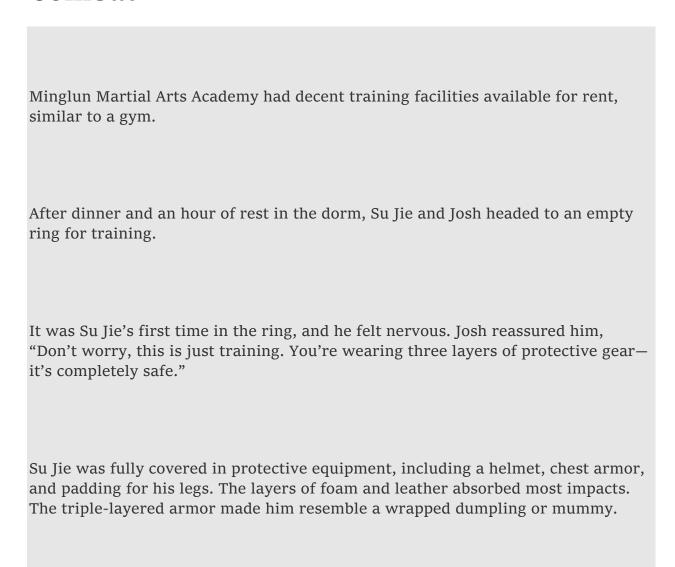
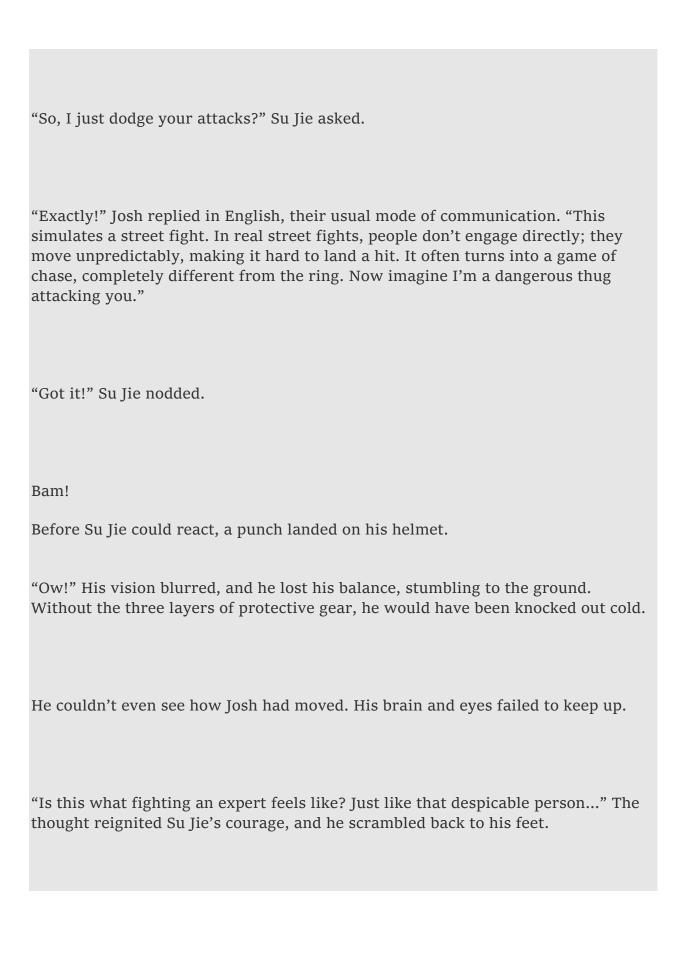
THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

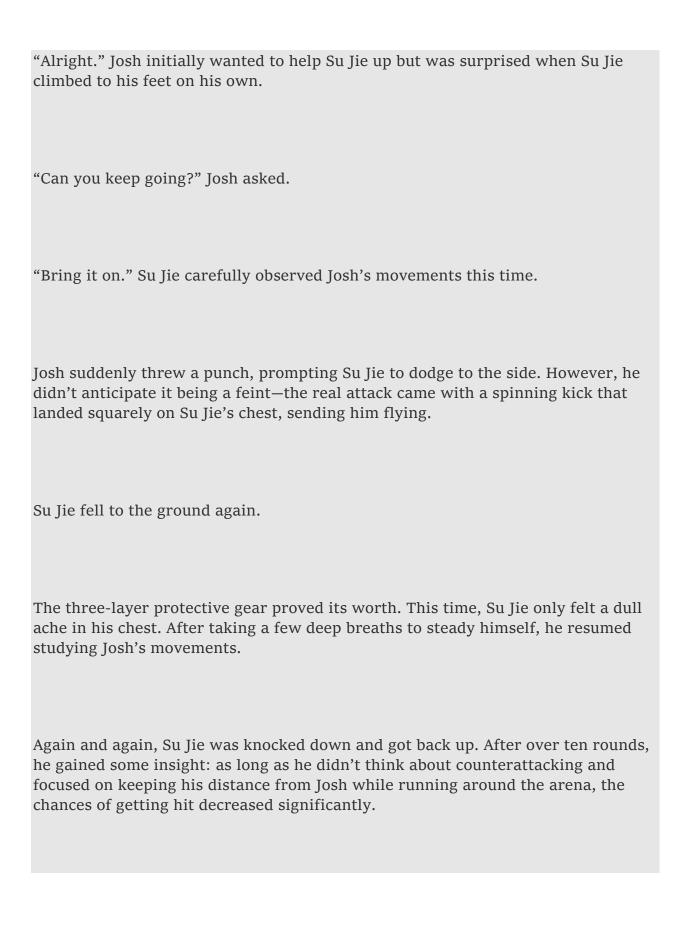
to jump and run easily.

