million was sent by Zhang Manman, a reward for dealing with the "Hungry Wolf."

"Being a bounty hunter is surprisingly lucrative. If we split the three of us, does that mean the bounty for the Hungry Wolf was three million? That's quite expensive!" Su Jie realized that being a bounty hunter truly had a promising future.

Chapter 145: The Talent Drain is a Serious Concern

During this holiday, Su Jie had a more fulfilling experience than the last time. On June 13th, he retreated into the mountains, practicing the "Thirteen Protectors' Golden Bell Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong" and the "Magic Step." He roamed the forests alone, carefree and at ease, finally mastering the horizontal training and achieving a profound understanding of the Magic Step.

By July, he encountered the top assassin "Punishment" Kong Dian, engaging in a back-and-forth battle that lasted over half a month, pushing Su Jie to make even greater progress. Such opponents were rare and hard to come by. No one would provoke a top assassin to have them come and assassinate themselves for the sake of training. A single misstep could lead to one's demise.

After "Punishment" Kong Dian left, Su Jie followed Gu Yang to work in the countryside, completely forgetting about fighting. During this time, the martial arts he practiced were born from the labor of farming—plowing fields, digging soil, weeding, breaking branches, carrying loads, and so on—all of which allowed him to experience the true essence of his skills. He felt that the significance of martial arts applied to productive labor was far greater than that used for combat.

After working, his mind became increasingly calm and meticulous. Moreover, while working in the village, he received unanimous praise from the elderly villagers, and their admiration made him feel quite comfortable. Indeed, many elders discussed afterward how they had never seen such a capable young person working in the fields. With him alone, the village hardly needed any other labor.

Surprisingly, Su Jie had genuinely come to enjoy farming. First, he could help others. Second, he contributed to society through his labor. Third, it strengthened his body and deepened his understanding of martial arts. Fourth, the impurities in his mind dissipated with his sweat. If it weren't for the need to learn other things, Su Jie would have wanted to continue working indefinitely.

Practicing in the deep mountains, engaging in real combat, working in the countryside, learning from Gu Yang, and studying with Uncle Mang—these five major events constituted his summer schedule.

Uncle Mang conducted daily checks on his body, recording various data, especially through different tests to analyze how psychological quality affected physical quality. At the Minglun Martial Arts Academy, they also utilized some artificial intelligence in their computers for research, and Su Jie learned a lot from Uncle Mang.

"According to the latest research experiments, foreign scientists have discovered that using music to soothe mice with cancer cells affects their mood differently depending on the type of music, resulting in variations in the increase or decrease of cancer cells. In other words, music can regulate the mice's mindset, thereby influencing their immune system," Uncle Mang explained one day as he handed Su Jie a copy of some materials. (G: Not sure if it's true so better not to believe it. This is a fantasy story.)

These materials contained various clinical data on psychological and physical qualities: "I think this might help with your horizontal training. Your horizontal training simulates various animals, nature, thunder, and strong winds to create psychological suggestions. It's worth exploring which type of psychological suggestion enhances human immunity the most, or which combinations of suggestions are the most effective."

Uncle Mang approached everything with a scientific attitude. Su Jie had already provided him with videos of the "Thirteen Protectors' Golden Bell Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong" for research. Uncle Mang searched through the vast database for scientific experiments, making comparisons and achieving some results. For example, when a person howls and expresses their emotions freely, what subtle substances are produced by the body's endocrine system, leading to changes in certain areas.

These were all precise scientific data. "My set of hard Qi Gong was reportedly first discovered by Coach Odell, who combined various horizontal training methods. It underwent many clinical trials and was then modified by the artificial intelligence at the Typhon Training Camp using big data," Su Jie asked Uncle Mang.

"It is precisely because of this that this set of martial arts can hardly be mastered by anyone other than a freak like you," Uncle Mang said. "I want to find a practice method suitable for all ages, one that can restore people's health functions, enhance immunity, and increase cancer survival rates." Su Jie thought about it, and indeed, that was the case. The first posture of this hard Qi Gong was to imagine oneself as a dragon, soaring up fiercely, letting out a long roar that reached the clouds. Then, as the winds rose and swirled, the dragon twisted and turned, conquering the universe.

The key to the movements, aside from the long roar originating from deep within the dantian, was that the entire body had to shoot upwards, continuously roaring. For those lacking sufficient Qi, it would be difficult to even manage the long roar. Besides that, the squatting, rising, and upward movements were extremely similar

to the action of a hoe. Achieving this upward and downward motion needed to be as flexible as a dragon stretching; without three to five years of practice, it was nearly impossible.

Even if one could perform the movements, the psychological suggestion posed a significant challenge. How could one imagine oneself as a giant dragon soaring into the sky, controlling the clouds and rain? This was a realm that only a few could comprehend. While there were standards for the movements to learn, there were no standards for psychological suggestion.

Moreover, after embodying the dragon, one had to suddenly imagine oneself landing on a mountain peak, transforming into a fierce tiger, roaring through the forest, with the winds rising and all beasts trembling in fear. To perfectly express this imagery, beyond the standard movements, one's expression had to be vivid, with an inner belief of being the king of beasts. This was the essence of the Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong.

Many other movements followed the same principle. They were complex and varied; psychological suggestion not only had to be convincing but also required constant switching, with physical movements keeping pace and the force of strikes needing to be precise. Even the most gifted individuals practicing this could have a high chance of experiencing nervous breakdowns.

Even if psychological suggestion could deceive oneself, if the suggestion was too deep and one failed to control the force of the strikes, it could harm one's body. In other words, to master the "Thirteen Protectors' Golden Bell Iron Shirt Dragon-Tiger Vajra Qi Gong," one's brain would need to rival certain functions of a supercomputer. Furthermore, one's movements had to be executed with mechanical precision.

Every strike's force and accuracy had to be nearly as precise as that of a surgical operation; otherwise, it could damage delicate blood vessels and nerves. In other words, when Su Jie practiced this horizontal training, each strike was akin to the best surgeon performing surgery on himself. The difficulty was extraordinary.

During the training, Uncle Mang felt that Su Jie was the top of the top, an unbeatable academic champion! "That Kang Gu has a pure heart; because he is deaf and mute, he is somewhat dull, but he learns very quickly. However, he is still far from Su Jie," Uncle Mang thought. "Su Jie has managed to elevate his physical fitness to this level in just one year for a reason. If a person's mindset can achieve this, then enhancing one's quality and potential in a short time is not a myth, but real science."

If he hadn't seen Su Jie's example, even with Uncle Mang's scientific mind, he wouldn't have believed that someone could become a martial arts master in just one year. "Kang Gu has signed with the Feng Lei Fighting Club." At that moment, Nie Shuang walked in again, announcing a shocking piece of news.

"The Feng Lei Fighting Club? That's the club invested and established by that kid Feng Hengyi, right?" Uncle Mang said. "Kang Gu didn't sign with our Minglun Martial Arts Academy but went to sign with this club? I don't see him as that kind of person."

"It's simple. Feng Hengyi found him and promised to cure his deafness, allowing him to hear sounds and speak, turning him into a normal person," Nie Shuang explained.

