

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 3: Block and Strike Real Lessons in Combat

Minglun Martial Arts Academy had decent training facilities available for rent, similar to a gym.

After dinner and an hour of rest in the dorm, Su Jie and Josh headed to an empty ring for training.

It was Su Jie's first time in the ring, and he felt nervous. Josh reassured him, "Don't worry, this is just training. You're wearing three layers of protective gear—it's completely safe."

Su Jie was fully covered in protective equipment, including a helmet, chest armor, and padding for his legs. The layers of foam and leather absorbed most impacts. The triple-layered armor made him resemble a wrapped dumpling or mummy.

Fortunately, the gear was lightweight and didn't hinder movement, allowing him to jump and run easily.

“So, I just dodge your attacks?” Su Jie asked.

“Exactly!” Josh replied in English, their usual mode of communication. “This simulates a street fight. In real street fights, people don’t engage directly; they move unpredictably, making it hard to land a hit. It often turns into a game of chase, completely different from the ring. Now imagine I’m a dangerous thug attacking you.”

“Got it!” Su Jie nodded.

Bam!

Before Su Jie could react, a punch landed on his helmet.

“Ow!” His vision blurred, and he lost his balance, stumbling to the ground. Without the three layers of protective gear, he would have been knocked out cold.

He couldn’t even see how Josh had moved. His brain and eyes failed to keep up.

“Is this what fighting an expert feels like? Just like that despicable person...” The thought reignited Su Jie’s courage, and he scrambled back to his feet.

“Alright.” Josh initially wanted to help Su Jie up but was surprised when Su Jie climbed to his feet on his own.

“Can you keep going?” Josh asked.

“Bring it on.” Su Jie carefully observed Josh’s movements this time.

Josh suddenly threw a punch, prompting Su Jie to dodge to the side. However, he didn’t anticipate it being a feint—the real attack came with a spinning kick that landed squarely on Su Jie’s chest, sending him flying.

Su Jie fell to the ground again.

The three-layer protective gear proved its worth. This time, Su Jie only felt a dull ache in his chest. After taking a few deep breaths to steady himself, he resumed studying Josh’s movements.

Again and again, Su Jie was knocked down and got back up. After over ten rounds, he gained some insight: as long as he didn’t think about counterattacking and focused on keeping his distance from Josh while running around the arena, the chances of getting hit decreased significantly.

“If this were a street fight in a larger area, I could run far enough to make it hard for my opponent to catch me. But in the ring, the space is limited, so I have to prepare for being cornered,” Su Jie mused, gradually summarizing his experiences.

For Josh, Su Jie was like a living punching bag that could dodge, which was much more effective than practicing against an immobile target.

The combination of punches and kicks was exhilarating.

As time passed, both of them got into the groove of their training.

Every five minutes, they rested briefly and continued their sparring for two hours. Su Jie lost count of how many punches and kicks he endured. However, he felt he had gained a lot; his fear of being attacked was gradually diminishing. Unlike at the start, his mind no longer went blank.

“Hah!”

Josh threw another straight punch aimed at Su Jie’s head.

The punch wasn’t heavy, as Josh was now slacking a bit after such a long session. It was more playful than serious.

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.

“I actually hit you!” Su Jie exclaimed as he climbed back up, unharmed thanks to the protective gear. Excitedly, he said, “So this hoeing move can be used like this. I finally understand! Coach Gu Yang told us how to earn money, but figuring out how to spend it is up to us.”

“Not bad, not bad.” Josh nodded approvingly and decided to stop for the day. “Let’s go back to the dorm and get some sleep.”

After showering and doing their laundry, the two lay in bed at a reasonable hour—just nine o’clock. However, Su Jie was already exhausted. He collapsed into bed without even jotting down his reflections in his journal and soon fell asleep.

His snores echoed loudly.

He slept soundly until six in the morning and woke up feeling refreshed.

Josh had already risen and was outside on the field practicing slow, deliberate moves that looked like the Tai Chi often performed by elderly people in parks.

Su Jie hurriedly brushed his teeth and washed his face before heading to the field. He asked Josh, “What are you practicing? Tai Chi? Does it even work?”

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.

He practiced it obsessively, deciding to master it no matter what. Over and over, he repeated the motion until he was utterly exhausted, even dreaming about it in his sleep. The satisfaction of landing that hit on Josh fueled his determination. If his strength were sufficient, Josh might have been knocked down yesterday.

At 6:30, the assembly whistle blew.

“Time for breakfast. Get your gear ready. Today’s training is more farm work,” Coach Gu Yang said, his usual aloof demeanor unchanged. He rarely engaged in small talk and never spoke more than necessary.

Taking a deep breath, Su Jie prepared for the third day of training.