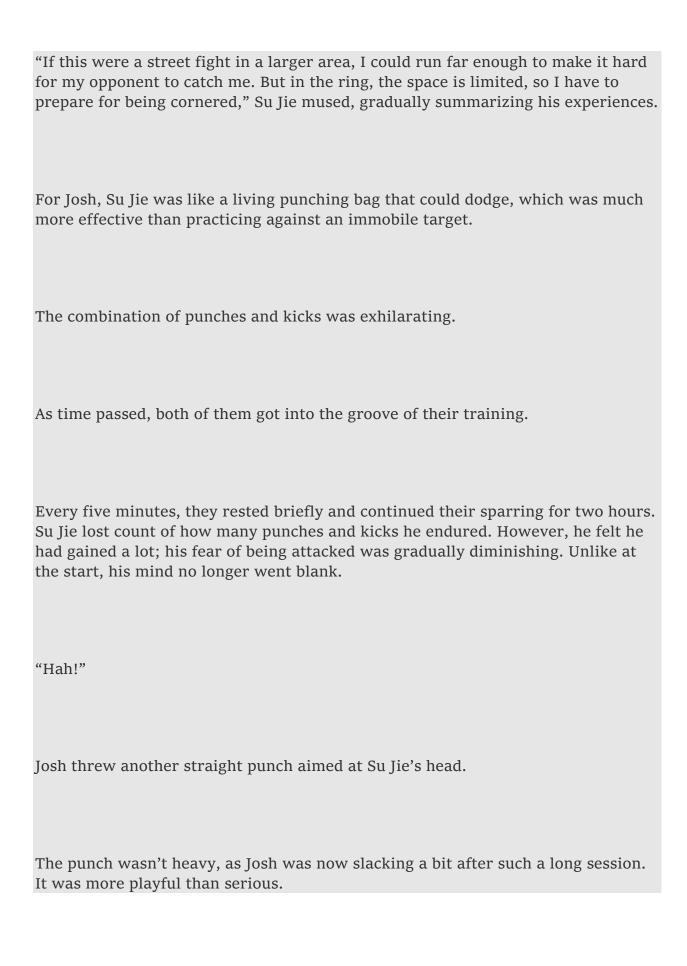
Chapter 3: Block and Strike Real Lessons in Combat



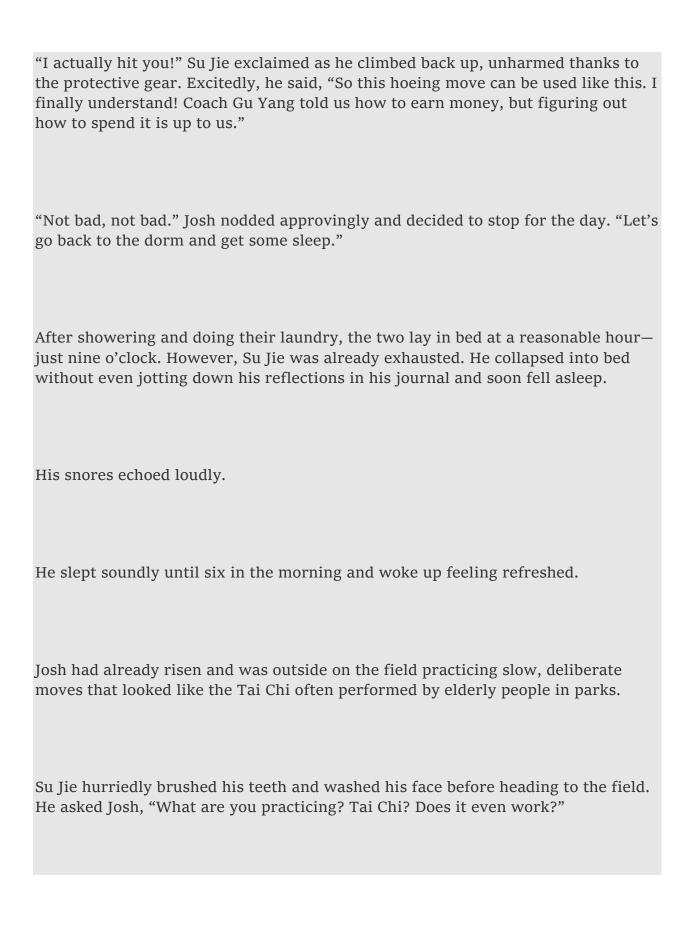
Fortunately, the gear was lightweight and didn't hinder movement, allowing him