"His deafness is an incurable disease; no major hospital can do anything about it," Uncle Mang frowned. "No, perhaps the medical methods at the Typhon Training Camp could achieve this."

"That's right. If Feng Hengyi takes him to the Typhon Training Camp and successfully treats his deaf-mute condition, we could really recruit Kang Gu," Uncle Mang sighed. "Our Minglun Martial Arts Academy lacks talent. It's hard to come by a good seedling, and now someone else has snatched him away. Soon, we won't have anyone to hold up the fort. Are we going to become an empty shell of a school?"

"I've been thinking about this too," Nie Shuang said, looking at Su Jie. "Su Jie has also set up his own branch and developed Dian Dao Martial Arts. Zhang Jinchuan has established his own Li Kun Network and isn't focused on this. Now, Liu Long isn't even from our Minglun Martial Arts Academy. If this continues, what right do we have to call ourselves the best in the industry? Moreover, a lot of talent is being poached by Haoyu. If this goes on, we might really be swallowed whole by Haoyu."

Su Jie listened, contemplating Haoyu's schemes. Haoyu's investment in Minglun Martial Arts Academy for collaboration seemed mutually beneficial, but secretly, they were poaching talent, gathering formulas, and collecting data.

In a few years, when all the good coaches in the combat sports circle had signed contracts with Haoyu, and all the promising talents were under Haoyu's banner, every champion in the fighting competitions would be from Haoyu. What would be left of Minglun Martial Arts Academy then?

For a school, the most important thing is the quality of its faculty, followed by talented students. For instance, Minglun Martial Arts Academy has produced numerous national champions, which naturally places it at the top of the industry. If both of these aspects are lost, it will quickly become second or third-rate and eventually disappear.

Su Jie also realized that Kang Gu was the best seedling, and both Uncle Mang and Nie Shuang were nurturing him, but unfortunately, he had been taken away by Feng Hengyi.

"Su Jie, for this Haoyu Cup, if you can win the championship, don't forget to tell the media that you came from Minglun Martial Arts Academy," Nie Shuang reminded him.

"That's only the truth," Su Jie replied, not one to forget his roots. "If it weren't for Haoyu investing in Minglun Martial Arts Academy, my Dian Dao Martial Arts would have collaborated with you. Now, I'm actually worried about encountering a lot of trouble."

"It's a time of turmoil," Nie Shuang said. "Alright, you still have some time before leaving school. While practicing, why not learn to cook with me?"

"That sounds great!" Su Jie exclaimed joyfully.

"Tomorrow at noon, in the kitchen of Nie's Private Kitchen, I'll wait for you. I can only teach you for two hours each day," Nie Shuang said.

"I'll definitely come," Su Jie bowed in thanks and walked out.

He looked forward to tomorrow. The reputation of Nie's Private Kitchen in the culinary world was akin to Minglun Martial Arts Academy's status in the fighting world. He had eaten there many times, and it was incredibly delicious. Not only did it please the palate, but it also left one feeling grateful for the experience of life after the meal.

Buddhism teaches that life is suffering, but those who have tasted Nie's Private Kitchen would feel that life is not suffering at all; it is simply a joy.

After leaving Uncle Mang's laboratory, Su Jie prepared to participate in a small arena competition to earn some money. At that moment, he saw someone walking towards him.

It was Josh.

Chapter 146: Awakening a Companion

Su Jie had very deep feelings for Josh. If it weren't for Josh, he wouldn't have realized that tilling the land and the hammering of tires during combat practice had similar principles, perhaps even surpassing them. His rapid progress was largely due to the enjoyment he found in daily sparring with Josh, which built his confidence to continue training under Odell later on. However, after Josh signed on to become a target for Feng Hengyi, the two lost contact. It wasn't that Su Jie didn't want to reach out to Josh; rather, all means of communication seemed to have been severed. Now, returning to the Martial Arts Academy and unexpectedly encountering Josh again filled Su Jie with joy.

“Hey!” Su Jie quickly greeted Josh, “What are you doing here?”

Josh walked over to Su Jie, but his expression showed little excitement; instead, he appeared somewhat indifferent. He stopped five steps away from Su Jie and said, “Su Jie, I want to challenge you. I specifically came to find you after seeing your performance in the small Arena Competition at Minglun Martial Arts Academy on the livestream. I wanted to have another match.”

“Sure!” Su Jie understood that Josh had likely been influenced by Feng Hengyi's training; both his physique and temperament, even his aura, had changed significantly. Josh's body had become as solid as steel, and he walked with a steadiness akin to a nail driven into stone, almost unshakeable. He had found the centerline of his body, and in all his movements—whether standing, walking, or sitting—his body's central axis showed no deviation whatsoever. This was a frightening level of cultivation.

The Confucian principle of “standing upright and centered” and the Daoist saying “too many words lead to exhaustion; it's better to maintain the center” both

emphasize this concept. Traditional martial arts also stress the importance of the body's central axis; during punching practice, one must firmly protect this axis and avoid swaying. In Judo, this is known as the theory of “roots.” The goal of any Judo technique is to destabilize the opponent's “foundation” while maintaining one's own.

Su Jie only grasped this principle after achieving some success in martial arts. Through gradual practice, he had long found his own “root,” and over time, he had cultivated it to an astonishing level. In fact, one could assess a person's martial arts proficiency by examining whether they had a “root” and the solidity of that root.

For instance, now that Josh stood before him, an ordinary person might not notice anything unusual, but Su Jie, who was well-versed in Physiognomy and could observe auras, understood the profound principles of martial arts. He could “see” that within Josh, from the soles of his feet to the crown of his head, there seemed to be a “pillar” supporting him. This “pillar” represented his “root.”

Of course, this did not mean that Josh had a literal pillar inside him; rather, it referred to his mental and physical qualities, which provided stability and support in every action. A person embodies the universe, and the pillar that supports the heavens is what martial arts refers to as the “root.”

Chinese traditional martial arts first emphasize standing postures. There are many methods and theories for standing postures, but in Su Jie's view, the ultimate goal of all standing practices is to find a certain physical and mental support and then cultivate and strengthen it. The “root” is the internal strength, as well as Qi. Su Jie had previously only had a vague understanding of this, but after discussing the martial arts theory of Japan's top Judo practitioner, Daben Xianghua, with his senior brother Song Qiong, he began to comprehend the concept of “roots.”

Since then, he had been pondering this idea, and upon seeing Josh today, he was finally able to discern a person's martial arts level by observing their “root” in conjunction with the internal observation of aura from Feng Shui and Physiognomy. Some people only begin to grasp their martial arts when they find their “root.” In Su Jie’s eyes, his own “root” felt like a thin thread that could snap at any moment.

Of course, most people lack "roots," which manifests in their erratic movements and an inherent lack of support; simply put, they lack Essence and spirit. Josh's "roots," on the other hand, were like an iron rod running through the axis of his body, making him fundamentally unshakeable. If Josh were a house, then his flesh and blood would be the concrete, while the "roots" would be the steel reinforcement within. The thicker the steel, the sturdier the house, making it harder to collapse.

Su Jie recalled the Josh of the past; although he had "roots," they were as flimsy as a wooden chopstick, easily destroyed by others. A year had passed, and Josh was now more than ten times stronger than he had been a year ago.

