

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 21: The Ultimate Realm of Relaxation Zen

"This is the ultimate realm of relaxation, Zen. Which is essentially summed up in a line from the Diamond Sutra: 'No self, no others, no sentient beings, no lifespan,'" Uncle Mang explained. (G: Zen – emphasizing the value of meditation and intuition.)

"What does that mean?" Su Jie asked again.

"The so-called 'self' forms the foundation of existence in this world. All pain, pleasure, joy, and anxiety arise because of the self. If the self ceases to exist, all emotions disappear. 'Others' refers to the foundation of existence similar to the self, the cause and effect that influences our being. Without others, we wouldn't have so many emotions and thoughts. 'Sentient beings' refer to various factors that affect our existence, while 'lifespan' is a combination of time and space—a marker of our existence within a specific time and space," Uncle Mang explained with philosophical depth, "If someone could reach this realm, their body would be in the most relaxed state, as their mind would have let go of all existential foundations. Everything would be released. It is said that in this mental state, the human body undergoes remarkable changes."

"I don't quite understand what kind of state that is. But I do know that when people relax, they can heal many illnesses and boost their immunity. On the other hand, constant tension and anxiety can make them prone to illness," Su Jie remarked, grasping the basic concept.

"The technique you're practicing—digging and carrying—is originally a combination of martial arts, Qigong, and Zen philosophy, created by martial monks. It's called the unity of Zen and martial arts. To master this martial art to its peak, you must understand Zen," Uncle Mang said.

"Uncle Mang, to what extent can you relax yourself?" Su Jie asked.

"I've only reached the realm where the self and the external world merge and fade. I'm still a bit short of achieving the true state of 'no self, no others, no sentient beings,'" Uncle Mang replied. "After all, fading is not the same as nothingness. Fading involves memory, while true nothingness is the complete absence of it."

Listening to these philosophical insights, Su Jie felt somewhat overwhelmed but vaguely understood parts of it.

"Perhaps these concepts require life experience and the passage of time for me to truly grasp," Su Jie thought. For now, he was enthusiastic about learning, advancing at his own pace.

After his massage session, it was only 8 PM, leaving an hour before his usual bedtime at 9. Normally, he and Josh would spar in the ring at this time. Since Josh

was likely training with someone else, Su Jie decided to check what he was up to.

He knew the importance of sparring. Even with protective gear and referees present, sparring was far better than practicing alone or hitting a punching bag.

“Hi! Hi! Hi!”

Su Jie entered the vast training hall. With the new academy term approaching, more students were training here. Most were enrolled in the martial arts academy, and some were even professional fighters.

Minglun Martial Arts Academy had produced many champions in boxing, sanda, Muay Thai, kickboxing, MMA, and wrestling—national champions included.

As advertised on TV, "The cradle of champions, Minglun Martial Arts Academy."

Here, you could find experts in almost every martial art and combat style. That was why Su Jie had traveled across provinces to study here.

“Victory! Another victory!”

At that moment, an explosive cheer erupted from a nearby competition arena.

Looking over, Su Jie saw another hall with a sign at the entrance stating tickets were required to enter, suggesting some sort of competition was happening inside.

"Could this be the small-scale arena Coach Nie Shuang mentioned?"

Curious, Su Jie walked over, paid 30 yuan for a ticket, and entered.

Inside was indeed a large competition arena equipped with a ring and an octagonal cage, the latter designed specifically for MMA. The arena was packed with spectators, creating a lively atmosphere. Many were students from the academy, but there were also outsiders, including students from other martial arts academies.

Two fighters were engaged in a match.

One of them executed a beautiful slam followed by an armbar, forcing his opponent to submit.

The crowd erupted in applause.

“Ruan Xing has won three consecutive matches. The academy awards him 6,000 yuan!” the referee announced.

“The Minglun Martial Arts Academy's internal tournaments have finally resumed. After a month-long summer break, it's game time. Should we join and earn some extra cash?”

“Come on, only experts sign up for this. If we enter, not only will we waste the registration fee, but we'll also get beaten up.”

Su Jie overheard two students from another academy talking nearby. He glanced at the posters around him and immediately understood that this was a ring challenge competition held by the Minglun Martial Arts Academy. Both students from within the academy and outsiders could participate as long as they paid the registration and entrance fees. Winners would even receive prize money.

This type of competition had been suspended for a month during the summer vacation. Now that the holidays were nearing their end and more students were returning to academy, the competition was being reopened.

In this area, there were many martial arts academies, and almost every one of them held such competitions. Even bars and boxing gyms in town hosted similar events. However, the Minglun Martial Arts Academy's ring competition was the most famous in the region. It had the highest skill level, attracted the most participants, and even garnered a large online fan base. The event had partnered with a live-streaming platform, generating considerable revenue.

For Minglun Martial Arts Academy, this competition was a highly profitable project.

“Should I register too?” Su Jie felt a spark of interest. He had been struggling to find opportunities for real combat. His last fight with Song Li was a private duel. Although he won 10,000 yuan, he didn’t take the money because it could easily lead to animosity. Instead, he chose to be generous and make a friend.

Now, this was a public competition organized by the academy. If he participated and won, it would be ideal. Even if he lost, it would be a valuable combat experience.

“The registration booth is over there.”

Su Jie squeezed through the crowd. The registration area wasn’t manned by anyone but a machine. Participants simply needed to place their ID card on the scanner, weigh themselves, and pay the registration fee via a mobile QR code. After that, they would wait to be assigned an opponent.

It was simple: Step one, stand on the machine. Step two, place the ID card. Step three, scan the QR code to pay 100 yuan.

After completing the registration, Su Jie moved to the contestant area.

The sports arena was divided into spectator, contestant, referee, event, media filming, and VIP areas. It was almost comparable to a national-level competition.

In fact, many national-level competitions were held in this venue.

The facilities highlighted the strength of the Minglun Martial Arts Academy.

When there weren't any major events, the arena hosted small-scale competitions daily, providing students with real combat opportunities and the experience of participating in formal events.

Su Jie waited in the contestant area, surrounded by dozens of other participants. Some were wrapping their hands, others were warming up, and a few were chatting to relax.

No one paid any attention to Su Jie.

Su Jie suddenly felt a wave of nervousness. This was his first official competition. Although it was a small-scale event open to everyone, the atmosphere, with so many spectators, was quite different.

“Control your breathing rhythm, warm up, adjust your mental state, and build a sense of excitement and fighting spirit...” He followed the advice of Coach Odell, beginning his warm-up and mental preparation.

Coach Odell had long taught him that psychological resilience was crucial in ring competitions. If not properly adjusted, one’s strength and techniques might perform at less than 10%, leaving them as easy prey.

While warming up, Su Jie imagined scenarios where he was bullied, beaten, or humiliated, then rose in defiance. This helped him overcome fear, generate anger, and ignite a fighting spirit. Simultaneously, he strategized—deciding which tactics, moves, and combinations to use against his opponent.

In short, emotional preparation was the most important part of pre-match rituals.

“Before a fight, adjusting your mental state relies on using emotions to stimulate adrenaline production. In extreme situations, the body releases adrenaline, which enhances vitality, reduces pain sensitivity, suppresses fear, and boosts speed, agility, and strength.”

Su Jie replayed Coach Odell’s combat techniques in his mind.

While physical warm-ups for the limbs were important before a match, emotional preparation was even more crucial.

Mastering emotional control required balance. Being overly excited or angry could cloud judgment, leading to mistakes and allowing opponents to capitalize on weaknesses. Conversely, being too calm could dampen explosiveness.

The ideal state was like a volcano on the verge of eruption—emotions surging beneath the surface, waiting to unleash their full power at the perfect moment.

Su Jie realized that the "internal techniques" often emphasized in traditional Chinese martial arts were about emotional control. By managing hormone secretion, one could improve health and enhance combat effectiveness.

His training, which included farming tasks like hoeing and carrying loads, was called “Xin Yi Ba” (Intent and Will Techniques) among ancient martial monks. The name itself hinted at profound truths.

“Su Jie, your opponent is Huang Bo.”

After about 30 to 40 minutes, during which seven or eight rounds of combat had taken place, it was finally Su Jie’s turn.

In this small-scale ring competition, each match lasted only five minutes. If neither side achieved a knockout, the result was determined by scoring.

The scoring wasn't done by referees but by the academy's computer system, which analyzed strikes with professional precision. This system was not only highly accurate but also fair, leaving little room for dispute.

"Who is Huang Bo?" Su Jie asked himself as he put on his sparring gloves and stepped into the octagonal cage.

This competition followed mixed martial arts rules.

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Chapter 22: Patience in the Octagon is True Skill

The octagon cage even had a referee, making the setup look highly professional.

Mixed martial arts allowed fighters to showcase various styles in the ring. The rules were highly open, making it an extremely efficient competitive sport, closely resembling actual combat.

Thus, this form of combat was the most popular in martial arts academies and highly favored by combat enthusiasts.

Here, one could use fists, Muay Thai, wrestling, karate, or traditional Chinese martial arts—whatever it took to defeat the opponent.

Su Jie stepped into the octagon, and at that moment, his opponent, Huang Bo, also entered.

Huang Bo was a twenty-year-old young man whose muscles didn't bulge but instead seemed like layers of scales clinging tightly to his body.

This physique was terrifying—an ideal combat build, unlike the bodybuilding physiques seen in gyms.

Su Jie's body was also evolving toward this standard, though it had not fully taken shape yet. Following Odell's training methods, Su Jie was on the path to achieving the perfect combat physique, akin to a naturally evolved predator. There would be no excess fat, not even unnecessary muscle.

Sometimes, excessive muscle could hinder movement.

This was his opponent, Huang Bo.

As soon as he entered, Su Jie felt an overwhelming aura. This guy had clearly been through countless battles and looked like a formidable challenge.

“Begin!”

The pace in the ring was fast. With numerous matches scheduled daily, there were no formalities like posing or media interviews. It was straight to the fight.

Huang Bo didn't waste words with Su Jie. As soon as the match started, he began lightly bouncing, showcasing a typical combat footwork style. This made it difficult for the opponent to lock onto his position while he searched for flaws.

Su Jie also moved swiftly, not adopting a traditional combat stance with his hands up to guard but walking casually with a relaxed posture, taking light and agile steps.

He hadn't found any openings in Huang Bo's defense, so he refrained from making rash moves or wasting energy. His relaxed and easy gait was ideal for probing the opponent's weaknesses before launching an attack.

Whoosh!

Huang Bo, unwilling to waste time, feinted after about ten seconds, followed by a quick step forward. With a twist of his waist and hips, he executed a signature Muay Thai roundhouse kick aimed at Su Jie's waist.

A mid-level roundhouse kick.

The roundhouse kick was one of the most frequently used moves in any combat sport.

Many world-class fighters relied on this move to handle opponents. It was simple and practical. After relentless practice, it could become terrifyingly powerful.

For example, the "Hoe Strike" Su Jie practiced—a simple move involving a thrust, push, lunge, and drop—was deceptively straightforward. However, an in-depth study could fill an entire book with its intricacies.

Similarly, the roundhouse kick was no different.

In combat, the most daunting opponents were those who honed a single move repeatedly, embedding it into their bones and soul.

As the saying goes, “Fear not the man who knows a thousand techniques; fear the man who has practiced one technique a thousand times.”

Huang Bo’s roundhouse kick was ferocious. A successful hit would undoubtedly result in a fracture.

But instead of counterattacking, Su Jie dodged to the side.

However, just as he evaded, Huang Bo retracted his leg, stepped forward, and unleashed a flurry of punches in a hooking and swinging pattern. His relentless assault resembled that of a raging beast. His punches were precise, and his arms moved so fast that afterimages appeared as if they would tear through anything in their path.