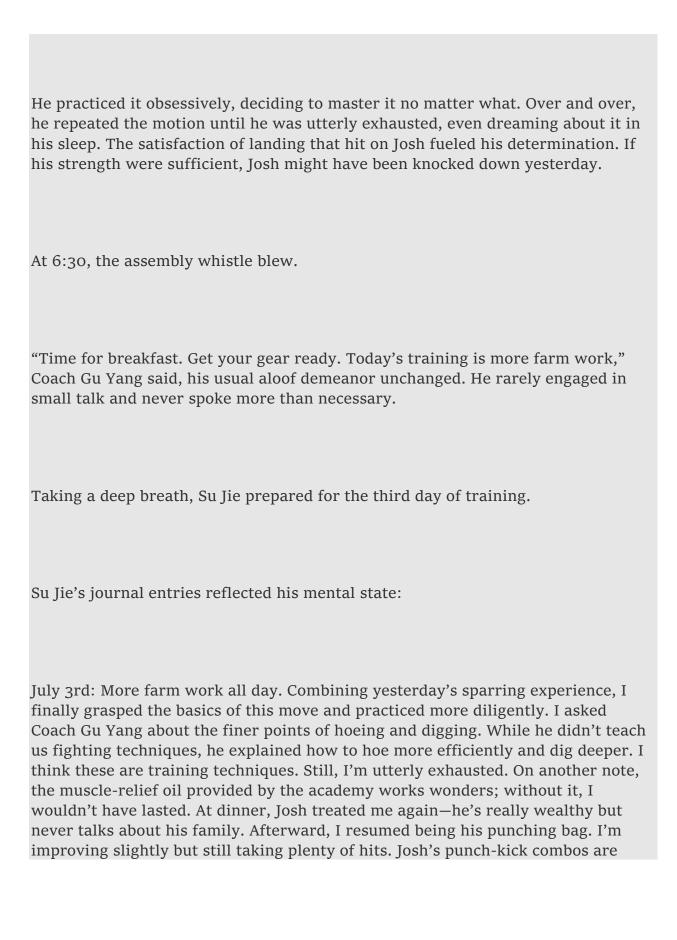




| Finally, Su Jie felt confident enough to block the punch. |
|--|
| A flash of inspiration struck him, reminding him of the posture he used while hoeing and digging soil. |
| Imagining he was holding a hoe, he instinctively raised his hands, bent his waist, crouched slightly, and blocked Josh's punch. He then stepped forward and mimicked a digging motion. |
| Smack! |
| The motion landed squarely on Josh's chest. |
| Startled, Josh instinctively retreated and countered with a kick, launching Su Jie into the air. Su Jie flew five steps away and landed hard on the ring. |
| Although Josh had been hit, he wasn't hurt because Su Jie's attack lacked penetrating power. |
| |



| Tai Chi was popular and had produced many "masters" in society, but these so-called masters were often beaten by professional fighters—or even ordinary people—until they were bruised and humiliated. To Su Jie, it seemed no better than square dancing. |
|---|
| "It is Tai Chi," Josh replied, nodding. "It's very useful. It trains your flow, balance, and stability. It also helps transition between moves. When I first started learning martial arts, my movements were stiff. My coach taught me this Tai Chi routine and had me practice it every morning. After a year, my skills improved significantly. I could control the strength of my punches—straight punches, hooks, uppercuts—more freely. It's truly incredible. The most fascinating things about your Chinese martial arts are its 'jin' (power) and 'qi' (energy). What exactly is 'jin'? That's why I'm here to learn. As for 'qi', that's much deeper—like Qi Gong, monks, and daoists. It's amazing." |
| "Really?" Su Jie remained skeptical. Although he wanted to learn, he restrained himself. Having just gained some insights into his hoeing-and-digging technique yesterday, he decided to focus on refining it rather than spreading himself too thin. |
| Josh practiced for a while longer and then stopped, looking relaxed and content. |
| "I wonder what today's training will be? More hoeing and digging?" Su Jie muttered, still reflecting on how he had managed to hit Josh the day before. Without a hoe, he practiced shadow movements, pretending to hold one. Raising it, swinging it down—after a while, his muscles felt warmed up. |
| Su Jie became fixated on this move. |



faster now. Among the students, a girl named Zhang Manman seems particularly tough. She's from abroad and knows Wing Chun. Interesting, but not my concern.

July 4th: Another day of farm work. My hoeing and digging techniques are much smoother now. I'm not as tired as I was in the first three days and have adapted to the rhythm. The intense sun has tanned me, though. Josh treated me to dinner again, and I continued being his punching bag. I took fewer hits today, and Josh even praised my progress. He shared a lot of fighting techniques and strategies, but it's too much to process all at once.

July 5th: More farm work. Five days of digging and hoeing. We've helped elderly farmers in rural areas with a lot of chores. It feels good to be doing something meaningful while training. I noticed some muscle definition in my forearms and core. The hoe feels lighter now. Coach Gu Yang taught us about combining breathing with movement, grounding our strength through our feet. At dinner, Josh remarked on my progress, though I'm still no match for him. Without protective gear, I doubt I'd last a minute.

July 6th: Another day of farm work. I feel like a seasoned farmer, wearing a straw hat and digging in the fields. I've mastered the hoeing move, at least the basics. At dinner, Josh seemed impatient to improve his martial arts, which was surprising given his existing skills. Back to being his punching bag in the evening—I focused solely on dodging and avoided most hits.

July 7th: After a full day of farm work, Coach Gu Yang finally said we won't need to hoe and dig tomorrow. He called it a seven-day foundation-building exercise. I do feel much stronger and have gained a lot—though Josh's generous meals likely helped, too. Sparring with Josh in the evening, he noted my significant improvement. Still, without protective gear, I wouldn't last against him.

Su Jie's seven days of training were straightforward but challenging. His journal revealed his evolving mindset: though repetitive and tedious, the training brought him into a meditative state. He found himself fully immersed in the act of digging, gradually building both strength and focus.

Chapter 4: Building a Foundation in Seven Days

"Su Jie, could you help me buy a phone in town? My phone broke."

On the eighth day, it was a rest day. Coach Gu Yang had told all the students in the training class to completely relax for a day. Rest and recovery were crucial after seven days of intense farm work to replenish their energy.

However, Josh had a different plan. He designed a physical training regimen for himself that included push-ups, squats, barbell lifts, sit-ups, and planks. He didn't want to waste time, but since his phone had broken, he asked Su Jie to go to town and buy one for him.

"No problem," Su Jie agreed. His training wasn't as complicated, and he realized that practicing digging and hoeing was something he could do anywhere.

The school was five or six kilometers away from the town, with no buses or subways. Generally, students had to either hitch a ride on a local farmer's motorbike or run there themselves if they wanted to buy something.

After eating, Su Jie decided to walk. On the way, he practiced the hoeing motion he had been working on recently.