"Haha, Josh, you truly are my lucky star! Seeing you has made me understand the crucial principles of martial arts," Su Jie said as he stepped forward to pat Josh on the shoulder, but Josh slipped away, evading Su Jie’s grasp.

"Follow me," Josh said, turning and walking away, his demeanor now completely different from the "overly dramatic" aura he once had; he had become taciturn. He exited the Minglun Martial Arts Academy and entered a small alley outside.

"Do you remember? Last year, in this very alley, you defeated me," Josh remarked. "That had a significant impact on me. Back then, you were a novice in Martial Arts; even with three layers of protective gear, you couldn't withstand a single

punch from me. Yet, in just over a month, you managed to defeat me. I had been training in combat for seven or eight years, having fought countless battles. At that moment, I realized there was something wrong with my pursuit. So, I signed a contract with Feng Hengyi and finally found the best training method in the world. Compared to my previous training, this was real training. I had thought of myself as a martial arts master who had practiced Tai Chi for decades, believing my skills were profound, but when I faced a beginner who had only trained for a month, I ended up with a bruised face. Today, I want to spar with you to see how far I've come."

"Sure," Su Jie replied, knowing that Josh had signed with Feng Hengyi, feeling a deep sense of regret inside. As a good friend, he actually wanted to advise him to reconsider, but he had never found the opportunity.

Boom! Josh crossed his feet, his fists arriving with explosive force, targeting Su Jie from all angles as if attacking from above, middle, and below. The impact was like cannon fire, shaking the ground violently, and his punches struck deep, instilling fear and awe.

Each of the three attacks was real, yet each could also be feigned; whichever route Su Jie chose to block could easily turn from real to fake, leaving him vulnerable. This style of punching was different from boxing and traditional martial arts; it was a brand new technique. Speed, power, and timing were all executed perfectly, making it nearly flawless. Even national-level athletes would find it hard to replicate such a technique.

Su Jie felt the pressure as he focused intently. But at the same time, he made his move.

Crack! He raised his arm from below, still using the "Hoe Strike" technique, but this time the intent behind the move was entirely different, becoming heavy and solid, like a great iron shield that blocked all attacks.

When Josh's punches made contact with Su Jie's arm, a dull thud echoed, like a hammer striking a large shield, unable to penetrate. Then, Su Jie retaliated.

This was a basic variation of the "Hoe Strike" technique: raising his hand to block the upper, middle, and lower attacks, then flipping his hand down to deliver a strike to Josh's face.

It was simple yet practical; poorly trained individuals would look like brawling cats, while those who trained well would strike like thunder from the earth, soaring to the heavens, delivering fierce blows that swept away evil and restored peace to the world. Su Jie was among those who trained well.

He could be said to have reached the pinnacle of his craft; while he might not be "unmatched in the world," he was certainly a rare talent. Even Odell could not compare to him, as he had repeatedly practiced this one punch.

Especially after last month's farming work, his understanding of this punch had deepened significantly. This punch, when applied to farming tasks, felt incredibly effortless, allowing him to take on ten opponents without any problem. He did not hold back against Josh. He wanted to wake Josh up.

Boom! His palm came crashing down, and all Josh could see was a hand that seemed to cover the sky and earth, compressing everything around him before pressing down on him. The world was grasped in one hand, and the mountains and rivers bore down on him. Su Jie's current "hoe" had reached such a grand level. Only a master could feel this way when facing this punch; a novice wouldn't even see it coming before getting slapped down to the ground.

As Su Jie unleashed this punch, it was as if he had seized the very essence of the world, then slammed it down, compressing the mountains and rivers within the universe. What kind of artistic conception could anyone possibly withstand? In "Journey to the West," when the Monkey King faced the Silver-Horned King who wielded Mount Sumeru, he could still use his skills to carry the mountain, but when Mount Tai came crashing down, he was left with "blood spurting from seven orifices." If the Monkey King couldn't withstand it, neither could Josh. Even if he retreated rapidly, Su Jie's feet could always keep pace with him. He could only watch helplessly as the palm came crashing toward his face.

Then, the palm covered his face, pressing down. His knees creaked, unable to support him any longer, and he was struck down to his knees on the ground. Eventually, he couldn't hold on and collapsed flat on the ground. He wanted to get back up, but his whole body ached, and his head buzzed. This was a temporary shock; on the arena, it meant he had been knocked out, unable to rise for ten seconds.

Su Jie looked at Josh, who was knocked down, and did not help him up, allowing him to regain his senses on his own. After a full minute, Josh came to his senses but did not stand to fight again; instead, he sat down heavily on the ground. "Why? Why is the gap between us getting wider? Have I been pursuing the wrong path? How can I become a master of Martial Arts?"

His tone was filled with desolation, like someone who had toiled for a lifetime only to discover they had taken the wrong path. "No, Josh, your Martial Arts are already quite high; you are definitely a master," Su Jie said. "But you have indeed taken the wrong path; you have not treated Martial Arts as Martial Arts."

"Not treating Martial Arts as Martial Arts?" Josh asked, puzzled.

"You want to become stronger, to be able to fight," Su Jie replied, sitting down beside Josh. "But the mindset of becoming stronger and being able to fight is just a small part of Martial Arts."

"Then what do you practice Martial Arts for?" Josh inquired.

Chapter 147: The True Essence of Martial Arts

"At first, I wanted to become stronger to resolve certain issues. But later, I realized that no matter how strong my Martial Arts were, they couldn't solve everything. A person's power is quite insignificant in this society. No matter how well I practiced Martial Arts, I couldn't protect the things I wanted to safeguard. My mindset then changed. I wanted to explore and learn more knowledge, help more people, and also ensure that Martial Arts could be passed down. Most importantly, I hoped to find a spirit within Martial Arts that could truly bring peace to the heart, allowing everyone to benefit from it."

After returning from the war-torn lands, Su Jie had thought a lot. While helping the elderly in the village with farming using Martial Arts, he received their admiration and gratitude, which deepened his reflections.

As he worked the fields, watching the land being turned over and the weeds cleared away, he felt a sense of accomplishment from using the hoe that far surpassed the satisfaction of defeating a master with it. At that moment, he believed that even defeating the world's number one with Martial Arts was less meaningful than using it to till an acre of land.

At this moment, his mindset underwent a tremendous transformation.

“Alright, let’s not talk about Martial Arts; everyone has their own purpose for learning it,” Josh said. “Su Jie, I want to ask you another question.”

“Go ahead,” Su Jie nodded.

“What is national credit?” Josh asked. “Some countries in the world blindly issue currency, leading to inflation. But almost all countries face this issue. So does the nation still have credit? Why can’t we break free from this credit and establish a mechanism that is not controlled by people, an absolutely neutral one?”

Hearing Josh’s question, Su Jie immediately thought of Feng Hengyi and the organization behind him, as well as the dark web, virtual currency, and so on. Josh had certainly passively accepted their ideology.

“Josh, national credit is a spirit that has been condensed over thousands of years of culture,” Su Jie said, his tone becoming very serious. “Our country faced many hardships a century ago, and you know this history, but many people did not give up hope. Instead, they sacrificed themselves and ultimately completed the revival. National credit means that when it is in danger, we will unhesitatingly die for it. I know you have joined a certain organization, but ask yourself, when that organization is in danger, would you die for it? Is it worth dying for?”