Su Jie hadn’t anticipated such a brutal follow-up after the roundhouse kick. This was the epitome of modern combat tactics, far more aggressive than his previous opponent, Song Li.

Song Li was Su Jie’s first opponent—a robust man with an imposing presence. Yet, upon reflection, Su Jie realized Song Li was relatively weak. Despite his bulky

muscles, they were merely for show, lacking explosive force. His speed was slow, and his strikes lacked penetration.

Defeating someone like Song Li was straightforward.

But Huang Bo was a different case altogether. His physique was less imposing than Song Li's, but his strikes were far heavier and much faster. In the blink of an eye, Huang Bo's fist was already in Su Jie's face. Within a few seconds, Su Jie's arms had taken several punches.

Fortunately, Su Jie had trained for endurance and kept his arms protecting his head and vital areas; otherwise, he would have been knocked to the ground.

Yet, under these circumstances, Huang Bo had already gained points.

If neither fighter knocked the other out by the end, Huang Bo's accumulated points would guarantee his victory.

Su Jie understood this but knew he lacked combat experience. His strategy was to dodge patiently and look for the perfect opportunity to land a decisive blow.

Although Huang Bo's speed was impressive, it was no match for Odell's blade techniques. Through Odell's training, Su Jie had mastered evasive maneuvers to a remarkable level.

Three minutes passed with Su Jie constantly on the move while Huang Bo remained on the offensive.

Su Jie didn't counterattack. Though he endured some punches, his agility minimized their impact. However, his arms showed some swelling from the repeated blows. Without his hardened training, he might have already succumbed to the pain, impairing his combat ability.

His thighs and calves had also taken some of Huang Bo's roundhouse kicks.

An average fighter would likely struggle to even walk at this point, yet Su Jie remained agile.

However, according to the rules, Su Jie hadn't scored any points while Huang Bo had scored significantly. If the match dragged on, Huang Bo would undoubtedly win.

Sensing his imminent victory, Huang Bo shifted to a more defensive approach, further reducing Su Jie's chances of a comeback.

To win now, Su Jie had only one option—knock Huang Bo out, rendering him unable to fight, commonly known as a “KO.”

With one minute left, Su Jie was still at a disadvantage. He couldn't land a hit on Huang Bo, while Huang Bo occasionally landed punches and kicks on him.

In this predicament, Su Jie seemed to grow anxious, his movements becoming quicker. He began probing with frequent strikes, shifting up and down to find an opening and end the match with a decisive attack.

Noticing this, a faint smile appeared at the corner of Huang Bo's lips, one even he didn't realize.

He knew Su Jie was getting desperate.

And in his search for an opening, Su Jie was exposing significant flaws in his defense.

Su Jie didn't notice this detail and kept attempting to attack relentlessly.

Suddenly, he seemed to seize an opportunity and lunged forward.

In his charge, however, he left a glaring opening, exposing his entire body to Huang Bo's attacks.

Huang Bo acted on instinct, unleashing a high kick aimed at Su Jie's head—a decisive blow meant to end the match.

But just then, Su Jie retracted his body mid-charge—it was a feint all along. From the start, his urgency had been a ploy to deceive Huang Bo and create an opening for himself.

Sure enough, Huang Bo fell for it, misled by the continuous vulnerabilities Su Jie appeared to show.

Huang Bo's sweeping kick missed its target, and his expression changed drastically.

"Half the body open when kicking"—an old martial arts proverb—highlighted how a kick could leave one's balance compromised.

At that moment, Su Jie launched himself forward again. His body contracted as he moved, slithering like a snake, his momentum rising like a polevault over a rooftop and descending like a tiger pouncing on its prey. All his strength erupted

in an instant, driven by an unwavering willpower that would not hesitate, even if a mountain of blades blocked his path.

Everything culminated in this single attack.

Bang!

Huang Bo's face was struck with a resounding slap. Su Jie followed up with a downward motion, his momentum driving him like a digging hoe, landing directly on Huang Bo's chest.

In a flash, blood spurted from Huang Bo's nose, and he staggered as if drunk, his feet unsteady, until he collapsed heavily onto the ground.

The referee immediately began the countdown.

“Ten! Nine! ... One!”

“Su Jie wins!”

As soon as the referee declared the victory, the medical staff rushed in to carry Huang Bo out.

“Huang Bo's physical condition, combat experience, and martial arts skills surpass Su Jie's, yet he lost. This was a psychological defeat. From start to finish, Su Jie never fixated on winning or losing. He continuously misled and finally defeated the strong with the weak.” Sister Nie observed the entire match from backstage.

She grew increasingly impressed with Su Jie. Although, from her perspective, Su Jie's current skills were still lacking, and his strength and speed were average, his youth, sharp intuition, perfect physique, determination, and eagerness to learn made him an exceptional talent. If he chose to become a professional fighter, he could become a top-tier champion within a few years.

She understood well how a true martial arts champion could significantly benefit the academy, even elevating its global reputation.

“It's a pity this boy seems uninterested in the benefits of fame and still insists on focusing on his studies. I've already sent Uncle Mang and Gu Yang to persuade him. What method could possibly change his mind?” Sister Nie fell into deep thought.

Since Su Jie was unwilling to become a professional fighter, she couldn't force him into it.

“Reason with him? Entice him with rewards?”

While Nie Shuang pondered, Su Jie faced his second opponent.

As the victor, Su Jie could choose to continue fighting in the cage or take his winnings and leave. However, Su Jie felt he still had energy left and wanted to gain more practical combat experience. With only a month left before summer vacation ended, he knew he wouldn't have such great opportunities once academy started.

This place was practically a research institute for martial arts and combat. Everyone talked about training and sparring, and even children could throw a few punches in the charged atmosphere.

After informing the referee of his intention to proceed to the second round, the referee called in medical staff to examine Su Jie. Once they confirmed he could continue, arrangements were made for the next matchup via a computer draw.

“Second round: Su Jie versus Peng Haidong.”

Su Jie soon saw another participant enter the cage. Peng Haidong was about his size but lacked muscle tone, appearing untrained and physically slack. His overall demeanor was also loose and unfocused.

This young man, around twenty years old, seemed far less intimidating than Huang Bo, more like someone who had entered just for fun.

Facing such an opponent, Su Jie relaxed a little.

“Begin!”

As soon as the referee gave the signal, Peng Haidong, who seemed amateurish at first glance, suddenly sprang into action. His arm shot forward like a monkey's, snapping out with the speed and unpredictability of a whip, catching Su Jie completely off guard.

Slap!

Su Jie barely managed to flinch back, but Peng Haidong's arm still struck his forehead with a whip-like motion, leaving him momentarily dazed as if he'd been struck by a heavy chain.

Swish! Swish!

Peng Haidong seized the opportunity and pressed his attack. His footwork was swift and erratic, his arms whipping through the air with a force that created audible whooshes, each strike exuding menacing intent.

In just a few exchanges, Su Jie's arms and shoulders had been struck multiple times, turning red and swollen with searing pain that made them nearly immobile.

Had it not been for his training in endurance, Su Jie might have already lost his ability to fight back.

“What kind of martial art is this? It's not free fighting or mixed martial arts—it's traditional martial arts!” Su Jie was startled.

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Chapter 23: Martial Arts Have No Limits

Su Jie quickly calmed himself.

Although he had taken a few hits, he hadn't lost his combat ability. Su Jie realized it was his carelessness that had put him at a disadvantage. Seeing that his opponent didn't seem particularly strong, he hadn't taken the fight seriously, leading to a momentary setback where he was nearly overwhelmed by the opponent's rapid offensive.

'Engaging in combat happens in an instant. Even a master can be caught off guard and stunned by a weaker opponent if they aren't paying attention. This is especially true in street fights. It seems I didn't perform well and failed to maintain constant vigilance.'

Once Su Jie regained his composure, the situation took a sharp turn. He observed carefully and increased the distance between himself and his opponent. He noticed that although Peng Haidong's speed was impressive and his strikes carried significant power, his physical fitness was inferior to Huang Bo's.

Peng Haidong's advantage lay in his ability to generate sharp, fast, and precise bursts of power with a long reach.

However, no matter how far his strikes could reach, they were no match for weapons. Su Jie, trained in combat with weapons like knives and spears, quickly evaded Peng Haidong's attacks.

Two minutes later, Peng Haidong's speed slowed significantly as his stamina rapidly declined.

This was the difference between a professional and an amateur.

Su Jie's stamina was excellent. He had undergone physical conditioning and endurance training under the world's best martial arts coaches. His rigorous conditioning, particularly the practice of hard-style martial arts, gave him extraordinary endurance.

When Peng Haidong's stamina waned and his movements slowed, Su Jie seized the opportunity. He lunged forward with a move resembling a farmer's hoeing motion.

However, Su Jie didn't use his full strength. Instead, he held back, applying only seventy percent of his power. When his palm struck Peng Haidong's face, it was a push rather than a strike.

Peng Haidong's vision darkened, and the immense force to his chest caused him to stumble and fall to the ground.

After falling, Peng Haidong quickly slapped the ground, signaling his surrender.

"Su Jie wins!"

The referee announced.

According to MMA rules, even after falling, a competitor could still continue by using punches or grappling techniques, as long as kicks weren't involved. However, Peng Haidong was experienced enough to know that this was just a small-scale match, and there was no need to fight to the bitter end. Recognizing his obvious disadvantage, surrendering was the sensible choice.

Having won two matches in a row, Su Jie felt invigorated. His abundant stamina, thanks to Odell's excellent training regimen, was one of his key strengths. It was no wonder Nie Shuang valued him so highly.

"Still want to fight?"

Su Jie nodded to the referee. His answer stirred a discussion among the audience.

The spectators of this small-scale arena were martial artists, professionals, and even some seasoned coaches or prominent figures from other martial arts academies.

"Old Li, this one's a good prospect."

In the VIP section, a few elderly and middle-aged individuals observed the match. Judging by their demeanor, they were respected veterans or martial arts academy leaders.

One of the elderly men nodded repeatedly as he spoke to another, “This young man’s physical development is excellent, his stamina is abundant, and his mental composure is first-rate. His techniques, while still immature, are authentic and not flashy. He consistently relies on that one ‘farmer’s hoe’ move. This is commendable. Most young people today are fickle, chasing novelty and learning a multitude of techniques without mastering any.”

The elderly man, known as Old Li, was evidently well-respected. His sharp evaluation of Su Jie was spot on.

“If this student belonged to Minglun Martial Arts Academy, he would undoubtedly shine within two or three years. Old Li, are you thinking of recruiting him for your Yangming Martial Arts Academy?” someone asked. “If you don’t make a move, I will. Finding a promising talent these days is no easy feat. They must be intelligent, hardworking, and physically fit. It’s rare—very rare.”

“Let’s see how it goes,” Old Li replied, still observing Su Jie with the keen eye of a teacher spotting a raw gem. “Peng Haidong’s Tongbei techniques are well-practiced—sharp, precise, and fast. But his physical fitness is lacking. He places too much faith in static stances and meditative training, which might work against ordinary opponents but fails against tougher ones. Old Peng’s son is clever but unwilling to endure hardships. That’s his downfall.”

“Old Peng’s Tongbei skills are exceptional. Back in the day, his training was grueling. His son refuses to suffer the same hardships, but he’s still managed to develop the essence of Tongbei. That’s unique in its way.”

“Compared to this Su Jie, young Peng still falls short.”

Unbeknownst to Su Jie, his performance had caught the attention of many martial arts academy leaders.