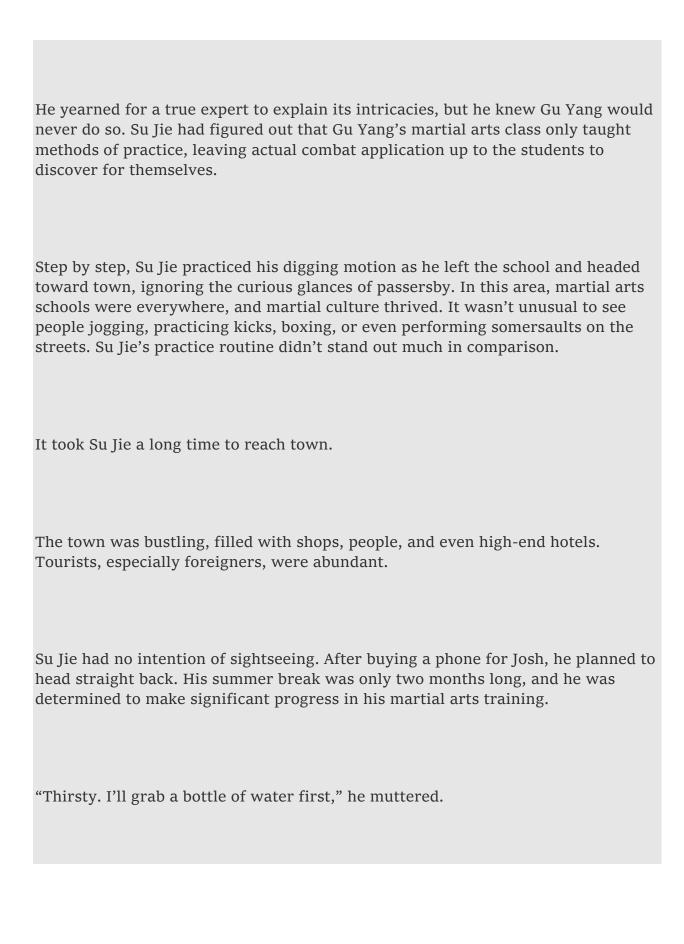
He had been contemplating the offensive and defensive potential of this move. Raising the hoe could be a blocking motion, while advancing and striking down could serve as an attack. When an opponent punched, raising your arm to block and then chopping forward could work as both defense and counterattack.

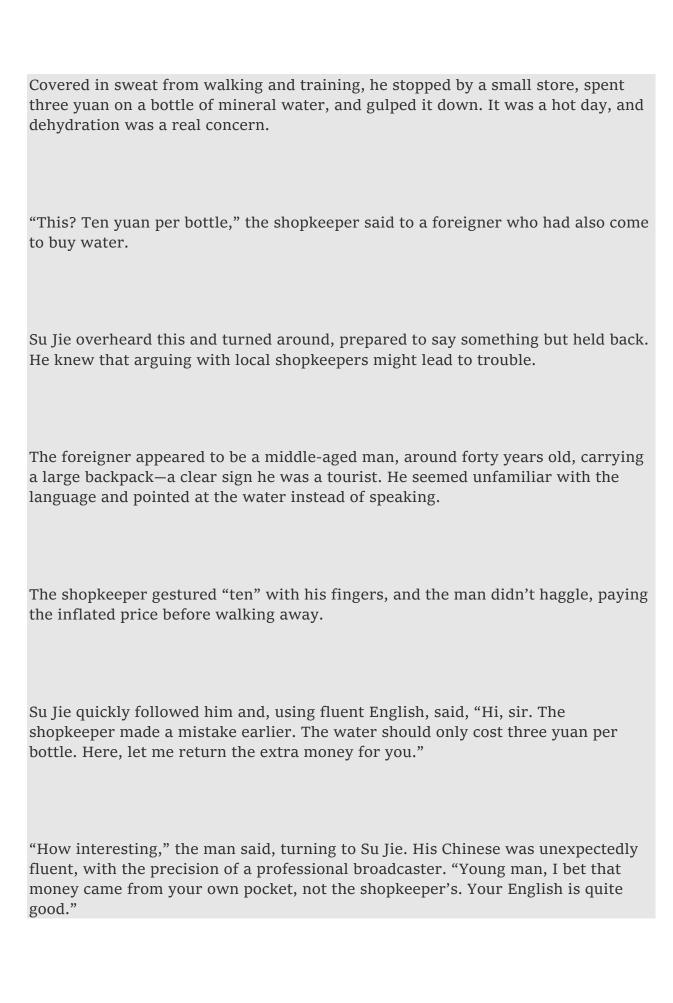
The movements seemed simple, like the flailing punches of an untrained brawler. However, upon careful consideration, the technique embodied human instincts. Coach Gu Yang had thoroughly explained the principles of this move, emphasizing how to use spiraling force and leverage. Raising the hoe required an upward, corkscrew-like motion, while striking down had to be swift and powerful, akin to an eagle pouncing on a rabbit. Retracting the hoe required a grabbing and stomping action to flip the soil for deep tilling.

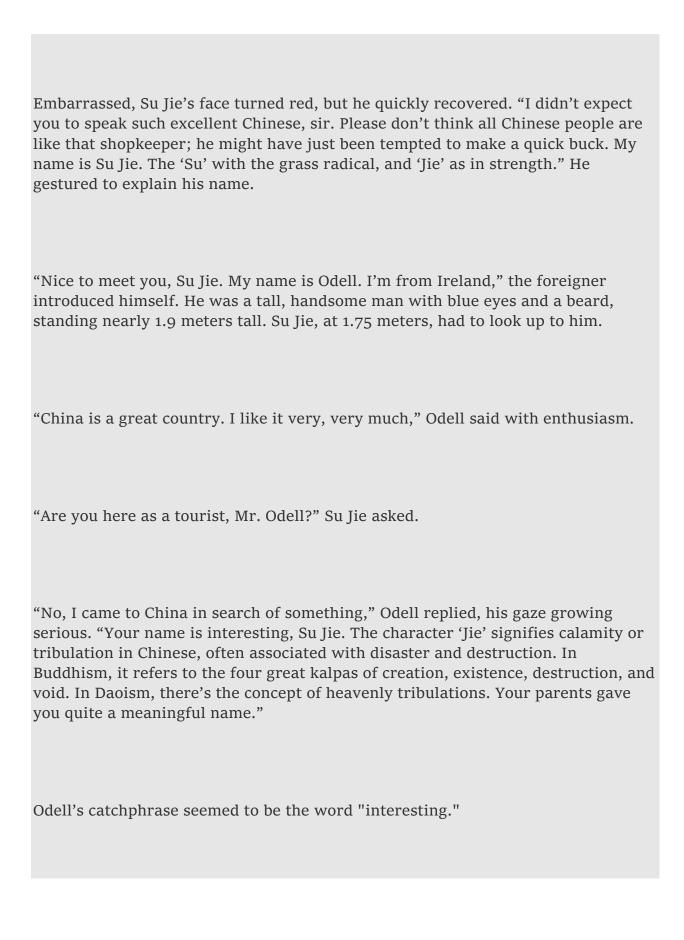
These techniques, when applied to combat, could be highly effective.