“Is it worth dying for?” Upon hearing this, Josh seemed struck by lightning, becoming completely stunned.

“Is something not worth dying for worth following?” Josh muttered to himself.

Suddenly, his gaze became resolute, and he stood up abruptly. “Su Jie, thank you. I understand now; something is not worth my death. But for Martial Arts, I can die for it.”

“You understand?” Su Jie felt extremely happy in his heart, knowing that his words had moved Josh, leading him to make the decision to break away from Feng Hengyi and even the large organization behind it.

“I understand,” Josh nodded.

“But you might be in danger,” Su Jie thought of some unfortunate possibilities.

“I know many secrets about Feng Hengyi and some matters regarding that evil organization. I have even undergone their training and committed many sinful acts; I was brainwashed by them. If it weren’t for you, I would still be lost in their dreams,” Josh said. “In the eyes of God, I am a sinner. I have betrayed the light and plunged into darkness; now it is time for me to cleanse my sins.”

“Join me,” Su Jie extended his hand. “Josh, we are good friends; let’s face everything together.”

Josh also extended his hand, shaking Su Jie’s firmly.

"Josh, I want to set up a team. In October, my Dian Dao Martial Arts Academy will participate in the Haoyu Cup. I'm a contestant, but I need at least two more people to join, though four or five would be better," Su Jie said. "I already have two candidates in mind; you can be my fourth partner."

"You want to participate in the Haoyu Cup?" Josh was taken aback. "Do you know why Haoyu is holding this competition?"

"I'm all ears," Su Jie replied. He knew a bit, but since Josh was close to Feng Hengyi, he surely knew some secrets that Su Jie was unaware of.

"The Haoyu Group has established a sports department, and the head of this department is Feng Hengyi. He wants to make a big splash, so he needs to create a spectacle. By hosting a major competition where countless experts fight, it will

generate significant influence. With high prize money as a lure, it becomes a massive hot event."

Josh said, "Of course, that's not the most important part. The key point is that this competition is purely prepared for Feng Hengyi himself. He plans to defeat all the domestic and international experts in this event, including the current number one in the country, Liu Long. Once he wins, his fame will skyrocket, and the sports department he manages will explode. He can promote his martial arts philosophy and turn his style into a globally recognized martial art, even rivaling established combat arts like karate and judo, which have been around for centuries. The commercial value in this is enormous."

Josh sighed, "He wants to keep this competition going, turning it into the largest event brand in the world. Even the top martial artist in the world would need to compete in his event to gain recognition. The more participants there are, the more data he can gather from the competition. Currently, Haoyu's short-term goal is to swallow up Minglun."

"How can a single event swallow up Minglun Martial Arts Academy?" Su Jie asked.

"It's simple. Minglun Martial Arts Academy will also have a team participating in this competition. He will suppress that team during the event, causing its members to embarrass themselves, which will significantly damage Minglun's reputation. The school relies entirely on its reputation; once that is tarnished, the school essentially loses its soul."

Josh continued, "Moreover, Feng Hengyi will manipulate international media to further lower the price for acquiring a controlling stake in Minglun Martial Arts

Academy. Just think about it: after this competition, if Minglun's team comes away empty-handed and is heavily criticized, won't that deal a major blow to the academy's reputation?"

"Feng Hengyi has many underhanded tactics," Su Jie nodded.

"There are many other means as well," Josh said. "But if you want to win the championship, you will ultimately have to defeat Feng Hengyi. If you don't beat him, it will be meaningless. I can't be sure about your martial arts skills, but my intuition tells me he's even more terrifying."

"Your intuition is spot on," Su Jie said. "Although I've made some progress in my training, I definitely wouldn't be a match for him. His foundation is too solid. Even though I'm trying to catch up, the time is too short to break through."

"But in just a year, you've already surpassed me," Josh thought to gain insights from Su Jie. To him, this was a miracle.

If miracles could happen to Su Jie, they could happen to him as well. Because behind every miracle is science; as long as one analyzes the principles behind it, anyone can achieve it.

"I'll share all my experiences with you," Su Jie stood up and brushed off the dust from his pants. "Let's spread the spirit of martial arts together. In modern society, martial arts shouldn't be kept secret; they should be openly studied by everyone."

But I'm curious, how have you been training under Feng Hengyi? Your progress is astonishingly fast!"

"First, there was physical training. Every day, I was given various health supplements produced by the Typhon Training Camp, followed by mechanical arm massages for relaxation, and a complete set of intelligent mechanical diagnostics to restore my physical strength, significantly increasing the training intensity. In addition, we practiced combat every day, engaging in life-and-death battles in underground boxing arenas in Southeast Asia, mimicking the gladiatorial training of ancient Rome. We had a group of fellow trainees, but during one chaotic slaughter in the arena, they all perished, leaving me as the sole survivor." Josh's brief words made Su Jie acutely aware of the brutality of the Typhon Training Camp. In this training camp, a large number of trainees would be eliminated through death, and those who survived were the elite. The mortality rate here was much higher than that of super agent training in various countries. It was a miracle that Josh managed to survive. No wonder he had improved so much.

"Do you practice a specific form of Martial Arts?" Su Jie asked.

"Yes, I have a set of joint exercises, breathing techniques, and meditation, which are meant to enhance physical fitness and cultivate the mind and body. Additionally, there is a specialized killing technique. Besides that, I have also taken courses on assassination methods like daggers and blow darts. Our curriculum basically includes physical training, practical combat, psychological training, assassination techniques, eavesdropping, and observation and reasoning classes," Josh enumerated.

"What is the observation and reasoning class?" Su Jie inquired.

"It involves inferring a person's lifestyle habits, past experiences, character, and preferences from their appearance, behavior, and speech, while also predicting their future development trends," Josh explained.

"Isn't that Physiognomy?" Su Jie realized. Students at police academies probably also had this course to identify criminals or to detect any latent criminal tendencies in people's psyches. Master Ma was sometimes invited by criminal police to share his expertise on judging criminals based on their facial features. The ancient art of physiognomy could also assist in solving cases.

"I need to return to my country for a while to settle various matters at home," Josh said. "Feng Hengyi still doesn't know that I have betrayed him. I need to feign compliance for a while, and at the last moment, bring him to justice. However, he is very shrewd and has left no evidence behind. If I want to gather evidence against him, I might have to stay undercover for a while."

"That's too dangerous," Su Jie thought. He wanted to take down the Feng Family but would never allow Josh to undertake such a risky 'undercover' mission.

"Feng Hengyi assigned me the task of getting close to you, earning your trust, and keeping track of your movements, then delivering a fatal blow at the most critical moment," Josh said. "So my purpose for coming today is also this. But deep down, I was still hesitating. Until you said that one sentence, I realized he wasn't worth my efforts. However, having betrayed him, he will definitely not let me go. This person is extremely ruthless, and he has a powerful backing; I must be cautious."

Chapter 148: Mastering the Art of Cooking

After exchanging a few words with Josh, the two parted ways.