These veterans had nurtured countless martial arts talents, and their discerning eyes could easily spot promising prospects.

Of course, the same principle applied to academics—exceptional students were highly sought after by teachers across classes and academies. Su Jie himself had been pursued in a similar manner. During his transition from middle to high academy, he had topped the entire region's entrance exams.

“Round three! Su Jie versus Wu Cheng!”

After a medical evaluation confirmed Su Jie's ability to continue, the referee arranged the third match.

“Wu Cheng is a professional athlete, a member of the provincial team. He's participated in numerous professional matches. Although he hasn't reached the national level, he ranks among the top in the province.”

“With Wu Cheng entering the ring, this young man doesn't stand a chance. His winning streak will end here.”

“Wu Cheng has been undergoing intense training in preparation for the upcoming national selection trials. He’s aiming to join the national team and is using this match as a warm-up.”

As Su Jie’s next opponent, Wu Cheng, stepped into the arena, the atmosphere grew noticeably more electric.

Su Jie felt a chill rise in his heart as he watched Wu Cheng step into the arena. Without looking at the man’s build or movements, his instincts told him that this was an opponent he couldn’t match.

Wu Cheng was a young man of about twenty, but there wasn’t a hint of youthful naivety on his face; instead, it bore a mature and seasoned expression.

Dressed in shorts and bare-chested, Wu Cheng's body was coated with a layer of oil, giving his bronze-toned skin a polished gleam. His muscles were smooth and well-defined, especially his waist, where his ribcage tapered dramatically into his hips. The striking contours resembled the sleek build of a running hound—typical of someone with exceptional core strength.

"Begin!"

At the referee’s command, Su Jie and Wu Cheng squared off.

Wu Cheng's prowess as a professional fighter became immediately apparent. He made no initial probing moves, instead sliding forward with swift steps, his feints and shifts so precise that it was impossible to tell real attacks from fake ones.

Su Jie instinctively widened the distance between them, relying on his tried-and-true method: avoid close combat at all costs.

Even if Wu Cheng was a professional, he was still just a man—one head, two arms, and two legs—not some mythical being with multiple limbs.

Besides, Su Jie had trained with Odell regularly. Compared to Odell, Wu Cheng was at least two or three levels inferior.

Su Jie maintained his strategy, retreating constantly and avoiding direct confrontation. Anytime Wu Cheng approached, Su Jie would run in the opposite direction. He had no intention of attacking, instead aiming to frustrate his opponent into making a mistake, just as he had done with Huang Bo.

What if Wu Cheng was a professional? The octagonal cage was spacious enough for him to evade effectively.

For five full minutes, Su Jie focused solely on evasion, biding his time for an opening that never came.

Wu Cheng, however, remained expressionless, his movements mechanical yet relentless. He pursued, intercepted, and cornered Su Jie tirelessly. His stamina was extraordinary, and on several occasions, his punches and kicks grazed Su Jie's arms and legs, leaving bruises but never landing cleanly.

Wu Cheng's strikes were incredibly powerful, living up to his reputation as a professional. Although Su Jie managed to protect his vital areas and avoid being knocked out, the areas where he was struck began to swell.

"Time's up."

The referee called an end to the match after five minutes.

"Su Jie is disqualified for passive play," the referee announced.

"Passive play?" Su Jie was stunned. He had expected to lose based on points, but being penalized for passivity was unexpected.

After leaving the cage, he quickly looked it up on his phone and discovered that in competitive matches, evading without counterattacking could result in disqualification for being overly passive.

Passive play was a serious offense—not just a loss but one that could lead to future bans and disqualification from professional fighting. After all, even in combat sports, entertainment value was crucial. It was a sport, not a life-or-death struggle.

In real combat, survival by any means was the ultimate goal.

“It seems I’m not suited for professional fighting,” Su Jie reflected. “But participating in these matches occasionally is great for martial arts training.”

Though the match ended with a disqualification for passivity, Su Jie felt even less inclined to pursue a professional fighting career. It wasn’t his path, merely a side pursuit in his life.

However, he had promised Odell that he would compete in a few professional matches under his name. Su Jie knew he needed to prepare.

Returning to his dorm, he rubbed some medicinal oil on his bruises, relaxed, and took deep breaths to ease the tension.

Soon, his phone chimed with a notification—4,000 yuan deposited.

It was the prize money for his two victories.

“Not bad. Earning money this fast? But without some skill, it’d be impossible,” Su Jie mused.

Reflecting on the three matches, he realized he had won the first through patience, the second by outlasting his opponent, and had been thoroughly defeated in the third. Wu Cheng had outclassed him in technique, stamina, and mental fortitude.

Yet even in defeat, Su Jie gained valuable experience.

Satisfied, he fell into a deep sleep.

The next morning, Su Jie woke at three a.m. as usual. The swelling on his bruises had subsided considerably, though some areas still throbbed faintly.

Undeterred, he continued his training regimen—strength, endurance, and techniques—spending the entire day drenched in sweat and focus.

That evening, Su Jie returned to his routine of swatting flies off glass panes before seeking out Uncle Mang for a massage.

“You went to a match yesterday? Your body has a lot of soft tissue injuries,” Uncle Mang noted as he began the massage. “Afterward, I want to try an acupuncture experiment on you.”

“Acupuncture experiment?” Su Jie asked, puzzled, but he trusted that it would benefit him.

“This will hurt—a lot. Only you could endure it,” Uncle Mang said, pressing into Su Jie’s muscles.

After enduring what felt like hellish pain, Su Jie experienced a euphoric lightness. Uncle Mang’s massages, as painful as they were, had become something Su Jie looked forward to.

Chapter 24: The Ancient and Modern Acupuncture Techniques

“Come, drink this wine.”

After the massage, Uncle Mang took out a jar of wine from his box. He handled it carefully, as if cradling a priceless antique. He poured a small cup and handed it to Su Jie.

Once Su Jie drank it, he immediately felt a burning sensation in his stomach that spread throughout his body. It gradually transformed into a cooling wave, leaving him feeling incredibly comfortable. His mind was in a semi-intoxicated state, as if he had ascended to immortality.

“What kind of wine is this?”

Su Jie was instantly captivated by the taste, feeling as if it could grant immortality. It completely numbed his nerves, leaving him unsure whether it was a blessing or a curse.

“At times, the four elements intoxicate me, and I ask the heavens, who am I?”

Uncle Mang quoted, “These lines are from a poem by Daoist Wang Chongyang, found in the book ‘The Fundamentals of Life and Nature’ (‘Xingming Guizhi’). They describe the mental state of Daoist cultivation. The ‘four elements’ refer to earth, water, fire, and wind—the fundamental components of the world as described in Buddhism. Daoists borrow this concept to depict a state of mind where one feels unified with these elements, a euphoric condition akin to immortality.

“In reality, drinking alcohol in moderation can stimulate the mind, excite the cerebral cortex, and elevate adrenaline levels, making one fearless and energetic. This wine, however, was crafted by Liu Guanglie, who combined an ancient recipe with cutting-edge extraction technology. It’s brewed with over a hundred types of Chinese medicinal herbs. It nourishes the blood and spirit, treats insomnia, nerve weakness, depression, and other mental illnesses. For healthy individuals, it boosts immunity. A single drop is more precious than gold. Last time, Nie Shuang and Zhou Chun gambled over this very wine. Now that you’ve had a small cup, both your spirit and body are in an optimal state, making it the perfect time for acupuncture.”

Uncle Mang’s face lit up with excitement, like a researcher making a groundbreaking discovery.

Su Jie had seen this kind of expression before—when his sister, Su Mochen, conducted her AI research.

He couldn’t help but feel a chill, as if Uncle Mang intended to dissect him.

Uncle Mang brought out a box of acupuncture needles. These silver needles were long and slender, looking intimidating at first glance.

Suddenly, he thrust a needle directly into Su Jie’s abdomen.

"Ah!"

Su Jie felt as if his internal organs were being turned inside out. This pain came from deep within, unlike the superficial discomfort of Uncle Mang's massage. It was more unbearable, as though something were trapped in his stomach, causing chaos.

While the massage had only affected Su Jie's surface tissues, the acupuncture felt like a trial for his internal organs—burning, freezing, cutting, and hammering all at once.

Uncle Mang continued to insert needles. Each time, Su Jie felt as if his organs were being grabbed and squeezed forcefully. Meanwhile, an unbearable itch seemed to spread deep within his bones, making him wish he could break them open to catch the imaginary ants crawling inside.

"This is to thoroughly regulate your body and awaken its potential," Uncle Mang said. "If you endure this, your physical condition will significantly improve. Do you know the principle behind acupuncture?"

During the massage, Su Jie could still converse, but now he couldn't utter a word.

Uncle Mang, understanding this, began explaining on his own. "The human body has self-healing capabilities. For instance, when you get a cut, nutrients and immune cells gather at the wound, promoting healing. Traditional medicine refers to the beneficial substances in the body—nutrients, immunity, etc.—as vitality."

Su Jie could only barely listen.

“In normal circumstances, vitality flows chaotically through the body, with no centralized control or storage. The core of traditional martial arts, health techniques, yoga, and meditation is to harness and harmonize this vitality, allowing it to flow where it’s needed to strengthen organs and the brain.”

“My acupuncture method combines traditional Chinese theories of acupuncture points and meridians with modern cellular biology, kinesiology, neuroscience, and human medicine. By using needles, I stimulate your internal layers to perform micro-surgery. These micro-injuries attract vitality to gather at the stimulated sites. Through repeated stimulation, it’s like clearing a blocked canal. Your vitality will follow a structured path, enhancing your physical strength and mental agility. This technique surpasses any massage in sophistication.”

Uncle Mang continuously pricked Su Jie with needles, gradually turning him into a hedgehog.

While needling, he recorded various experiences—not by writing but through audio recordings. Being blind, writing would have been of no use to him.

“When people overeat, the excess energy accumulates in the abdomen, forming fat. When someone experiences extreme hunger and cannot replenish their food supply, their body breaks down fat to generate energy, compensating for the body's consumption. In ancient times, when food was scarce, having fat on one’s body was a sign of health. To some extent, fat represents vitality in humans,” Uncle Mang explained. “Ancient Chinese medicine is based on two principles: first, taking various medicines to enhance the body's vitality; second, using acupuncture

and wellness techniques to direct this vitality to areas of illness, harnessing the body's immunity to eliminate pathogens. Essentially, it leverages the body's own capabilities. Medicine is merely an auxiliary tool. In contrast, modern medicine directly uses surgeries and drugs to forcibly eliminate issues, achieving quicker results.”

Uncle Mang continued recording: “In reality, there’s no such thing as Chinese medicine versus Western medicine. In ancient China, when medical knowledge was advanced, the West was still relying on bloodletting and witch hunts, with no hygiene practices, leading to plagues like the Black Death. But with the advent of microbiology in modern times, in-depth studies on human anatomy and pathogens laid the framework for modern medicine. So, there’s only ancient medicine and modern medicine. Ancient medicine centers on self-immunity, or vitality, while modern medicine relies on external forces. It’s fascinating to analyze this thoroughly.”

After turning Su Jie into a hedgehog, Uncle Mang continuously changed needles, extracting and reinserting them, even rotating them.

He treated Su Jie like a straw dummy, experimenting with his ideas. Of course, his experiments were safe and seemed rigorously tested. It’s just that no one else was willing to indulge his eccentricity until Su Jie came along.

When all the needles were finally removed, Su Jie felt as though his body was riddled with holes, leaving him feeling empty, like a deflated balloon.

He suspected that if he drank water, it might leak out through the needle marks all over his body.