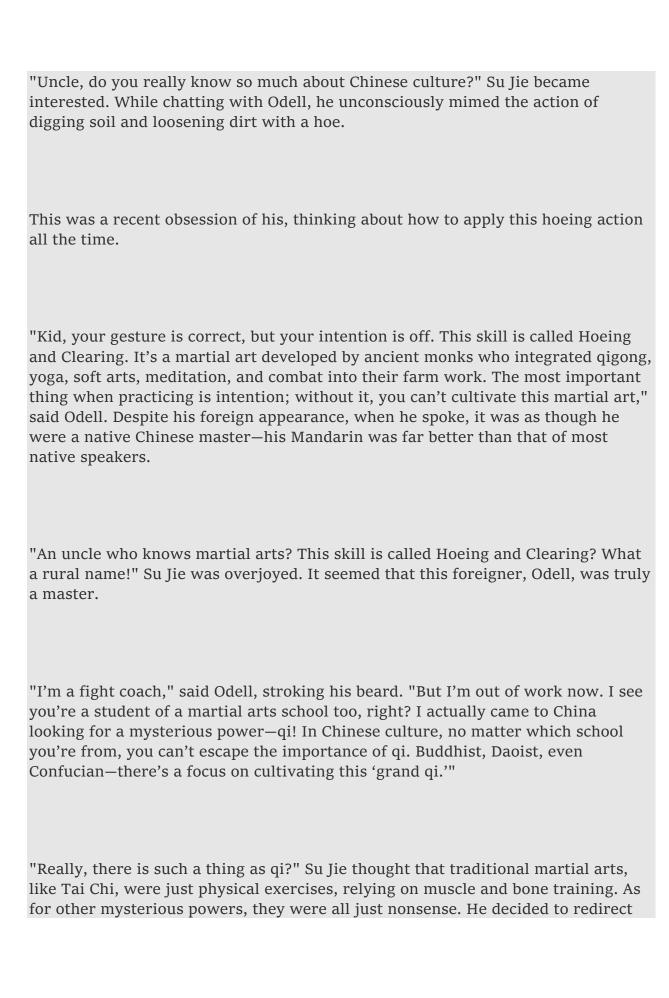
That said, Gu Yang's instructions were solely focused on improving efficiency and reducing effort in hoeing; he never mentioned combat applications.

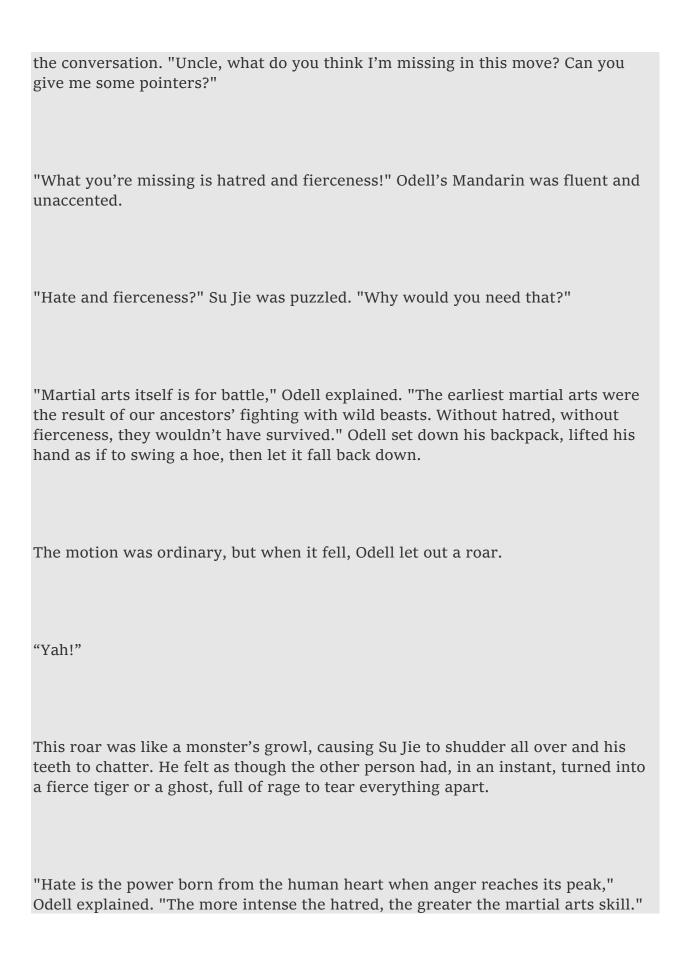
Fortunately, Su Jie was a keen learner. He gathered information online, watched videos of martial arts masters, and gained insights from being Josh's sparring partner. Over time, he gradually grasped the profound potential of this simple move.











Odell put down his bag and demonstrated a simple two-line mantra: "When you raise your hands, imagine hating the earth for being without a ring; when you strike down, hate the heavens for being without a handle. Hate the heavens for being without a handle, and the earth for being without a ring. That's the heart method in martial arts. Without this intention, your martial arts training won't have any effect."

"Hate the heavens for being without a handle, hate the earth for being without a ring?" Su Jie seemed to understand.

"Imagine yourself as a giant with limitless power, unable to break free from the restrictions of the world. You want to unleash your strength but can't. At this moment, you feel hatred for the sky because there's no handle and the earth because there's no ring. If you had these, you could tear the world apart. In Chinese mythology, there's the story of Pangu who opened the heavens for the same reason—he woke up in chaos, unable to break free until he felt such intense hatred that he tore the world apart," Odell said.

Su Jie finally understood and immediately closed his eyes to concentrate on cultivating his emotions.