Su Jie had faith in Josh; he could see that Josh was an idealistic and opinionated young man, with a face that showed he had not completely fallen from grace. This was the principle of gaining support through righteousness and losing it through wrongdoing.

Once Josh left, Su Jie glanced at the date and organized his schedule. As soon as the holiday was over, he would be heading to B City for university. Given his exam results, he could choose any university and major he desired without any issues. He scored 745 points on the National College Entrance Examination, and while he could have achieved an even higher score, it seemed pointless since the regulations now discouraged the promotion of top scorers. Moreover, he did not want to draw attention to himself during the exam; otherwise, he might have been able to achieve a perfect score of 750.

In fact, the most challenging part of the exam was the essay section. However, Su Jie had no problem with that; he could analyze the mindset of the examiners and apply various analyses of the broader context to write an essay worthy of full marks. In his view, the writing skills of modern students paled in comparison to those of the scholars who had excelled in the historical imperial examination system. Especially the top scorers, second place, and third place from history, who had skillfully understood the examiners' psychology and analyzed the political situation, tailoring their writing style and calligraphy to suit the occasion—this was truly an art form.

With a little study of history, one could gain a wealth of information. Su Jie understood these principles, but 99% of high school students would not.

"B City's Q University, School of Life Sciences," Su Jie read from a text message on his phone. This was a congratulatory message from his homeroom teacher, Chen Juan, who had learned of his admission. It was the best university in the country, and Life Sciences was the subject Su Jie had long decided to pursue, encompassing genetics, heredity, cells, ecology, and various other disciplines. It held significant meaning for researching the mysteries of life, which Su Jie intended to use to explore the secrets of Martial Arts.

His current knowledge could surpass that of an average expert, but it was still far from enough. Besides Life Sciences, Su Jie also wanted to study computer artificial intelligence, as these would also be beneficial for his Martial Arts. He had already thought out his research topic, which was similar to those of Uncle Mang, Master Ma, and Master Luo, focusing on the connection between physical and psychological qualities. This was the relationship between intention and technique in Martial Arts.

Moreover, he was curious about how the three states of mind in cultivation—contemplation, non-contemplation, and the Living Dead—could enhance physical qualities and what scientific basis lay behind them. These were all things he was eager to understand.

His cultivation had gradually deepened, and he had begun to grasp Odell's true intentions. The impact of psychological quality on physical quality was immense; a positive mindset, combined with some scientific training methods, could lead to dramatic changes in a person's physical condition in a short time. Su Jie was a prime example of this.

Additionally, during his studies with Master Luo and Master Ma, he had encountered numerous medical cases. Some cancer patients, who maintained a relaxed and positive mindset while cooperating with their doctors, had a significantly higher survival rate compared to those who were psychologically

despairing.

Perhaps, once psychological quality reached an unattainable realm, a person's body could indeed generate some incredible power? These were all worthy subjects for research.

However, the immediate priority was to learn how to cook well from Nie Shuang.

The next day at noon, Su Jie arrived at the Nie family's private restaurant in town. This restaurant consisted of several courtyards and only accepted high-end clients, requiring reservations in advance. Odell frequented this restaurant because he loved the food, and given the many experts in D City, he would often stay here for a while each year.

Nie Shuang was dressed in a white chef's uniform, complete with a chef's hat. Su Jie had also changed into a similar outfit.

The entire kitchen was spotless, filled with transparent glass, and not a speck of dust could be seen, making it resemble a laboratory. Numerous ingredients were neatly arranged on the table. Swish, swish, swish...

Nie Shuang picked up a kitchen knife, twirled it in her hand, and then with a flick, brought it down onto the cutting board.

“The people regard food as heaven; eating, drinking, relieving oneself, and sleeping are the major affairs of life. A person can go without clothes, can live without a house, can lack everything, but they cannot go without food. Practicing Martial Arts is similar; it’s thirty percent about practice and seventy percent about eating,” Nie Shuang said. “A Martial Arts expert should ideally learn how to cook; making food for oneself is the most comfortable. Just like one knows whether the water is cold or warm when drinking, I will now tell you the ten major cooking methods.”

Su Jie listened quietly.

“Cooking methods include braising, simmering, stewing, blanching, steaming, frying, boiling, marinating, and deep-frying,” Nie Shuang explained. “These cooking methods can be combined in various ways, just like the hexagrams in the Book of Changes, ever-changing, with sixty-four combinations evolving the myriad phenomena of the world, bringing both fortune and misfortune. However, the most important aspect of cooking is to retain the nutrition, followed by flavor and aroma, and finally, the presentation. Aroma and presentation can uplift a person's spirit and enhance their appetite. I will first teach you the most important cooking technique—frying.”

She swiftly drew the knife, its blade flashing, and sliced a piece of fresh pork into thin slices. Then she added seasonings to the pan, turned on the heat, and stir-fried. As the spatula flew, flames roared, and in no time, a plate of stir-fried meat was ready.

Su Jie picked up his chopsticks and took a taste, feeling the freshness dance on his tongue, an indescribable sensation that stimulated his appetite and made him ravenous.

“The first impression of good food must stimulate the taste buds and enhance appetite,” Nie Shuang said. “Moreover, before cooking, adjustments should be made according to a person's internal organs; everyone's taste varies. The so-called five flavors correspond to pungent, sour, sweet, bitter, and salty, which relate to the lungs, liver, spleen, heart, and kidneys respectively. In the theory of the five elements, they correspond to metal, wood, earth, fire, and water.”

Nie Shuang first explained the theory to Su Jie, then discussed the heat control, knife skills, and colors.

She spoke quickly, rarely repeating herself. If it were anyone else, even a gifted learner would struggle to grasp it, but Su Jie's capacity for understanding was terrifying; he even felt that Nie Shuang wasn't explaining enough.

In a typical culinary school, the concepts Nie Shuang was teaching would take at least a year to learn.

Su Jie had previously self-studied cooking, following online tutorial videos, and had managed to grasp the heat control well enough. However, after Nie Shuang's guidance, he felt his knowledge was riddled with gaps, like a child who had learned a few martial arts moves trying to join a national fighting team.

Fortunately, he was quick to absorb the information, and once pointed in the right direction, he understood the principles.

For ten consecutive days, Su Jie learned cooking from Nie Shuang, mastering various culinary techniques. After careful consideration, the dishes he prepared began to impress Nie Shuang.

Clang! Clang! Clang!

Su Jie's knife flew, cutting various meats into uniform small pieces, which he placed in a pot to boil. While it cooked, he began washing and chopping various vegetables. Once the vegetables were ready and the meat was nearly done, he fished it out and started to stew, braise, and fry.

This series of actions flowed like water, without any hindrance, mechanical and tight, with no flaws whatsoever.

Ding!

Nie Shuang pressed the stopwatch, and just as Su Jie's dish was served on the table, she nodded in approval.

"Not bad, not bad." Nie Shuang was a strict person, but she had to give Su Jie full marks because the dish was prepared according to precise methods, with the nutrition and cooking time at their best, exactly as she had set.

And Su Jie had managed to be precise to the second.