Diary entries:

[August 2nd: After a day of training, I had Uncle Mang massage me. He performed acupuncture, claiming to stimulate vitality, leaving me feeling like I was on the brink of death, with my entire body leaking energy. However, his explanation made sense. His discussion about ancient and modern medical theories resonated with me and strengthened my resolve to study medicine and research life sciences in the future.]

[August 3rd: I continued practicing and sparred with Josh without protective gear. It's not as easy for him to land a hit on me anymore, but I'm still no match for him. In the evening, I smashed glass panels to swat flies, then had Uncle Mang massage and perform acupuncture. I figured if I could endure such pain, I could face anything in the future. I didn't participate in any competitions today.]

[August 4th: Today, I practiced techniques taught by Coach Odell and sparred with Josh again. In the evening, Josh and I participated in a small-scale arena competition. I surprisingly won six consecutive matches and earned twelve thousand yuan. My stamina seems to have improved—could Uncle Mang's acupuncture truly be enhancing my vitality? The arena competition is a way to make money if you have the skills, and as summer vacation comes to an end, more people are joining. After the matches, Josh also tried Uncle Mang's massage but couldn't endure a few pinches before quitting. Watching me undergo both massage and acupuncture left him staring at me as though I were an alien.]

[August 5th: After training all day, I participated in the arena competition as usual. This time, I won three consecutive matches. Unfortunately, I faced a professional opponent in the fourth round and lost due to passive play. As always,

I had a massage and acupuncture afterward. Today, Uncle Mang brought out a tiny amount of a ridiculously expensive liquor for me to taste—it was as comforting as gold. Hopefully, I won't get addicted.]

[August 6th: During today's practice, I perfected the 'Hoe Strike' technique, executing it smoothly without any hindrance—this must be the pinnacle of mastery. I practiced it thousands of times daily. Also, while smashing flies on glass panels, I finally succeeded in killing a fly without damaging the glass. My control over strength has significantly improved. In the evening, I won five consecutive matches in the arena, drawing considerable attention. Uncle Mang continued massaging and performing acupuncture while explaining more about the relationship between ancient and modern medicine. He also asked me to cooperate in his experiments, recording my physical changes and mental state, collecting data for comprehensive analysis. I'm curious about how he became blind. Despite his blindness, his accuracy in locating acupuncture points surpasses most sighted practitioners.]

[August 7th: After practicing and sparring with Josh during the day, I competed in the arena in the evening, winning eight consecutive matches. My opponents were enthusiasts, not professionals, so I could win with ease. Josh also participated but was unlucky, facing a professional in his first match. Despite this, their fight was evenly matched, and Josh only lost by points. Afterward, Josh swore that outside the ring, he could take down the professional in under thirty seconds on the street. I've now completed over thirty matches, gaining some experience, but I still lack real street-fighting knowledge. Of course, brawling is illegal, so I won't experiment unless absolutely necessary. I'm a good student and intend to keep my record clean. Uncle Mang's massages and acupuncture continued, and he seems invigorated in his research, like a mad scientist who rediscovered his passion.]

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Chapter 25: Defeating Josh, The Genius Turns Out to Be You

Diary entries:

[August 7th: I practiced martial arts alone. Coach Gu Yang was still teaching routines to the training class members, including Tai Chi and Long Fist. These martial arts moves are elegant and well-designed to attract attention. In today's society, martial arts are mainly for performance. Even ring matches are a form of performance; otherwise, terms like "passive fighting" wouldn't exist. I focused on practicing the "Hoe Strike" technique. While it isn't suitable for ring fights, it is highly effective for eliminating fierce enemies.

Additionally, my external martial arts training has significantly improved. During a small ring match today, my opponent's hook punch landed on my stomach. The

moment his fist touched my skin, my abdominal muscles instinctively tightened and relaxed, completely neutralizing the force. In the evening, Uncle Mang said this was an improvement in sensitivity—my body reacted without relying on signals from my cerebral cortex, developing a natural resistance to strikes. Many people train for ten years and still can't reach this level.

I owe my small success mainly to Coach Odell's foundational training and the guidance of Uncle Mang and Coach Gu Yang. Regular people don't get such opportunities. Of course, Coach Odell saw potential in me because I am diligent and resilient. Uncle Mang also valued me because I can endure intense pain.]

[August 8th: Still practicing martial arts, participating in matches, and doing massages. Today, I checked my bank account and found I had earned seventy to eighty thousand yuan in prize money! It's incredibly profitable. I haven't even entered professional matches, yet the earnings are this high. Professional matches must be even more lucrative, right? Wrong. Professional fighters endure harsher conditions, and most don't earn much.

Among the many martial arts schools and gyms hosting small ring matches in this area, only Minglun Martial Arts School profits. On online platforms, their matches dominate in popularity due to the "head effect." Many professional fighters come here to earn extra income, similar to how second- and third-tier celebrities turn to livestreaming.

Professional fighters, unless they are world-class with unmatched popularity, often struggle financially. This reality made me reconsider my future. As the old saying goes, "A man fears choosing the wrong career; a woman fears marrying the wrong man." Regardless, improving physical fitness is always beneficial.]

[August 9th: Today, I switched to training with a heavier iron hoe, weighing about 20 jin (approximately 10 kilograms), to strengthen my core. Uncle Mang suggested it, using weight to stimulate muscle groups. He complemented this with acupuncture to enhance the activity of my soft tissues and fascia.]

[August 10th: Martial arts training, swatting flies on glass, competing, acupuncture, and sleeping.]

[August 11th: Same as yesterday, nothing insightful to note.]

[August 12th: My savings have reached 138,000 yuan—all from prize money. However, as more students return to school after the summer break, small ring matches have become increasingly popular. I couldn't even register today. It seems this source of income is becoming unreliable.

The matches are attracting better competitors, including coaches and experts from other schools. The quick and straightforward format appeals to the masses, unlike professional matches, which drag on with lengthy introductions and build-up. Future entertainment trends will undoubtedly favor faster-paced activities.

Today, there were no matches. I felt restless.]

[August 13th: I paid the registration fee but still couldn't secure a spot. The venue was packed with people, and the atmosphere was electric. This embodies the true martial spirit of martial arts schools.

While martial arts promote courage, they must be paired with moral values to avoid fostering recklessness.]

[August 14th: For three consecutive days, I paid the registration fee but couldn't compete. My plan to gain more combat experience seems to be falling apart. Actual combat is the fastest way to improve martial arts skills. Many moves I don't understand during practice become clear in real fights, feeding back into my training.

My hammer technique for swatting flies is now more controlled, though still far from perfect. Uncle Mang said true mastery means using techniques freely to incapacitate opponents without causing harm.]

Half a month had passed, and September 1st, the start of school, was approaching. Su Jie should have been preparing to return, but he couldn't bring himself to leave this environment.

He knew this place represented a major opportunity, and missing it could change his life trajectory.

'Should I take a year off to train here? After all, I can keep up with my academic courses,' Su Jie thought. 'I've already self-studied all the senior year subjects—Chinese, math, physics, chemistry. None of it is challenging for me. I've completed many high-scoring mock exams, and I could still perform well in the college entrance exam even now.'

Returning to school felt inefficient. Staying here meant benefiting from Uncle Mang's research on his body and gaining extensive martial arts knowledge. Without Uncle Mang and this environment, his progress would slow significantly.

Su Jie valued efficiency and hated wasting time.

However, taking a year off to train while preparing for the college entrance exam was unlikely to gain approval from his parents, teachers, or principal.

At school, Su Jie was a top student and a focus of special cultivation. Proposing a leave of absence would lead to relentless persuasion and lectures from everyone, which was daunting to even imagine.

Unable to find a solution, Su Jie decided to focus on learning as much as he could in the time left.

August 15th.

After a full day of training, Su Jie finished dinner and went to the small ring match venue, hoping to register. On his way, he bumped into Josh, who had just exited the venue.

Josh patted Su Jie's shoulder and said, "It's too crowded inside. I couldn't get in. Don't waste your registration fee. How about we spar?"

"A spar? Sure," Su Jie nodded. "You attack, and I'll defend."

"No, we're really going to fight here. During training, having a good sparring partner and opponent is crucial. I've been watching your matches these past few days, and you're really strong. I didn't realize just how much you've grown. Today, I want to simulate a street fight with you, a real one. How about we go off-campus and do it?" Josh's tone was serious.

"This seems too dangerous." Su Jie was startled. He knew that Josh highly valued street fighting, believing it to be the true test of strength. On the arena, the fights were all staged, with fighters taking stances and waiting for the referee's signal—just a performance. But on the streets, anything could happen. Many martial arts champions had been killed in street fights with thugs.

"Please." Josh spoke earnestly, even bowing in the Japanese style. He had learned it when studying karate, and it was part of the traditional Japanese gesture for requests.

"Alright, alright." Su Jie knew Josh's character too well. If he refused, Josh would keep asking. Besides, after spending so much time together, they'd developed a strong friendship, so sparring a bit wouldn't hurt.

Without saying anything, Josh silently walked off-campus, with Su Jie following behind him.

The two of them arrived in a small alley outside the campus.

Su Jie saw Josh stop and couldn't help but ask, "Are we fighting here?"

Swish!

Josh suddenly turned around, his demeanor completely different from their usual training. He became fierce and vicious, raising his fist and striking. The vicious look in his eyes made it seem like he was facing an enemy he could never forgive. Su Jie's heart skipped a beat. If he hadn't participated in so many real arena battles, he might have been too slow to react.

In that split second, Su Jie's practiced move—the "Hoe Strike" technique—came into play. He leaned in, raised his arm, and covered his head, allowing Josh's punch to land on his arm.

As Josh's fist struck, Su Jie instinctively rotated his arm, diffusing the force. Then, with the power of a tiger pouncing from the mountains, he struck forward like swinging a hoe.

It was all instinctive; he hadn't thought about it much.

Josh seemed to have anticipated this move. He pulled his fist back, retreated, and slid his foot forward. His foot came up like a spear, kicking straight at Su Jie. This was the standard Thai kick—quick and fierce, with elements of boxing and traditional martial arts. It was one of the deadliest moves in street fighting.

In street fights, with the unpredictable terrain and the uncertainty of numbers, leg techniques were rarely used. In martial arts, lifting a leg was often too exposed, but the Thai kick was excellent for blocking an opponent's offensive.

However, such a kick couldn't be used in the arena, where techniques like whips and side kicks were more common.

Josh's kick seemed designed specifically for street fighting—small in range and subtle, but it perfectly blocked Su Jie's assault.

But as Su Jie lunged, his hand dug downward, landing squarely on Josh's leg, forcing his kick to be suppressed. The pain in Josh's foot was sharp.

Then, Su Jie quickly moved again, his hands digging and thrusting as he closed the distance between them.

Josh raised his hand to block.

At that moment, Su Jie's hand seized Josh's arm, yanking it downward, like a fight between street hooligans. In that tug, Josh seemed to lose his balance slightly.

Su Jie released the tug, arced his chest forward, and then launched another dig and thrust.

Bang!

The blows came down on Josh's head, striking hard.

Josh had no way to escape. Seeing the heavy blow coming, Su Jie transitioned from digging to pushing, exhaling forcefully, his abdomen swelling, and then he shoved Josh with the power of a mountain.

Thud!

Josh was sent crashing to the ground.

Su Jie himself hadn't even realized what had happened. All the moves he just made were purely instinctive. His mind hadn't processed them; it wasn't like a fight in the arena, where there was time to strategize and think.