Suddenly, he opened his eyes, glaring with rage, his anger reaching its peak. He raised his arms and then struck down in a series of movements—lifting, digging, and striking all in one fluid motion. It was like a giant opening the heavens, a tiger pouncing, an elephant stomping, a shark fishing, and a giant with fierce eyes.

| The ground trembled under his feet and there was a loud cracking sound all around him. |
|---|
| After finishing the movement, he seemed completely exhausted, his vision blurry with stars, gasping for breath as if all his strength had been drained. |
| "Such innate talent?" Now it was Odell's turn to be surprised. |
| After a long while, Su Jie finally caught his breath. He didn't want to try again—it was so exhausting, more so than pulling an all-nighter to finish his homework. |
| Chapter 5: Resent the Sky Without a |
| Handle, Resent the Earth Without a Loop |
| On the way, Su Jie chatted animatedly with Odell. |
| |

Odell turned out to be quite knowledgeable about China—well-versed in many aspects, especially martial arts. He was an expert in countless techniques, and there seemed to be nothing he didn't know. Su Jie found this entirely unsurprising. Through their conversation, he learned that Odell was a combat coach, and not

just any coach—he trained world-class professional fighters.

| However, Odell was currently unemployed. |
|--|
| What made Su Jie both laugh and cry was that Odell's job had been snatched away by artificial intelligence. |
| According to Odell, the top professional fighters today all trained with the assistance of AI. The technology could analyze even the smallest muscle movements, subtle changes in the skin, and even the undulations of internal organs, enabling it to design targeted training regimens every day. |
| Moreover, AI could monitor fighters' physical conditions daily, devising meal plan and recommending specific trace elements for intake. |
| With access to massive databases and the most advanced medical analytics, AI far surpassed any human coach. |
| Su Jie knew how powerful AI had become. Years ago, it had completely defeated the world's top Go champions. What's more, its strategies were entirely different from human techniques, creating a new realm of Go that was not merely an extension of human intelligence but a manifestation of its own innovative capacity. |
| He had also read news about AI-assisted training in national sports teams, such as badminton, table tennis, basketball, and soccer. By analyzing videos, AI could correct every action and guide athletes to perfection. |
| |

S

| The same applied to combat sports. |
|---|
| Su Jie's elder sister, Su Muchen, was involved in AI computer research at a major company after earning her PhD. |
| Su Jie had read novels before where the protagonist acquired a super AI chip that corrected their martial arts movements, merging numerous techniques into an invincible skillset. While fictional, it wasn't entirely implausible. |
| Nowadays, Go players and their coaches had largely been replaced by AI. Every move it made was the most accurate and flawless. |
| In ancient times, Go players would exhaust themselves mentally and even spit blood to perfect a single move. In contrast, AI could calculate the optimal solution in just a fraction of a second. |
| Years ago, Su Jie had seen the despair of the world's best Go masters facing AI, describing it as akin to the "God of Go." |
| "Uncle Odell, do you think AI has figured out the ultimate training method for combat or determined the strongest fighting techniques?" Su Jie asked, voicing a question he had long wondered about. |
| Which martial art was the strongest in the world? |

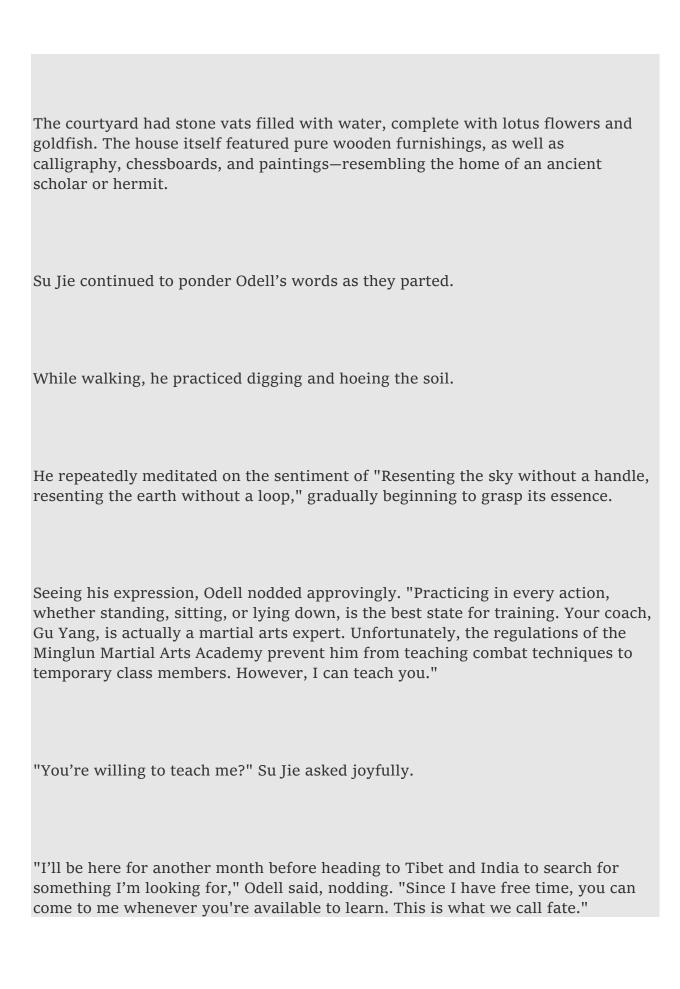
"There is no strongest martial art, only the strongest person," Odell replied. "Training methods are not set in stone. Every individual has different physical and psychological traits. A method that works best for me might not suit you. As coaches, we design personalized training regimens for each person. Unfortunately, AI is superior in tailoring regimens for professional fighters. But I'm not willing to give up. That's why I've come to the mysterious East—to seek the legendary Qi, a supernatural power."