‘Using the term genius doesn’t even begin to describe it,’

Nie Shuang thought to herself. ‘What a pity it would be if he were one of our Minglun Martial Arts Academy’s students; otherwise, he could even be the heir to our Nie family’s private kitchen. I must recommend him to the old principal, but unfortunately, he has gone abroad and won’t be back anytime soon.’

In just ten days, Su Jie had learned a wealth of knowledge and techniques about cooking, which he committed to memory, planning to experiment and reflect on them slowly.

Cooking had no other secret; it was simply about continuous practice and research.

Its complexity was no less than that of Martial Arts.

Of course, during these ten days, Su Jie learned only the basics and fundamental principles. The Nie family’s private kitchen was most famous for its medicinal dishes, which were secret recipes that Nie Shuang could not casually pass on to Su Jie.

However, Su Jie had mastered the basic skills of cooking, and with careful study, he could create meals that were very beneficial to health. He could completely solve his daily meal problems.

Time quickly passed to August 25th, and Su Jie was set to leave Minglun Martial Arts Academy to return home and prepare for college.

He bid farewell to Gu Yang, Nie Shuang, and Uncle Mang, stayed one night in Odell's small courtyard, tidied up, locked the doors and windows, and then set off on his journey home.

While in the courtyard, he hoped Odell would return, as there were many things he wanted to ask and discuss with him. However, Odell did not come back this time, which left him feeling a bit disappointed.

During these nearly three months, Su Jie had gained a lot; his Martial Arts had progressed significantly, and in terms of physical fitness, he had achieved the "Golden Body." In terms of spiritual cultivation, he had thoroughly solidified his previous realm, and his inner peace was frighteningly profound.

If before, his heart was like still water, calm but capable of rippling when a stone was thrown, now his heart was like a frozen lake. Not only could the wind not stir up waves, but even if a stone were to fall, there would be no splash.

Moreover, he gradually felt that his inner self was advancing further, transforming into a sensation akin to ice jade.

He remained calm at all times, maintaining clarity, unaffected by any external environmental factors, preserving independence and purity, without any impurities arising.

This feeling was incredibly wonderful, even more comforting than the changes in his body.

Su Jie felt he was getting closer to the realm of the “Living Dead.”

Many times, he felt he could step over this threshold at any moment, but with each advancement, he realized he was still far from it. Yet this time, it was so clear that with just a gentle blow, he could access the long-sealed treasure, but Su Jie’s heart remained exceptionally calm, treating it as an ordinary matter.

The young man, in this unnoticeable way, grew once more.

Chapter 149: Shadows Approaching

Just as Su Jie completed his summer training and returned to S City, preparing to start university, the Feng Family was also gearing up for a series of business maneuvers.

In a secret office of Haoyu Group, three individuals were holding a meeting. These three were none other than the three powerhouses of the Feng Family: Feng Shoucheng's eldest son, Feng Yuxuan, his second son, Feng Qianzang, and his third son, Feng Hengyi. Each of them had distinct appearances, yet there was an indistinct aura of ambition about them; each could stand on their own and become a lord among lords.

"Third brother, all the mistakes our company made this time are because you failed to secure the shipment from the Xu Family, allowing Awasi to pass through smoothly. Not only that, but you also completely offended the local warlord, leaving us unable to establish a foothold there. This directly led to our failure in acquiring shares from the Xu Family, and we were counterattacked by that old man Xu Qiaomu, resulting in us being penalized by the higher-ups and forced to sell the Xu Family's stocks at a low price, withdrawing from the market. This has caused our Feng Family significant losses, and more importantly, this failure has diminished our credibility in the market; many companies no longer fear us as they once did."

Feng Yuxuan continuously blamed Feng Hengyi, as if he were kicking someone while they were down. After all, within the family, the only one who posed a threat to his position was his third brother, Feng Hengyi. The second son, Feng Qianzang, was naturally charming and flirtatious, and while he had a keen business mind, he lacked the authority to command respect in public, making it unlikely for the Feng Family to let him take over.

Meanwhile, the third son, Feng Hengyi, was actively plotting various matters, and each successful endeavor posed a threat to Feng Yuxuan, which made him quite uneasy.

"This matter has drawn the Zhang Family's attention," Feng Hengyi glanced at Feng Yuxuan and said, "Things are not that simple. You don't understand who Zhang Hongqing is, but our old man knows very well. Of course, he won't be able to bounce back for long; the forces behind me have already arranged for someone who can take him out. We just need to wait; sooner or later, news of his death will spread."

"Third brother," at this moment, Feng Qianzang spoke up, "It's best not to get too deeply involved with that organization behind you. I'm afraid it will bring trouble, which would be extremely detrimental to our Feng Family."

"Second brother, you can never imagine the immense power that exists behind me," Feng Hengyi replied. "In front of that force, our Feng Family and Haoyu are hardly stronger than ants. Feng Yuxuan, don't worry about me competing with you for assets; I tell you, my ambitions lie elsewhere. What I seek is the highest leadership of the organization; at that time, the Feng Family will become the dominant force in global commerce, not this ambiguous position we hold now, unable to even swallow the Xu Family."

Feng Yuxuan remained silent for a while before speaking, "Third brother, since you always boast about how great your backing is, then show it to us and let the Feng Family's influence expand once more."

"Rest assured, I will lay out a global strategy," Feng Hengyi said. "I will first take over Minglun Martial Arts Academy, then acquire Liu Zihao's film company. Minglun Martial Arts Academy may not have a large industry now, but combined with Liu Zihao's international influence and the operations of his film company,

its future value will far exceed that of the Xu Family. What do you think, second brother?"

"I think so too. Minglun Martial Arts Academy has a tremendous faculty and training mechanism, along with some pharmaceutical intellectual property rights, but unfortunately, it hasn't been fully operational yet." Feng Qianzang nodded, "I've purchased many fitness products from their official website, and they are indeed very effective. That old guy Liu Guanglie is much more cunning than Liu Zihao. He has acquired several large pharmaceutical factories and is managing them slowly. If we swallow Minglun Martial Arts Academy, leveraging Liu Zihao's film effects and adding some hype from competitions, we can quickly open up markets for health products, clothing, film, education, and more globally. Not to mention, just selling the intellectual property rights of those martial arts videos could earn us a substantial profit abroad."

"Not bad," Feng Hengyi nodded. "What is the fastest way to become famous in this world? It's combat sports. Even if you're just a small fry, as long as you defeat the world champion, you can instantly become a superstar. Once you become a superstar, you can use your influence to market countless products."

"Liu Zihao is not an easy character to deal with; he will definitely not give up control of the Minglun Martial Arts Academy," Feng Yuxuan said.

"That doesn't matter. If he doesn't give up, there will naturally be someone to make him give up. In my plan, he is merely a stumbling block. He won't abandon his pursuit of power and will eventually come under my command," Feng Hengyi replied. "Currently, what I care about most is our Haoyu Group's artificial intelligence laboratory. This is of utmost importance. We cannot afford any loopholes; this is the key to my future plans. My goal is to build our Feng Family into a colossal 'umbrella' company like those in movies."

"Third brother, you might be too fanciful," Feng Yuxuan scoffed.