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Chapter 26: Martial Arts Girl, Full of Hidden Dragons and Crouching Tigers

During the earlier scuffle, Josh suddenly launched a fierce attack on him, leaving only the move he had repeatedly practiced, the "Hoe Strike."

Indeed, in a street fight, no technique mattered—only instincts. Fortunately, Su Jie practiced this move thousands of times daily, making it second nature.

He realized that this move, in the middle of action, covered all directions.

Firstly, it mimicked a natural walking posture: arms hanging down close to vital areas like the abdomen and groin, ready to defend when needed. As the movement progressed, the hands rose to cover the head, the body lowered to protect the head and torso, and upon falling forward, shielded the chest and groin. Meanwhile, the elbows tightened against the ribs, guarding both sides. By crouching and curling, the body not only conserved energy but also reduced the area vulnerable to attacks.

This move proved surprisingly effective against sudden assaults or street brawls. Su Jie's understanding of it deepened.

“What a profound technique—guarding the head with the lift, neutralizing force with the turn, dodging with the shrink, building power with the twist, striking with the pounce, protecting the heart with the return, shielding the groin with the collapse, defending the ribs with the shake, chasing with the follow-through, exhaling with the release, intimidating with the roar, stabilizing with the retreat, and surveying with the settle. All thirteen principles are present.”

As Josh struggled to get up, a voice came from the other end of the alley—it was a girl observing them.

To Su Jie's surprise, it was Zhang Manman, a member of the martial arts summer training class. An American-born Chinese, she had returned to learn Chinese martial arts. Three days ago, Su Jie had already noticed her. During training, she exhibited great stamina while digging and would occasionally demonstrate Wing Chun moves from movies during breaks.

Of course, this wasn't unusual; most students at the martial arts academy had some background. What stood out was that Su Jie, a complete novice, had joined to learn from scratch.

“Zhang Manman,” Su Jie greeted her.

Zhang Manman's eyes sparkled as she looked at him.

She had coincidentally witnessed Su Jie and Josh's swift yet intense scuffle. Her shock was indescribable.

The fight had lasted only a few seconds—far less dramatic than a ring match—but it was a real brawl.

'Facing Josh's sudden attack, Su Jie raised his hands to protect his head, twisted to neutralize the force, then shrunk, twisted, and lunged. Midway, he dropped to block a kick, counterattacked with another lunge, then switched from striking to pushing. Finally, he leaped back, steadied himself, and surveyed his surroundings for more threats. The entire process took five seconds. Luckily, I habitually record videos, so I captured it,' Zhang Manman thought.

What impressed her most was Su Jie's transition from striking to pushing. It wasn't just ordinary martial arts. Even driven by combat instincts, he had the restraint not to cause harm. If his strike had landed earlier, the consequences would have been severe.

"I actually lost," Josh muttered, crestfallen as he stood up. He had eight years of combat experience, training in various martial arts, and never stopped practicing. Yet, he lost a street fight to a high schooler with just a month and a half of training!

"In street fights, luck plays a huge role. Even professional fighters can fall to a random thug," Zhang Manman said. "Josh, you underestimated the power of the 'Hoe Strike.' This move, though simple—a forward thrust—contains thirteen key principles and dozens of subtleties. It mimics animal hunting instincts, perfect for chaotic brawls. Your fitness, technique, and experience are solid, but lacking

knowledge of this move's intricacies, you fell into its trap. In ancient times, people would master one move through relentless practice to gain an advantage in sudden combat. If you familiarize yourself with its system, you can still defeat Su Jie."

Zhang Manman spoke in fluent English, as she had grown up abroad and could accurately convey Chinese cultural concepts in English.

"Do you know this move as well?" Su Jie asked.

"Of course, many martial artists do. But seeing it executed so masterfully is rare. It's like Muay Thai's simple sweeping kick—lifting the knee, rotating the hip, and sweeping. Beginners can use it, but world-class fighters make it terrifying in the ring. Sweeping kicks are long and powerful, perfect for the ring but less effective on the streets. In a complex street environment, the 'Hoe Strike' from Xingyi Quan is far more suitable," Zhang Manman explained.

"Su Jie, let's go again," Josh said, reviewing his loss. He realized he had underestimated the move's variations. With caution, he believed he wouldn't be defeated in five seconds again. His solid foundation was undeniable, but in street fights, even the strongest could fall victim to a moment of carelessness.

"Forget it," Zhang Manman waved her hand. "This kind of fighting is too dangerous—it's life or death. If you want real combat experience, come to the U.S. and register as a bounty hunter. Then, you can legally apprehend criminals, earn money, and gain experience. Fighting among friends isn't worth it."

"Bounty hunter? Are you sure that's not just a game?" Su Jie asked. He had seen the bounty hunter profession in games but didn't know it existed in real life.

"In the United States, there has long been a bounty hunter system. During the westward expansion, the West was chaotic, and the police couldn't handle everything. So the police stations would issue bounty notices for cowboys to make arrests. After several amendments to the law, the bounty hunter system was finally perfected, officially known as bail enforcement agents. For example, many criminals who pay huge bail amounts can be temporarily released, but if they escape after release, the police often lack the manpower to capture them. That's when bounty hunters step in," Zhang Manman explained. "Of course, modern bounty hunters mostly use guns and often have more authority than the police. If they know martial arts, that's even better."

Josh observed Zhang Manman's right index finger joint keenly. "Your hands show signs of frequent shooting. Are you a bounty hunter?"

"I've done it a few times," Zhang Manman nodded. "This time, I returned home to learn martial arts, hoping to develop the animal-like sensitivity within martial arts to better sense danger."

"Bounty hunters..." Su Jie was still mulling over this profession Zhang Manman mentioned. He felt it belonged to another world. In America, there existed such a group of people—gun-toting tough guys like those in Hollywood movies—roaming the dark corners of cities to capture criminals.

For someone like Su Jie, a good student who had been focused on academics since childhood, this kind of world was hard to imagine, though it did have a certain allure. Of course, he had no plans to go to the United States to become a bounty hunter at this stage. Staying in the country to study diligently was the best option, especially since he wasn't even an adult yet.

"We'll settle this on the ring later," Josh patted Su Jie on the shoulder. "I underestimated you earlier and got pushed down. That won't happen again."

"No problem." Su Jie himself wasn't entirely sure how he had managed to push Josh down earlier. He planned to reflect on it later. That five-second exchange had given him new insights.

"I've recorded the video. Let's exchange contact information, and I'll send it to you," Zhang Manman said. She was dressed in a black tracksuit and running shoes, her ponytail neat and tidy. She was tall, standing over 1.75 meters, with a fit and streamlined figure—a classic example of a fitness beauty. However, upon closer inspection, her aura was imposing. While most fitness beauties radiated softness, Zhang Manman seemed to possess a body of steel and iron beneath her appearance.

This was a trait only those who had trained in combat for years could discern.

Su Jie, who had been practicing martial arts intensively, understood that a body's toughness came from the coordination of muscles, tendons, and fascia. The elasticity derived from the relaxation and tension of these tissues was the key. The stronger the elasticity, the tougher the body—like the draw strength of an ancient bow.

This concept also aligned with what Chinese martial arts referred to as "inner strength."

When a person's intent shifted, their body could become soft and fluid like water or cotton at one moment, and as hard as porcelain or steel the next. This was a sign of profound inner strength. Such individuals had agility, explosive power, and reaction speeds far beyond ordinary people.

Understanding this principle and undergoing strict training, Su Jie could discern the depth of a practitioner's inner strength.

Undoubtedly, his classmate Zhang Manman was a master.

"You've worked as a bounty hunter. We should spar sometime," Josh's eyes lit up.

"Not today. I have some things to attend to and just happened to pass by," Zhang Manman declined Josh's invitation, then turned to Su Jie. "Your control over relaxation and tension is even better than mine. To master this, I spent three years practicing zhan zhuang (standing meditation). How did you achieve such skill in just a month? And I'm curious—how can you endure Uncle Mang's massages? Are you naturally super strong-willed, like Guan Yu scraping poison from his bone without even flinching?"

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Chapter 27: Electric Stimulation Training and Endurance Training

"I don't know either. I just endured it. But Uncle Mang's massage does indeed train muscle flexibility quickly, effectively enhancing one's strength," Su Jie explained to Josh and Zhang Manman. "You two should try to endure it; it's extremely beneficial for training."

"Forget it," Josh waved his hand dismissively. "I've tried it no less than five times, and I couldn't last more than ten seconds each time. It cost me fifteen thousand for nothing."

Uncle Mang had a rule: to receive his massage, you had to pay a deposit of three thousand. If you managed to endure an entire set of his massage techniques, the deposit would be refunded, and you could receive free massages in the future.

Unfortunately, so far, many had tried, but only Su Jie had succeeded in the wager. As a result, he became Uncle Mang's test subject and gained immense benefits from it.

"I've also tried several times, but I couldn't handle it," Zhang Manman admitted, shaking her head. "That's why I'm so curious about Su Jie. Uncle Mang is a

remarkable individual, and gaining his favor leads to rapid improvement in martial arts, almost like acquiring years of skill in a novel."

"Is it really possible to transfer martial arts skills?" Josh nearly jumped in excitement. "Ah, the magical land of Ch!na! Did it involve Qi transmission?"

"Science, Josh. You need to trust in science," Su Jie sighed, feeling exasperated. "The internal energy of Ch!nese martial arts is similar to the elasticity of full-body relaxation and tension, just like combat techniques. However, many of Ch!na's training methods are mysterious and can significantly enhance the limits of relaxation and tension. This results in extraordinary explosive power, such as the one-inch punch in Jeet Kune Do, which can send someone flying from a short distance. But techniques like that are more for show and rarely usable in real combat."

"True. The inch punch in Wing Chun looks impressive, but in a tense exchange, you need to have honed it through endless practice and countless battles to seize an opportunity to use it. Otherwise, even if you've learned it, you'll still get beaten by a boxer," Zhang Manman remarked, her gaze toward Su Jie increasingly impressed. Understanding such martial arts principles was rare, especially for a high schooler like Su Jie.

Ninety-nine percent of people still clung to the fantasy of martial arts from novels—things like walking on walls, attacking from a distance, or defying physics by stepping on one's own feet to fly.

Only those who truly understood martial arts knew it was deeply scientific, albeit vast and profound, becoming more fascinating the deeper one delved.

"Everyone has their own finishing move. What's your most practiced technique?" Josh asked Zhang Manman.

"This." Suddenly, Zhang Manman moved. She darted forward like a snake, her arms mimicking serpentine motions. Her fingers were joined together, forming a knife-hand strike rather than a fist.

In an instant, she was right in front of Josh, her fingers stopping just short of his eyes. A slight push, and his eyes would have been blinded.

"Wing Chun's 'Viper Strikes Out,'" Zhang Manman explained. "This is a technique banned in all combat sports, but it's perfect for women with weaker strength. Precision and speed are enough to deliver a fatal strike."

"So fast!" Su Jie exclaimed, observing the technique. It was a swift and deadly move, aiming straight for the eyes with no room for mercy. If he encountered this on the street, he would likely end up blinded.

He fell into deep thought.

"In that move just now, Zhang Manman's footwork resembled the 'Hoe Strike' technique. It's fast and powerful. But once you lunge forward, there's no variation—it's a direct kill. If the enemy dodges or blocks, you expose yourself. The 'Hoe Strike' is different; it combines a strike and a guard, allowing continuous attacks. Even if you miss, you can adapt and defend while preparing your next

move. It's an all-encompassing technique designed by ancient warriors after countless battles. However, as for the 'Viper Strikes Out,' its speed compensates for its lack of versatility. It's a single, decisive strike, capable of taking down even the strongest opponents by surprise. For women, mastering it might enable them to quickly subdue enemies..."