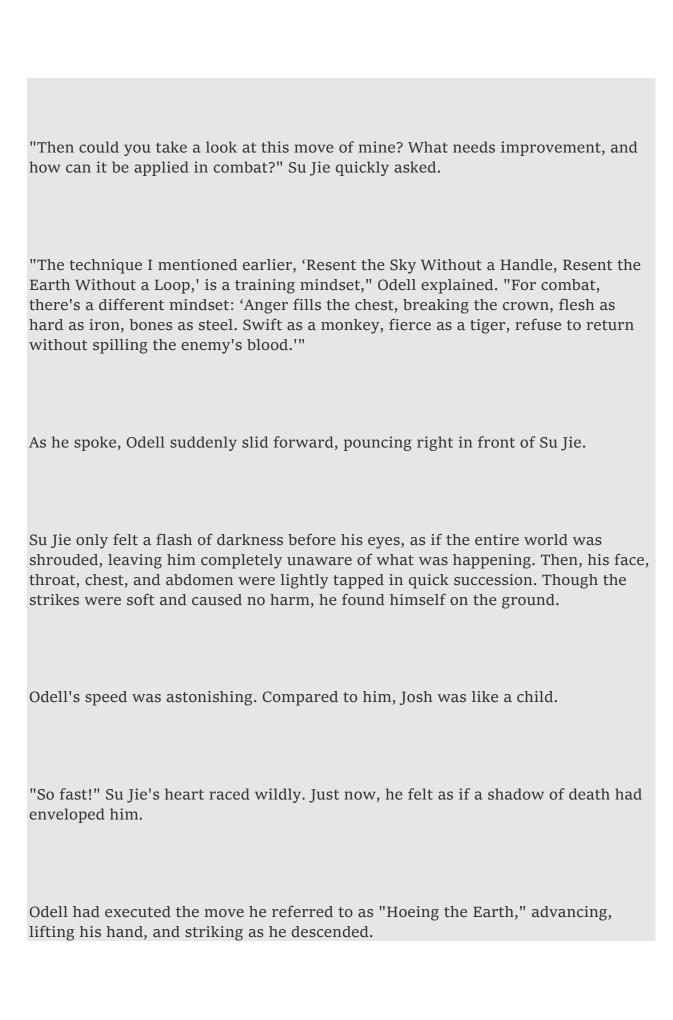
"Supernatural power? Is that even possible?" Su Jie was skeptical. However, he could understand Odell's frustration. Losing his career to AI was undoubtedly disheartening, not to mention the significant financial loss.

Professional combat coaches at Odell's level could earn tens of thousands of dollars per hour. Some even received shares of their fighters' prize money and endorsement earnings, as they often doubled as managers.

As a diligent student of science, Su Jie didn't believe in supernatural powers. However, he knew little about the limits of martial arts and couldn't compare himself to someone like Odell, who stood at the pinnacle of the field. Criticizing or judging Odell would have been as foolish as an elementary school student telling a renowned professor that their research was worthless.

As they chatted, Su Jie bought the phone Josh had requested. When they returned, he discovered that Odell lived near his school. Odell had rented a small farmhouse, which was quiet and adorned in an antique style. Once the gate was closed, it felt like a world of its own.





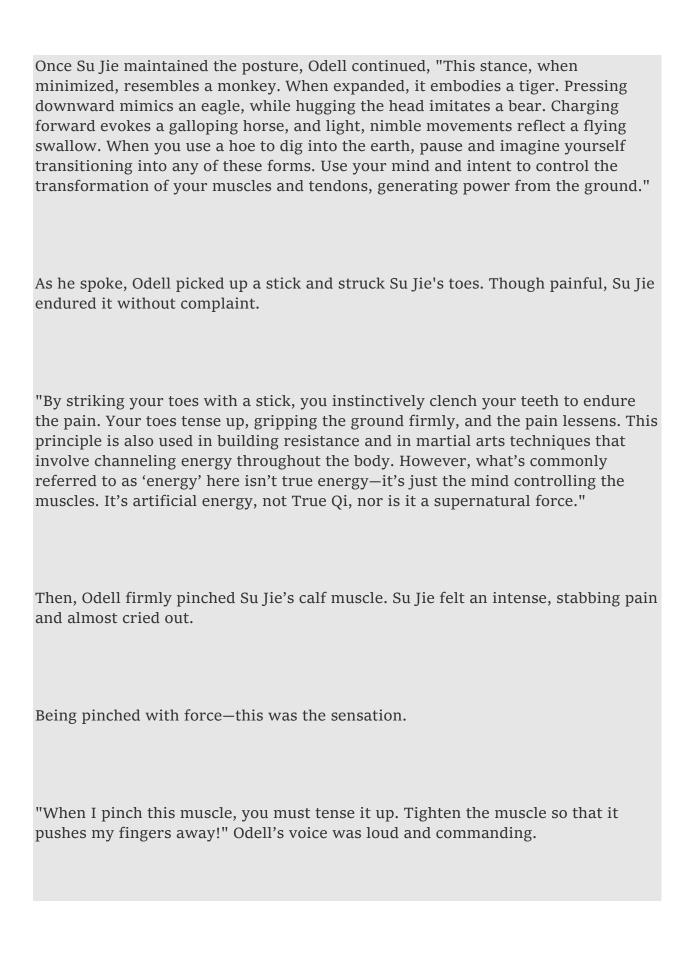
"'Anger fills the chest, breaking the crown, flesh as hard as iron, bones as steel. Swift as a monkey, fierce as a tiger, refuse to return without spilling the enemy's blood?'" Su Jie repeated the mantra, pondering it. Suddenly, clarity filled his mind. The essence of the mantra boiled down to one word: ruthlessness.

Using this move in combat demanded an unyielding resolve. When pouncing forward, one must not retreat without drawing the enemy's blood. How fierce and unstoppable was that?