"As long as you live long enough and gradually accumulate power, nothing is impossible to achieve. Just like me," Feng Hengyi said. "My physical condition allows me to live to one hundred and twenty without any problem. And I'm not even twenty yet. What will happen in a hundred years? Who can say for sure? As long as we stay at the forefront of the times and master the most advanced technology, anything is possible."

"Our artificial intelligence laboratory is managed by me, so you can rest assured. I've documented all the important researchers and signed hefty compensation agreements; there won't be any loopholes," Feng Yuxuan stated.

"I'm not at ease," Feng Hengyi replied. "I've decided to move our artificial intelligence laboratory abroad and continuously recruit various talents. After all, even if you sign various agreements with them domestically, it is of no use because you cannot restrict their personal freedom."

"I absolutely disagree with this," Feng Yuxuan knew this was Feng Hengyi trying to seize power from him.

"This is not up to your agreement; it was decided by the old man," Feng Hengyi said.

"I don't believe it," Feng Yuxuan frowned.

"Indeed, it was decided by me," at that moment, Feng Shoucheng walked in.

"Dad," Feng Yuxuan stood up, seemingly wanting to say something.

"This is the company's grand strategy, not aimed at you," Feng Shoucheng said. "I consulted Master Mao, and if we don't do this, there may be great disasters in the future, and we won't be able to escape. Of course, you may not believe this, but this is my intention. Starting today, we will gradually relocate, and for those important researchers, we will offer high salaries to stabilize them and have them follow us abroad for projects. In a year and a half, the plan will be completely successful."

"Understood," Feng Yuxuan could only agree upon hearing this.

"Also, in the artificial intelligence laboratory you manage, is there a studio called Morning Dawn?" Feng Shoucheng asked.

"Yes," Feng Yuxuan nodded. "They are people I recruited from outside and are a crucial part of our Haoyu technology core."

"That's right," Feng Shoucheng pondered. "Get all the information on the members of this studio, especially their family details. From now on, Hengyi, you send someone to keep a close watch on all the members of this studio."

"Okay," Feng Hengyi agreed.

"Dad, did you hear any rumors? Is someone trying to poach our technicians?" Feng Qianzang asked.

"Don't worry about this; just manage your own area," Feng Shoucheng's expression was extremely grim, even Feng Hengyi frowned because he sensed a stifling atmosphere.

"Also, Heng Yi, after swallowing the Minglun Martial Arts Academy and Liu Zihao's film company, you should discuss the film sector with the second brother. His instincts in this area are sharper than yours, and the three brothers must not create discord. I'll speak frankly with you all; our Feng Family is about to face a great calamity. In the past, we have been like a raging storm, but this acquisition of the Xu Family has cost us dearly, and it marks the beginning of our decline." Feng Shoucheng said, "From now on, we will follow the plan and work quietly. You all need to keep a low profile." The three brothers looked at Feng Shoucheng's expression, feeling as if disaster was imminent, and they fell silent, each lost in thought.

At Su Jie's home, the family was having dinner. Su Jie had cooked a full table of dishes.

"Mm, it smells great. Kid, did you learn to cook during this summer vacation?" His father, Su Shilin, was enjoying the meal, and even his mother, Xu Ying, nodded in

agreement, feeling that the food surpassed that of hotel chefs. The steamed rice was also fragrant and delicious; it was ordinary rice, yet it tasted exceptional. Not to mention the other dishes, each one was a feast for the senses, significantly better than before.

His older sister, Su Mucheng, was also at the table but seemed to lack appetite, remaining silent.

"What's wrong?" Xu Ying asked, "You've been busy with work and rarely come home for dinner. Why are you so downcast?"

"I might have to work abroad for a year or two," Su Mucheng replied.

"What?" Su Jie perked up immediately, "Is it Feng Yuxuan who sent you on a business trip?"

"No, the company is relocating its overall strategy and establishing a studio abroad to expand into foreign markets. We have to go work there," Su Mucheng explained. "The company has signed a new project agreement with our team. As long as we successfully develop the core code for artificial intelligence, we can gain our freedom, plus a substantial bonus. So, I need to work abroad for a year or two."

"You can't go," Su Jie said immediately. "Even if Haoyu's influence is great domestically, they still have to follow the rules and not act recklessly. Once you go

abroad, your personal safety becomes a concern. If I'm not mistaken, once you leave the country, it will be very hard for you to come back. What do you think, Dad, Mom?"

His mother, Xu Ying, was deep in thought.

"I know Haoyu definitely has his own plans," Su Mucheng frowned. "But this is a normal work transfer, and I can't refuse. Little brother, you know our team lost a lot of money when we started the company. Right now, the main issue is the debt we owe Haoyu. If we can pay off this debt, I could consider not going. But the amount is too large; there's no way."

"Dad, don't say you can't do anything," Su Jie looked at Su Shilin. He remembered how Song Qiong called him Uncle Su.

"It's fine," Su Shilin said calmly. "You just go work abroad. Some things are inconvenient to handle domestically, but they can be done easily abroad."

Chapter 150: The Drowning Swimmer Turns the Tables

"Dad, what are you talking about?" Su Jie disagreed. He had been to the war zone and understood deeply that abroad, Feng Hengyi was linked to dark forces. Once he stepped out, it would be like a sheep entering a tiger's den.

Although Su Jie had Martial Arts skills, he knew that the power of Martial Arts was not as formidable as it seemed; there were many situations where he would be powerless.

“Don’t worry, maybe we can catch a big fish,” Su Shilin said. “Your sister’s ambition is to design a powerful artificial intelligence. Once abroad, she might leverage the Feng Family’s connections to obtain truly confidential information. Sometimes, broadening one’s horizons and seeing the world is beneficial. Just like you, I didn’t want you to learn Martial Arts because I was afraid you would get into fights. But you didn’t listen and chose this path, inevitably exposing yourself to many dangers. For instance, your trip to the war zone—wasn’t it a brush with death? A stray bullet could take your life. Remember, those who drown are often good swimmers. Those who can’t swim have the self-awareness not to go into the water, and thus, they will never drown.”

“But it’s too dangerous,” Su Jie argued with his father. “If sister goes on an adventure, I definitely don’t support it. I know you have a good relationship with the chairman of the Zhonglong Group, and sister’s team could be very useful to them. They could easily recruit her team, compensate Haoyu, and handle the lawsuit. After all, the two major groups have been at odds before. It would be much safer for my sister to work at Zhonglong than to be on edge at Haoyu.”

Su Jie had a point. If the Zhonglong Group recruited his sister’s team, it would be a significant advantage. He had seen how the wealthy young masters like Lu Shu were willing to give away hundreds of millions in property just to recruit her. However, these young masters were not very reliable, but Su Jie believed the Zhonglong Group was trustworthy.

“Not everything can depend on others,” Su Shilin replied. “Zhonglong is Zhonglong, and we are us. Besides, even if we rely on Zhonglong, will the Feng Family let it go? It would only bring more trouble. It’s better to eradicate the root cause once and for all. Don’t worry, you’re still young; there are some things you don’t need to bear. When I can’t handle it anymore, you can step in. Many things may seem like huge troubles to you, but they might not be as terrifying in my eyes. In fact, compared to the Feng Family, the Zhang Family is the most formidable. Don’t get too close to them.”