"Let's go." Josh patted Su Jie on the shoulder, pulling him out of his thoughts. "Let's check out the ring matches. I heard there's a national-level professional fight today."

"I'll head to Uncle Mang for a massage first," Su Jie replied. "Want to give it another shot?"

"No way. I don't want to experience that again." Josh shuddered. "Anyway, your endurance surpasses mine. We'll compete tomorrow."

"Tomorrow, Gu Yang will teach us something real, focused on combat. Our summer training class is ending soon, and in the last few days, there will be a competition with other classes. You two better not miss it," Zhang Manman called out. "Coach Gu Yang has true skills. The routines he's taught before were just for school regulations and earning a living."

"That I know. He's actually teaching us practical combat? Let's see what that's all about," Su Jie said, intrigued.

The three of them parted ways, and Su Jie once again headed to Uncle Mang's massage parlor.

This time, Uncle Mang seemed to have been waiting for him. The moment he heard Su Jie's voice, a smile appeared on his face, which gave Su Jie a bad feeling.

"I've been giving you massages and acupuncture for days, stimulating your entire body inside and out, causing your physical abilities to increase rapidly. Today, I'm going to take it up a notch," Uncle Mang said as he took out the usual silver needles. However, this time, the needles were attached to wires connected to a machine that was powered by electricity.

"What is this?" Su Jie asked, startled.

"This is electrotherapy, also known as transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation, or neuromuscular electrical stimulation. The principle is to use electric currents to stimulate muscle tissues, causing intense contraction and release while engaging motor neurons. This technology was already used in the former Soviet Union for training agents and even tried by Bruce Lee. Over the years, it has been refined, and now many professional athletes use it. The current strength and control vary depending on the person. Early in the 2000s, there was an experiment in which a weightlifter's strength increased by 40% after a few weeks of electrical stimulation. It's much more advanced now, with wearable microcurrent stimulation devices. Many celebrities wear them during workouts for better results. My electric stimulation is far more intense, though. Most people can't handle it, but if you can endure it, the benefits for your body are immense. This is an improved method based on the U.S. special agents' top-secret training techniques," Uncle Mang explained, leaving Su Jie feeling chills.

He had already experienced the hellish pain of Uncle Mang's massages.

Initially, Su Jie thought the massages were the most painful thing he'd ever endured, but the subsequent acupuncture proved to be a level of torment beyond imagining.

Now, Uncle Mang was planning to stimulate his muscles with electricity, using methods derived from U.S. special agent training.

Foreign agents were renowned for their endurance. Even when captured and tortured, they wouldn't divulge secrets. Su Jie believed he could endure some pain, but compared to U.S. agents, he felt like a child playing make-believe.

This was bound to be unbearable.

"Lie down and drink this wine to condition your body and put yourself in the best state. Otherwise, you might not get through this," Uncle Mang instructed. "Also, bite down on this chopstick to avoid accidentally biting off your tongue when the shocks hit."

"Do I have to do this?" Su Jie asked, growing more terrified.

"You don't have to, of course. I won't force you. But if you refuse, you'll miss a tremendous opportunity. And don't bother coming to me tomorrow; I won't treat you anymore," Uncle Mang said, his tone turning stern.

"Without Uncle Mang's massages and acupuncture, my training progress would slow down significantly. Besides, what's a little pain? Uncle Mang is a medical doctor and an expert in human anatomy. Even though it's painful, it won't harm my body," Su Jie thought. "I only have half a month left before I have to make my choice. I need to maximize my training time to improve my technique and physical fitness. Pain has proven effective in enhancing my martial arts training. Let's do it!"

"Fine, I'll go along with your experiment," Su Jie said.

"Good! You're a brave kid," Uncle Mang said, his face lighting up with joy. "Don't worry. Apart from the pain, it won't harm you. Once you get through this, your physical and psychological resilience will surpass that of professional athletes. If you can endure this kind of pain, your nerve resilience will be extraordinary. Taking punches will feel like a child tickling you. Plus, I'll provide you with sufficient nutrition. Aren't you starting school soon? With half a month left, this is enough time to enhance your motor neurons and boost your athletic potential several fold."

"Alright!" Su Jie downed the "strengthening wine" in one gulp, immediately feeling intoxicated yet relaxed. He knew this wine contained numerous nutrients to regulate the digestive system, cleanse the organs, and promote flexibility. It was a secret formula developed by the principal of Minglun Martial Arts Academy and refined by a modern research team. It was incredibly precious, but Su Jie only got to drink it occasionally when Uncle Mang forced a cup on him.

He lay on the bed and bit down on the chopstick.

At this moment, Uncle Mang inserted a needle into the "Mingmen" (Life Gate) point on his back.

The Mingmen acupoint, as described in traditional Chinese medicine, was one of the body's most crucial points. Its name alone, "Life Gate," indicated its significance.

"The Mingmen is located at the lumbar spine, corresponding to the navel on the front of the body. It governs the central nervous system of the spine and controls the waist, knees, and even the soles of the feet. It's the key to physical strength. In internal martial arts training, one of the most important principles is to push out the Mingmen. This means the lower back must exert force, with energy and blood flowing to this point to achieve stability like a mountain," Uncle Mang explained while calibrating the device. A computer connected to the machine emitted a series of beeping sounds as it ran diagnostics.

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Chapter 28: Muscle Activation and the Union of Inner and Outer Techniques

Su Jie recalled how, during his training with Odell, the first step involved focusing strength on the small of his back, aligned with his navel, creating elasticity. If he couldn't grasp it initially, Odell would use acupressure techniques to induce pain,

forcing Su Jie to resist and channel his strength. Over time, with just a thought, Su Jie could concentrate power on his lower back, which grew increasingly strong.

In martial arts, the waist is considered the ruler of the body, the source of all strength. Yet, it is also the most vulnerable part. All martial arts include waist training. Whether it's hammer swinging, tire rolling, or weightlifting, they all serve to strengthen the waist. However, the waist is prone to injuries during such training.

"Focus now, adjust your mind, and prepare for stimulation," Uncle Mang said as he adjusted the machine before pressing a button.

Click!

In an instant, Su Jie experienced unbearable pain throughout his body. The pain was indescribable, far exceeding that of being sliced to death—ten times worse, even surpassing the pain of childbirth. Someone with weaker nerves would have passed out immediately.

Fortunately, Su Jie had a wooden chopstick in his mouth; otherwise, he might have bitten off his tongue. Even so, the chopstick was bitten into pieces.

"Here, bite down on this rubber pad," Uncle Mang said, replacing the chopstick with a pad.

At this point, Su Jie realized his lower body was soaked. The intense pain had caused him to lose control, resulting in both urinary and fecal incontinence.

Uncle Mang was unfazed, swiftly helping Su Jie change his clothes and take a shower. He also replaced the massage table before continuing the stimulation.

"That was just to give you a taste of what top-tier agents go through in daily training. Among all forms of torture, electric shocks are the most cruel and inhumane. However, if used correctly, they can also serve as a vital method to enhance physical capabilities. In ancient Chinese philosophy, the 'I Ching' states that 'Thunder emerges from the mountain, and all things spring forth.' Scientifically, amino acids, the building blocks of life, were believed to have formed when lightning struck the ocean, creating the earliest cells. Electric stimulation is a modern, scientifically validated training method. Even pacemakers rely on electrical principles to stimulate cardiac and pulmonary function. Your loss of control is normal. With repeated exposure, your nerves will adapt," Uncle Mang explained.

"Let's do it again," Su Jie gritted his teeth. The thought of enduring a second round was daunting. Compared to the earlier electric stimulation, the pain from massages and acupuncture was insignificant.

After all, this was the first time pain had caused him to lose control of his bodily functions.

"This is one of the training regimens for the world's top agents. Just imagine how terrifyingly resilient those elite agents must be," Su Jie thought, deeply shocked by the sheer determination of such individuals.

Buzz, buzz, buzz...

The second round of electric stimulation began. Even though Su Jie was mentally prepared, fully focused, and employing all his strength, the electric current completely overwhelmed him. His muscles lost all control, rendering any tension or relaxation utterly useless.

'I once read a news report about internet addiction centers using electric shocks to treat students. Those who were shocked became docile and stopped playing games. Now, I finally understand how horrifying it is. This is pure hell,' Su Jie thought, unable to articulate his feelings.

Fortunately, after each session, Uncle Mang applied medicinal ointments and had Su Jie drink a tonic.

"You've undergone hard-body conditioning, so your tolerance is much higher than that of ordinary people. Consider this: in the past, revolutionaries captured by the Ja*panese endured electric shocks and other tortures but never revealed a word. The human spirit can be unimaginably strong. Also, I've calibrated the electric current to suit your body's limits using a computer algorithm, ensuring maximum training efficiency," Uncle Mang explained. "This artificial intelligence system, which I brought back from abroad, makes precise adjustments to the stimulation. Only AI can provide such optimized training, far beyond human capability."

"So that's why," Su Jie thought, suddenly understanding why Odell, despite being a top-tier martial arts coach, was outclassed by artificial intelligence. The precision required to enhance a human body's potential through electric stimulation was beyond human capability.

"Has Minglun Martial Arts Academy adopted this training method?" Su Jie asked.

"Not yet. No one is willing to endure this level of pain. Without pushing the body to its limits, the effects are minimal. Of course, it's still beneficial, but it won't lead to significant breakthroughs. Those who can't even handle my massages could never endure this training," Uncle Mang replied. "As martial artists, we must embrace modern advancements to stay ahead."

Zzzzzz...

The faint electric current stimulated his body once again.

Su Jie felt as though he was dying over and over, but each time, he used his willpower and nervous control to resist by coordinating his muscles and bones.

Two hours passed, and Su Jie was drenched in sweat. He felt more exhausted than training nonstop for ten days and nights.

"That's it for today's stimulation. We'll continue tomorrow," Uncle Mang's words filled Su Jie with an overwhelming urge to escape from this place forever.

Dragging his body, which felt as if it might collapse at any moment, back to the bedroom, Su Jie still gritted his teeth and persisted in writing in his journal.

[August 15th: I actually managed to beat Josh in a street fight once, but I think if we fought a few more rounds, I'd probably lose more than I'd win. Zhang Manman turned out to have been a bounty hunter—what a fascinating world. I really need to go abroad someday to broaden my horizons.

Today, I endured the electric current stimulation from the agent training. It was unbearable. I'm just a high school student. Shouldn't I be focusing on my studies instead of enduring this torture? Should I quit tomorrow? No, Su Jie, you've already endured so much. How can you not push through this final challenge?

This electric stimulation is the most modern training method. My martial arts, if subjected to long-term training like this, might reach a level unimaginable to ordinary people. Uncle Mang is providing me with experimental data through this training, along with fortified wine and plenty of nutritional supplements.

I think I have to persevere to reap the greatest rewards. If I back down now, how will I achieve great things in the future? How will I defeat that person...?]

Though utterly exhausted, Su Jie meticulously documented his psychological changes and the events of his day.

Then, he climbed into bed and fell into a deep sleep using the "Great Corpse State."

He slept so soundly that he completely lost consciousness.

At 3 a.m., he woke up, feeling entirely refreshed. It seemed that the electric stimulation not only pushed his limits but also alleviated his fatigue and eased his mind.

He searched online using his phone and discovered that many professional athletes abroad also used electrode massages to relieve lactic acid buildup in their muscles and reduce fatigue, which enhanced their performance.

Uncle Mang's electric stimulation, however, was far more scientific and precise.

Hungry!