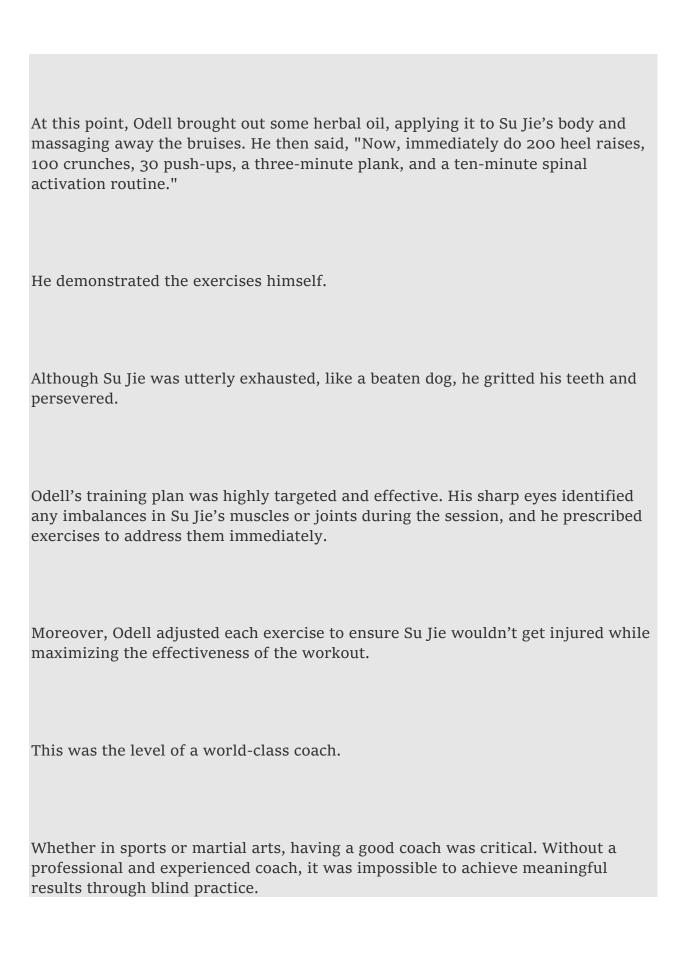
"This is a superior martial art that incorporates many elements. Hoeing the earth involves movements that are forward and back, up and down, left and right. Master this move, and many other techniques will become second nature," Odell explained, sharing extensive knowledge of traditional martial arts with Su Jie. "No matter how versatile your opponent, I'll rely on my trusty 'hoe.' Farming techniques are invincible. A hoe can cultivate the land to feed people, defend oneself, and even ignite uprisings. Your execution of this move only scratches the surface of power application. You're far from mastery. To perfect it, you must start with stance training."

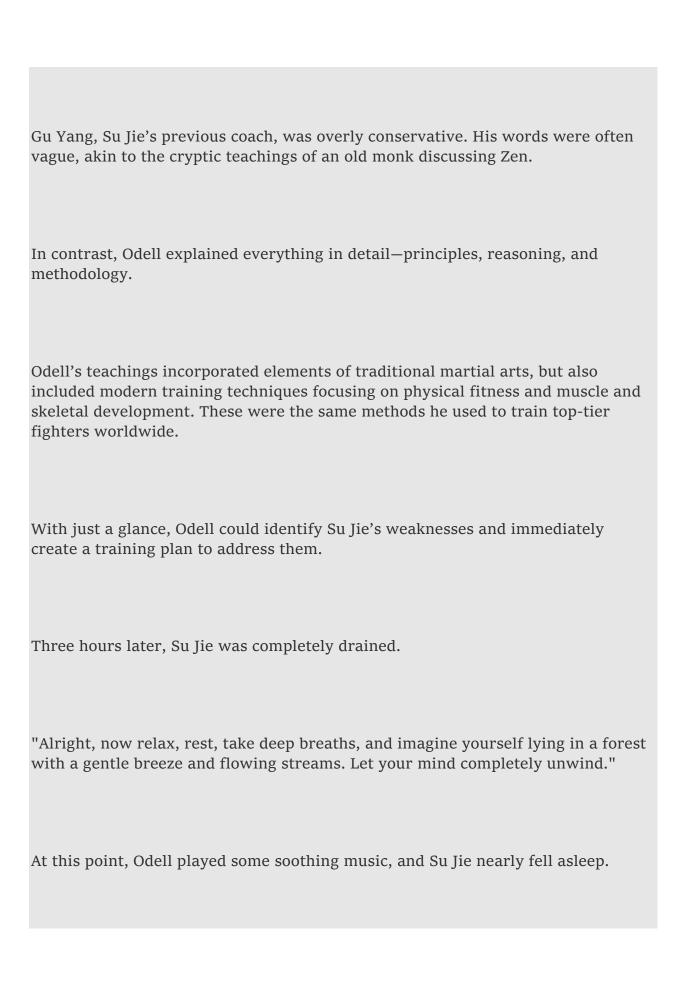
"Stance training?" Su Jie refrained from asking further and focused on learning.

At this point, Odell positioned him in a forward-backward stance, one hand extended forward and the other pressed just below his abdomen, supporting himself left and right, pulling upwards and downwards.



| Su Jie quickly focused his mind to control his calf muscle, making it tighten sharply and push Odell's fingers away. |
|--|
| Odell continued to pinch along different parts of Su Jie's body, instructing him to tense his muscles and push away each time. |
| This form of training was grueling for Su Jie, but gradually, he noticed a slight improvement in his ability to control his body's sensitivity. |
| "This is the essence of martial arts training and the so-called truth behind Qi Gong. In every movement, you must imagine someone striking your body with a fist. For each part of your body, consider the state it should maintain upon impact to neutralize the opponent's force. This is true training—not merely posing or recklessly abusing your muscles." |
| Odell methodically pinched, slapped, and struck Su Jie with his fingers, palms, and a stick, creating a rhythmic routine that forced Su Jie's body to tense in a coordinated manner. |
| "As you breathe, every muscle in your body should move, assisting your breathing This is what martial artists call body breathing, rather than abdominal or dantian breathing. When your lungs breathe, every muscle should resonate with them. Only then will your breathing be perfect, and your strength reach its peak." |
| An hour later, Su Jie was covered in bruises from the pinching and slapping. |
| |





| "Take a hot shower," Odell commanded as Su Jie was about to doze off. |
|--|
| After the hot shower, Su Jie felt refreshed, and all his fatigue seemed to vanish. |
| "Now, I'll teach you the true path of martial arts cultivation—eating and sleeping," Odell said once again. |
| |
| |