“The Zhang Family? Is that Zhang Manman?” Su Jie’s heart stirred.

“You should ask your mother about that,” Su Shilin crossed his arms. “I’m too lazy to explain. Just don’t get too close to the Zhang Family; they are even more hostile towards us than the Feng Family.”

“I’ve interacted with the Zhang Family before, and it was fine?” Su Jie seemed to sense some hidden secrets.

“Only the core members of the Zhang Family know about the events from back then,” Xu Ying spoke up. “Zhang Manman probably doesn’t know the secrets either. Anyway, Zhang Hongqing hates your dad to the core. If you’re going abroad, definitely avoid the Zhang Family, and it’s best to cut ties with Zhang Manman.”

“What exactly happened?” Su Jie asked.

“Don’t worry about it. Just know that it’s a deep-seated grudge,” Xu Ying said. “Let’s eat; your dad has made arrangements. Your sister won’t run into any trouble. Just focus on your university studies. After you graduate, you can deal with things then.”

“Dad, are you reliable?” Su Jie still didn’t believe it. “I just don’t think you can handle this situation.”

“Hey!” Su Shilin immediately got angry. “You little brat, do you dare to question your old man? Come on, let’s see what your Martial Arts skills are really like today!”

“Shilin, you’re not a kid anymore. Why are you arguing with your child?” Xu Ying interjected. “Enough talk, let’s eat!”

At that moment, Su Jie did not heed his mother's words. He suddenly picked up a toothpick from the table, twirled it in his hand, and, as if by magic, it vanished from sight. The toothpick shot towards Su Shilin at an imperceptible speed. Just as Su Shilin was eating with his chopsticks, completely unprepared, the toothpick struck him with a swift and precise motion that went unnoticed.

"Hmm!"

The instant the toothpick reached Su Shilin, Su Jie felt a slight pain in his shoulder. He then saw that the toothpick he had shot out had somehow lodged itself in his own shoulder. He hadn’t even realized it. At that moment, Su Shilin had just put down his chopsticks. All of this happened in the blink of an eye—Su Shilin was eating, Su Jie shot the toothpick, and it rebounded to pierce his shoulder, all in about one or two seconds.

Su Jie pulled the toothpick out, a small trace of blood appearing where it had pierced his shoulder. In that instant, he hadn't felt a thing. He hadn't even caught a glimpse of Su Shilin's technique.

'Is he really that strong?' Su Jie immediately understood that his father was likely on the same level as Odell.

"The heart-piercing nail of the Judge Gu Yang," Su Shilin said casually as he watched Su Jie pull the toothpick from his shoulder. "His hidden weapons are indeed exceptional, but you've only just started practicing, and your skills are far from sufficient. When it comes to killing, your father is better than you. But killers are always hunted; no one is a god, all are flesh and blood. Once you enter this circle, it's hard to turn back, and it's quite meaningless."

"What technique was that just now?" Su Jie asked, staring intently.

"Your Martial Arts have already reached a certain level; teaching you would be useless," Su Shilin replied. "When I was young, I was nowhere near as good as you. Alright, let's not talk about this. You have your own worldview and outlook on life; just follow your own path. You don't need to worry about family matters."

"Fine." Su Jie had nothing more to say. The technique his father had just displayed was far cleaner and more efficient than anything he could manage. If even he couldn't handle it, then he certainly wouldn't be able to. Since his father wanted to send his sister abroad, he must have his own reasons.

'It seems that only by reaching a mental state akin to the Living Dead can I truly spar with my father. Only then will I be able to withstand certain things,' Su Jie thought to himself. 'My skills with hidden weapons are still in their infancy; I'm far behind in that regard compared to my fist and foot techniques. I should be able to hold my own against my father in a few rounds with those.'

Hidden weapons were indeed a weak point for Su Jie. They were purely tools for killing, without any pretense. Practicing fist and foot techniques, even the most vicious moves, could be justified as a means of strengthening the body, but practicing hidden weapons was solely for the purpose of murder. Su Jie didn't want to invest too much time and energy into hidden weapons; the priority was still on physical and mental training. Becoming overly obsessed with hidden weapons would be a waste of time. As long as his physical abilities and mental resilience improved, a little practice with hidden weapons would suffice.

"Why are you arguing with the child?" Xu Ying suddenly slammed her chopsticks down.

Su Shilin flinched and lowered his head to eat. At that moment, his sister Su Mucheng seemed to be much happier. "It seems that the Haoyu Group has powerful technical support behind it. During my research, I vaguely grasped that connection. If I can further crack the secrets within, I could even master all the business secrets of Haoyu and find evidence of how Feng Yuxuan set me up. Little brother, this is also why I stayed at Haoyu; I'm not willing to accept failure in my entrepreneurial endeavors."

"The Feng Family is not that easy to deal with. You don't know Martial Arts; if anything goes wrong, a security guard could easily take you down," Su Jie still felt uneasy deep down.

"I still have my value, besides, you can't catch a tiger cub without entering the tiger's den," Su Mucheng said. "Little brother, you still don't understand the tricks of computers. A true expert can gather a lot of information without anyone noticing. Once I obtain all the criminal records of the Feng Family, it will be their end. Just like how the Feng Family brought down my company back then, I will do the same to theirs."

"It's not that simple," their mother Xu Ying interjected. "You must prioritize safety above all else."

"There's no need to worry about safety," Su Shilin chimed in. "On the Zhonglong side, I'll give them something to think about. There will indeed be times when we need them, but they are also the type that won't act until they see the rabbit. We can only leverage their power, not put all our bets on them."

"Got it," Su Jie nodded.

After the family finished their meal, father Su Shilin and older sister Su Mucheng left, and it was unclear what they were up to.

Su Jie stayed home to clean up the dishes. He felt much more at ease now; his sister seemed to have gained some insight and was no longer the stubborn blockhead who only focused on research.

His sister wasn't stupid or foolish; she was intelligent but lacked emotional intelligence. Perhaps she had spent too long in the ivory tower of academia, leading to some naivety and assumptions. After everything that had happened, she had undoubtedly grown to some extent.

Even Su Jie had matured significantly compared to last year; he could almost say he had undergone a transformation.

"At least I'm not fighting alone now," Su Jie thought of his father's technique of flicking toothpicks back. He hadn't seen it clearly in the moment, but now it vividly replayed in his mind. When his father flicked the toothpick, he did so with such speed that it changed trajectory in an instant and bounced back.

It was somewhat similar to a bullet rebounding off a hard surface. This kind of precision and perfectly measured force didn't seem so miraculous to Su Jie anymore. With some practice, he could achieve it too.

His Martial Arts had reached a certain level; as long as he calmed his mind, he could discern the essence of things.

'What unresolved deep-seated grudge could my father have with the Zhang Family?' Su Jie pondered another question. 'Zhang Manman is actually quite nice; without her, we might not have been able to deal with the Feng Family. The grievances of the previous generation shouldn't affect the next. In this competition, I still need her to thwart Feng Hengyi's schemes. It's better to resolve enmities than to deepen them. If we can eliminate this grudge, it would be a good thing. Otherwise, we would have to deal with both the Feng Family and the Zhang Family, and even my father wouldn't be able to handle it all.'