That was Su Jie's first physiological reaction upon waking.

He realized that the electric stimulation likely caused his muscles to tense up and consume a lot of Qi.

Thankfully, his bedside was stocked with plenty of nutritional supplements like chocolate and Qi bars. With 130,000 yuan in his pocket—earned from small arena fights—he was far from lacking money.

If not for the recent overcrowding that limited his participation, he might have earned even more.

After eating a few pieces of chocolate and Qi bars to ease his hunger, Su Jie went to the bathroom, washed up, and drank warm water—something he always did to maintain the warmth of his digestive system.

Odell had once taught him this small but important trick. During physical activity, the body's internal heat is expelled through sweat, leaving the internal organs cold. Drinking cold water afterward only makes it worse, leading to a weakened stomach and spleen over time. Warm water, however, restores internal warmth and helps maintain the body's overall balance.

Never underestimate such details—they're the key to sustaining peak physical condition.

After breathing exercises to expel the turbid air from his lungs, Su Jie practiced Odell's joint exercises and flexibility routines. He felt noticeably lighter, and movements that once felt stiff now flowed effortlessly.

"Could the electric stimulation really have such a significant effect?" he muttered to himself, surprised by his clear improvement.

When he focused his thoughts on a particular part of his body, that area would harden like iron. The moment he shifted his focus away, the area would immediately relax, soft and powerless like cotton.

"Have my martial arts progressed again?" Su Jie gleefully continued practicing different movements. He even managed to increase his push-up sets.

"Not bad! When Qi and strength align, and intention and Qi unite, you achieve the Six Harmonies. Any punch that incorporates the Six Harmonies qualifies as internal martial arts. Without it, it's merely external martial arts. The so-called distinction between internal and external martial arts is really about levels of mastery. External means being an outsider, while internal means you've entered the inner circle.

Even in kickboxing, if your movements achieve the Six Harmonies, it's internal martial arts. Without them, it's external."

At 5 a.m., during Su Jie's training, he happened to run into Gu Yang, who was also out for exercise.

"I understand that Chinese martial arts emphasize the Six Harmonies: the external harmonies of hands and feet, elbows and knees, and shoulders and hips are straightforward enough to grasp. But what exactly are the internal harmonies of mind and intention, intention and Qi, and Qi and strength? Coach, could you explain it to me?" Su Jie immediately asked.

Having gained limited knowledge from Odell due to time constraints, he seized every opportunity to learn more. At this stage, he had completed the basic physical shaping exercises and needed to rely on his own comprehension while absorbing a wealth of theoretical knowledge.

Ancient martial arts manuals and theories had now become invaluable resources to him.

For ordinary people, ancient manuals might seem like nothing more than martial arts myths. Even if given a hundred books, they wouldn't understand them. But for Su Jie, these resources held great potential.

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Chapter 29: Understanding Intent, The Nature of a Genius

Gu Yang stared intently at Su Jie for a long moment.

Over the past few days, as Gu Yang taught the routine classes, Su Jie hadn't attended any. Instead, he had been training diligently on his own and participating in competitions. Gu Yang understood and didn't interfere because this was the right approach—greed for more often leads to failure.

However, for the foreign students, such an approach was unavoidable. After learning, they would return home to showcase their skills.

Martial arts require relentless practice, not something that can be mastered overnight.

Even Su Jie, as talented as he was, couldn't be considered a master yet. At best, he was an outstanding student.

Still, Gu Yang was more than willing to share more knowledge with him.

"The concept of the 'inner three harmonies' is indeed difficult to grasp," Gu Yang began. "Even seasoned traditional martial artists often fail to truly understand it. In ancient times, it was something you could only feel but not explain. However, modern science has given us tools to guide our understanding."

Gu Yang continued, "This is why martial arts must be approached scientifically."

Su Jie listened quietly, absorbing the knowledge.

"Mind, intent, Qi, and strength—you need to understand these four elements," Gu Yang said, pausing as if contemplating the best way to explain. "For instance, the harmony between mind and intent: the mind represents holistic thinking. If I have a thought of attacking you, that thought is the intent. The origin of intent is the mind. Does that make sense to you?"

"The mind is like a tank of pure, clear water," Su Jie immediately responded. "But over time, microorganisms, even insects and mosquitoes, might grow in it. These things that emerge are the intent—our thoughts."

"Wow!" Gu Yang, usually calm and composed, couldn't help but curse in astonishment. "You're a genius! An absolute genius!"

"No, no, I'm not," Su Jie replied, blushing at Gu Yang's praise.

"The harmony between mind and intent means that once you have the thought of attacking me, you must eliminate all other thoughts," Gu Yang explained.

"Ordinary people might think of striking someone, but then they hesitate. They worry: Should I do it? What if I hurt them? What are the consequences? This indecision slows them down. In martial arts, hesitation is the enemy. As the saying goes, 'Better to take one step forward in action than to waver in thought.'"

"'Better to take one step forward in action than to waver in thought,'" Su Jie echoed, recalling a line from a martial arts film he had watched. "In simple terms,

it means don't hesitate. Act when the time is right. That's the harmony between mind and intent."

"Exactly." Gu Yang nodded in admiration. "Don't underestimate this. It's the key to defeating your opponent—decisiveness and courage. Take the Xuanwu Gate Incident, for example. If Li Shimin had hesitated, history would have been rewritten."

"What about the harmony between intent and Qi?" Su Jie asked.

"Once you've decided to act, you must execute without delay. For example, if you use the move 'Hoe Strikes the Ground' against me, you first crouch, then leap forward, twisting your waist. The intent to attack starts with exerting force through your feet, transferring through your body. This intent must travel instantly, directing your entire body to perform the move flawlessly. This is the harmony between intent and Qi. Qi refers to the nerve signals controlling muscle tension and relaxation, creating explosive power."

Gu Yang used modern scientific explanations to discuss traditional Chinese martial arts.

"And the harmony between Qi and strength?" Su Jie asked, now fully engaged.

"That's your skill of smashing a fly on a glass pane without breaking the glass. It's about moving with ease and controlling your strength. Once you've mastered this,

you can control your force to push or strike without causing serious harm but still demonstrate your power."

"To adjust strength freely and act with precision," Su Jie nodded, having fully grasped the meaning of mind, intent, Qi, and strength in martial arts.

"Let's go have breakfast," Gu Yang said. "Today, I'll teach you Sanshou (free hand) techniques. They're very practical for combat. You should join the class. It will enhance both your fighting skills and physical condition. Martial arts aren't practiced in isolation; they're developed through interaction. Without exchange, there's no martial arts. No one ever mastered martial arts by training alone in the wilderness."

The academy cafeteria opened early, and the food was always abundant. There were basic options like steamed buns, porridge, and fried dough sticks, but there were also high-end offerings like bird's nest porridge and health-focused meals.

Su Jie, not short on money, ordered a 558-yuan nutrition and strength-building meal. He even ordered one for Gu Yang.

A single breakfast cost over a thousand yuan—highway robbery! But Su Jie thought it was worth it. The food at Minglun Martial Arts Academy was prepared by a team of professional chefs. Although the prices were much higher than those at nearby academies, the cafeteria was always crowded. The taste and presentation rivaled five-star hotels, and some of the health-focused dishes even had remarkable restorative effects.

"It seems you've earned quite a bit of money from competitions," Gu Yang remarked, leisurely enjoying the meal offered by his student without any hesitation. "Training is a money-burning endeavor. Hundreds of thousands, millions, even tens of millions can go into it. Internationally renowned boxing champions spend millions, even tens of millions of dollars annually on their physical training and maintenance."

"Excuse me, Coach. I'll focus on eating first," Su Jie replied, adhering strictly to the principle of eating in silence, concentrating fully on his meal without any distractions. Over time, he had started to reap the benefits of this habit, boasting exceptional digestion and gastrointestinal health.

Gu Yang watched as Su Jie ate his breakfast with composure, completely absorbed in the process, as if entering a unique state of focus.

Su Jie ate a substantial amount during this meal. In addition to finishing a large bowl of nourishing porridge, medicinal noodle soup, and a health-boosting set meal, he consumed ten boiled eggs and a variety of fruits.

He ate methodically, chewing thoroughly, and followed it up by massaging his stomach and swallowing in a deliberate manner. His routine was as strict as military regulations, without a single deviation.

The more Gu Yang watched, the more astonished he became.

'Such rigorous self-discipline, extending even to the act of eating—this is exceedingly rare, even among adults, let alone students. This is the hallmark of a potential achiever. While such traits don't guarantee success, they significantly increase the likelihood, especially in the field of martial arts and combat sports, where this kind of discipline is invaluable.'

Even with Gu Yang's stringent standards, he couldn't help but feel a ripple of admiration.

Initially, he hadn't paid much attention to Su Jie since the student had no foundational background in martial arts. However, over the past seven days of digging and tilling the soil—tasks that tested endurance and resilience—Su Jie had demonstrated his capacity for hard work and his ability to discern the martial principles hidden within labor. This showcased both intelligence and diligence, qualities of a good student.

Of course, that alone wasn't extraordinary.

Every academy has its share of hardworking and intelligent students. What truly set Su Jie apart was his rapid progress later on, bolstered by training under a mysterious mentor. This wasn't just a matter of being a good student—it was a matter of luck and opportunity.

Never underestimate the power of opportunity; it is a critical factor in success. Luck is also a part of one's strength. Throughout history, many individuals—no

matter how intelligent, diligent, or capable—failed to achieve success because they lacked that bit of luck.

"Fate first, opportunity second, environment third, virtue fourth, and knowledge fifth," Gu Yang sighed. "Intelligence, diligence, luck, and strict execution combined with self-discipline—such a person is bound to succeed and achieve great things in any field."

"Coach, what are you saying?" Su Jie asked, stopping his stomach massage and swallowing practice. He felt thoroughly comfortable, his organs warm and content, his energy replenished.

"Nothing," Gu Yang replied, standing up. "It's time for class."

The two of them headed to the training field. It was 6:30 in the morning, and the golden sunlight bathed the entire academy in a radiant glow.

The academy's training field was vast, and it was abuzz with activity. Many official martial arts academy students had returned and started their training, filling the air with thunderous shouts that swept away the stillness of the previous month.

Morning exercises were critical, so martial arts students never missed the opportunity to train.

"Did you offend Coach Zhou Chun?" Gu Yang suddenly asked as they rejoined the team.

"Coach Zhou Chun?" Su Jie recalled the man who had lost a bet to Nie Shuang and forfeited a jar of wine. "What about him? Here's what happened..."

He recounted the incident to Gu Yang, his vigilance heightened.

"You made him lose a jar of internal-strength wine?" Gu Yang's eyes widened as he listened. "Do you have any idea how expensive that wine is? You've seriously offended him now. Zhou Chun is narrow-minded and extremely devious, and he holds significant influence in this region. Be cautious. Also, if he tries to provoke you or push you into signing a club contract, do not sign it."

"A club contract?" Su Jie nodded. "Got it."

Nie Shuang, Uncle Mang, and others had previously told him that joining the academy's professional team and competing in professional martial arts tournaments would provide access to the best training conditions and the highest salaries and bonuses. However, Su Jie had already decided against going professional. He intended to focus on academics, acquire knowledge, and eventually delve into research on human life sciences.

He understood that enhancing the human body and pursuing the highest realm of martial arts could not be achieved solely through relentless training or competition. Only science could facilitate a complete transformation.

Su Jie's perspective was different from that of Odell, one of the world's top combat coaches. After artificial intelligence surpassed his core training techniques, Odell scoured the globe in search of "supernatural" powers to prove himself superior to AI in training and understanding the human body.

But Su Jie disagreed with that approach. He had been raised with a scientific mindset and believed in embracing science. To him, everything should be approached with a scientific attitude and perspective.

In fact, the machine used by Uncle Mang to stimulate the body with electrical currents, controlled by an AI system, was an example of artificial intelligence at work. While Su Jie didn't fully understand its core principles, he planned to study it thoroughly in the future and intended to discuss it with his sister.

Su Jie's sister specialized in artificial intelligence research.

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Chapter 30: The Long-Armed Apes Grappling Techniques

"I wonder if that guy is still bothering my sister." Su Jie's thoughts wandered from professional tournaments to Odell, then to artificial intelligence research, and

finally to his sister, Su Muchen, as well as the young master who had been harassing her. It was precisely because of this person that Su Jie decided to learn martial arts. Sometimes, personal strength truly makes a difference.

"You've been training for so many days now. I've taught you digging and carrying loads—these are foundational skills. Then, I introduced you to various martial arts forms. Some of you might think these are just flowery techniques, impractical in real combat. But just watch," Gu Yang began his lecture. "Frankly speaking, you're all participants in a short-term summer training camp. In just two months, you can't truly learn martial arts. Mastery takes at least three to five years, commonly ten to twenty years, or even a lifetime. In these two months, all I can do is teach you the correct training methods so you won't waste time or go down the wrong path. According to the academy's schedule, the last half month will focus on teaching you the practical applications of forms—specifically grappling combat."

"Grappling? Is it the same as sanda? I've studied that before," Boone, a burly man, said with a disappointed look. "Sanda is just a few basic moves: straight, hook, and swing punches, along with front, side, and whip kicks. Combine those, and it's freestyle at best. It's not even as effective as Muay Thai with its elbows and knees."

"Grappling is not sanda," Gu Yang corrected. "Grappling encompasses numerous techniques from traditional martial arts—moves to subdue the enemy with a single strike or successive attacks. You can use any technique. Boone, come here."

Boone, who had been knocked down by Gu Yang with one move previously, already had a significant fear of him. Although he was the troublemaker of the group, he didn't dare disobey Gu Yang's orders.

"You've studied Muay Thai, right? Attack me," Gu Yang instructed. "Use anything—elbows, knees, kicks, throws—whatever you want."

"Then here I come." Boone, a complete pragmatist, never held back. He was even more straightforward than Josh.

Adopting a combat stance, Boone swayed left and right, feinting attacks. This was a deceptive boxing technique. Suddenly, his legs shifted, and he launched a sweeping kick.

'That's a good move,' Su Jie thought, slightly startled as he observed. This was a standard maneuver used in professional matches. Su Jie, no longer a novice, had gone through dozens of matches. While he couldn't defeat professionals, if he resorted to stalling tactics like evasive running, it would be hard for even a professional opponent to knock him out.

Boone's feints followed by the sudden leg sweep were already at the level of a provincial professional team.

At that moment, Gu Yang, as if predicting Boone's kick, sidestepped smoothly like a water serpent and moved into Boone's blind spot.

Suddenly, Gu Yang extended his arm.

Pa!

In that instant, Su Jie seemed to see a long-armed ape plucking fruit. The movement was like a whip—swift, precise, and with a crisp sound.

Boone's armpit was struck, and he immediately fell to the ground, convulsing, foaming at the mouth as though in the throes of withdrawal symptoms.

'He struck an acupoint,' Su Jie analyzed silently. 'This technique resembles Peng Haidong's long-reaching punches in my previous match—Tongbei Boxing. The strikes are far-reaching and retract instantly, cold and sharp, like the movements of a gibbon. Tongbei Boxing is said to be one of the oldest and most powerful traditional martial arts. Peng Haidong's strikes weren't strong enough to break my defense, but this Coach Gu Yang's mastery is far superior. His strikes penetrate the body like the tip of a whip, and his precision with acupoints and footwork is incredible.'

While Su Jie was pondering, Gu Yang stepped forward and massaged Boone's body for a few moments, bringing him back to consciousness.

"This is Chinese martial arts?" Boone exclaimed in delight after recovering. "Coach, are you teaching us this today?"

"That's right. This is a freehand technique in martial arts. Today, I'll teach you a move called 'Long-armed Ape Reach.' From now on, I'll teach you one move of freehand technique each day. Practice diligently, and you'll be able to overcome your opponents in the future," Gu Yang said. "Now, follow my lead. First, face the opponent's attack. Move in a zigzag pattern like a snake, then suddenly dart forward, extending your arm, using the power from your body's motion to thrust and retract in one fluid motion."

At this moment, Gu Yang began teaching the move "Long-armed Ape Reach" in slow motion.

"This move isn't as simple as it looks. The first step is to find the opponent's blind spot in combat. This kind of awareness can only be honed through relentless practice and countless battles. Then, the darting motion involves a sharp and crisp force from Tongbei Fist. Without three to five years of hard training, it's impossible to master. Don't be fooled by how effortlessly and gracefully Gu Yang executed it—there's a lot of knowledge embedded in it," Zhang Manman explained to Su Jie as they practiced the move.

"Exactly," Su Jie replied. Having already perfected the move "Hoe Strike," his keen eye immediately recognized the complexity of "Long-armed Ape Reach." This move incorporated many intricate forces such as dodging, shifting, floating, twisting, rotating, drilling, snapping, and swinging. A seemingly simple body movement was laden with profound techniques, involving numerous muscle groups and skeletal coordination.

Simply mastering the form of this move without understanding its essence would make it difficult to use effectively in real combat.

Most students, unaware of this, would see the coach perform the move impressively and assume it could be directly applied in a fight.

Watching the eager students practicing, Su Jie shook his head. He could tell they hadn't grasped the essence of the technique or its underlying principles. However, for him, this was a valuable learning opportunity.

He understood the core of the move at a glance.

Of course, this understanding stemmed from his deep mastery of "Hoe Strike," which had become ingrained in his soul. It had taught him how different forces moved and how muscle groups worked in tandem. Without this foundation, he wouldn't have been able to discern the intricacies of the move.

Now, after watching Gu Yang demonstrate once and practicing a few slow-motion repetitions on his own, Su Jie could replicate it convincingly.

At this point, he fully understood why "Hoe Strike" was called the mother of all martial arts techniques. Mastering it provided a foundation to easily grasp almost any martial art.

'Although martial arts techniques are numerous, their core lies in the combined effort of muscle groups and neurons. The human body is simple in structure—limbs and torso—but its variations always adhere to these principles.'

After about an hour of practice, Su Jie had thoroughly grasped the force technique of the move. The technique involved seamlessly combining different forms of power, such as rising, drilling, relaxing, exploding, and pulling.

When it came to the core of "inner strength," Su Jie had already reached a level of proficiency. This combination of tension and relaxation across the entire body was the foundation of explosive power.

Pop!

Once he had mastered the core techniques, Su Jie exerted a bit of force. At the moment his arm extended and retracted, it emitted a faint snapping sound.

'As expected, a genius,'

Gu Yang observed this detail and said, *'He has quickly grasped the secret of Tongbei Fist's power. Traditional martial arts may seem mysterious and hard to master, but once you truly have an epiphany, you can learn it in a matter of days. After that, it's all about hard training. But this kind of epiphany is something many people can never achieve—it's like Zen Buddhism. Some people drift aimlessly their whole lives, while others have a moment of sudden enlightenment that clears the fog, leading to instant understanding.'*

Only two people noticed the snapping sound Su Jie produced—Gu Yang and Zhang Manman.

"Su Jie, let's spar," Zhang Manman suggested. "You use this move to attack me, and I'll attack you. Training like this will help us improve faster."

"Sure," Su Jie agreed. After learning that Zhang Manman had been a bounty hunter, he no longer underestimated her. He might even gain valuable experience from her.

The two paired up and began training, attacking and defending in turn.

Su Jie noticed that Zhang Manman was very fast, with extensive experience in finding openings and reacting swiftly. Her only disadvantage was her strength, which was a natural limitation for most women compared to men and often difficult to overcome.

This was why women's combat techniques often focused on targeting vital points with speed and precision.

Somehow, Su Jie felt that with each passing day, his skills and experience were advancing rapidly. He discovered many new insights, deepening his understanding of martial arts.

'If I were to fight Zhang Manman in the ring, I'm ninety percent confident I could defeat her. But in real life, she might still have a chance to kill me.' Su Jie came to this conclusion. He had developed a habit: the moment he met someone, he would analyze their combat abilities and quickly devise strategies to exploit their weaknesses.

This was one of the small techniques taught to him by Odell, and it proved to be very useful. It allowed him to win match after match in the ring and earn a significant amount of money.

As his victories increased, so did his ranking and confidence, making it harder and harder for him to lose.

Sometimes, when Su Jie looked back, he found it unbelievable that he had made so much progress in just a month and a half. It felt like a miracle. But upon deeper reflection, he realized that success didn't come by chance. The grueling daily training—unbearable for most—was the real reason behind it.

Take Uncle Mang's massages, for instance. Most people couldn't endure them. Even the professional coach Zhou Chun couldn't handle the hellish pain, let alone the subsequent acupuncture treatments or the electric stimulation methods used by top U.S. agents.

Suddenly, during practice, Zhang Manman's movements changed. She switched to a different technique with incredible speed, twisting her body like a snake. After two quick turns, she maneuvered to Su Jie's side and launched a fierce punch.

A surprise attack.

An improvised move.

Whoosh!

Su Jie's hairs stood on end. Instinctively, he ducked, dodged, covered his head, and lunged.

The "Hoe Strike."

This move had become ingrained in his very bones and soul. No matter what kind of attack he faced, it was always his go-to response. He had practiced it so thoroughly that it had seeped into the deepest parts of his brain, requiring no conscious thought—a pure muscle memory.

Although he had recently learned the "Long-armed Ape Reach," he had only borrowed certain techniques from it to enhance the power of the "Hoe Strike."

Originally, the "Hoe Strike" was a short-range, close-combat move—ferocious but not without its flaws. But now, with the incorporation of the "Long-armed Ape Reach," a technique from Tongbei Boxing, Su Jie could extend his reach dramatically. As he lunged, his arm shot out like lightning, grabbing at Zhang Manman's face.

In that moment, Su Jie seemed like a tiger with wings or an elephant with an extended trunk—able to attack from a distance.

Su Jie had seamlessly integrated the "Long-armed Ape Reach" technique into the "Hoe Strike."

Smack!

Just as Su Jie's hand was about to grab Zhang Manman's face, Gu Yang intervened and pushed it away.

At the same time, Zhang Manman's "Groin Kick" nearly hit Su Jie's lower body. It was a deadly move. Without Gu Yang's intervention, both might have been seriously injured. (G: Ouch!)

"You can't train like this," Gu Yang scolded. "Your instincts are highly lethal. It's too easy for something to go wrong if you keep sparring this way."

"Impressive," Zhang Manman said, giving Su Jie a thumbs-up. She had thoroughly tested Su Jie's martial arts skills and confirmed that he was indeed a genius.

"The core of the 'Hoe Strike' lies in the upward lunge. While lunging, you can use Tongbei force, short force, or even other forces. Next, I'll teach you many

techniques from various academies and disciplines. If you can integrate them all into this one move, you'll reach a point where you can learn anything at a glance. Your martial arts will truly be interconnected," Gu Yang added.

Su Jie hadn't intentionally executed the move earlier, but under Zhang Manman's pressure, he had instinctively integrated the "Long-armed Ape Reach" into the "Hoe Strike." Reflecting on it now, he felt grateful to her for helping him make yet another breakthrough in his martial arts.

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