Su Jie’s journal entries reflected his mental state:

July 3rd: More farm work all day. Combining yesterday’s sparring experience, I finally grasped the basics of this move and practiced more diligently. I asked Coach Gu Yang about the finer points of hoeing and digging. While he didn’t teach us fighting techniques, he explained how to hoe more efficiently and dig deeper. I think these are training techniques. Still, I’m utterly exhausted. On another note, the muscle-relief oil provided by the academy works wonders; without it, I wouldn’t have lasted. At dinner, Josh treated me again—he’s really wealthy but never talks about his family. Afterward, I resumed being his punching bag. I’m improving slightly but still taking plenty of hits. Josh’s punch-kick combos are

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.

He yearned for a true expert to explain its intricacies, but he knew Gu Yang would never do so. Su Jie had figured out that Gu Yang's martial arts class only taught methods of practice, leaving actual combat application up to the students to discover for themselves.

Step by step, Su Jie practiced his digging motion as he left the school and headed toward town, ignoring the curious glances of passersby. In this area, martial arts schools were everywhere, and martial culture thrived. It wasn't unusual to see people jogging, practicing kicks, boxing, or even performing somersaults on the streets. Su Jie's practice routine didn't stand out much in comparison.

It took Su Jie a long time to reach town.

The town was bustling, filled with shops, people, and even high-end hotels. Tourists, especially foreigners, were abundant.

Su Jie had no intention of sightseeing. After buying a phone for Josh, he planned to head straight back. His summer break was only two months long, and he was determined to make significant progress in his martial arts training.

"Thirsty. I'll grab a bottle of water first," he muttered.

Covered in sweat from walking and training, he stopped by a small store, spent three yuan on a bottle of mineral water, and gulped it down. It was a hot day, and dehydration was a real concern.

“This? Ten yuan per bottle,” the shopkeeper said to a foreigner who had also come to buy water.

Su Jie overheard this and turned around, prepared to say something but held back. He knew that arguing with local shopkeepers might lead to trouble.

The foreigner appeared to be a middle-aged man, around forty years old, carrying a large backpack—a clear sign he was a tourist. He seemed unfamiliar with the language and pointed at the water instead of speaking.

The shopkeeper gestured “ten” with his fingers, and the man didn’t haggle, paying the inflated price before walking away.

Su Jie quickly followed him and, using fluent English, said, “Hi, sir. The shopkeeper made a mistake earlier. The water should only cost three yuan per bottle. Here, let me return the extra money for you.”

“How interesting,” the man said, turning to Su Jie. His Chinese was unexpectedly fluent, with the precision of a professional broadcaster. “Young man, I bet that money came from your own pocket, not the shopkeeper’s. Your English is quite good.”

Embarrassed, Su Jie's face turned red, but he quickly recovered. "I didn't expect you to speak such excellent Chinese, sir. Please don't think all Chinese people are like that shopkeeper; he might have just been tempted to make a quick buck. My name is Su Jie. The 'Su' with the grass radical, and 'Jie' as in strength." He gestured to explain his name.

"Nice to meet you, Su Jie. My name is Odell. I'm from Ireland," the foreigner introduced himself. He was a tall, handsome man with blue eyes and a beard, standing nearly 1.9 meters tall. Su Jie, at 1.75 meters, had to look up to him.

"China is a great country. I like it very, very much," Odell said with enthusiasm.

"Are you here as a tourist, Mr. Odell?" Su Jie asked.

"No, I came to China in search of something," Odell replied, his gaze growing serious. "Your name is interesting, Su Jie. The character 'Jie' signifies calamity or tribulation in Chinese, often associated with disaster and destruction. In Buddhism, it refers to the four great kalpas of creation, existence, destruction, and void. In Daoism, there's the concept of heavenly tribulations. Your parents gave you quite a meaningful name."

Odell's catchphrase seemed to be the word "interesting."

"Uncle, do you really know so much about Chinese culture?" Su Jie became interested. While chatting with Odell, he unconsciously mimed the action of digging soil and loosening dirt with a hoe.

This was a recent obsession of his, thinking about how to apply this hoeing action all the time.

"Kid, your gesture is correct, but your intention is off. This skill is called Hoeing and Clearing. It's a martial art developed by ancient monks who integrated qigong, yoga, soft arts, meditation, and combat into their farm work. The most important thing when practicing is intention; without it, you can't cultivate this martial art," said Odell. Despite his foreign appearance, when he spoke, it was as though he were a native Chinese master—his Mandarin was far better than that of most native speakers.

"An uncle who knows martial arts? This skill is called Hoeing and Clearing? What a rural name!" Su Jie was overjoyed. It seemed that this foreigner, Odell, was truly a master.

"I'm a fight coach," said Odell, stroking his beard. "But I'm out of work now. I see you're a student of a martial arts school too, right? I actually came to China looking for a mysterious power—qi! In Chinese culture, no matter which school you're from, you can't escape the importance of qi. Buddhist, Daoist, even Confucian—there's a focus on cultivating this 'grand qi.'"

"Really, there is such a thing as qi?" Su Jie thought that traditional martial arts, like Tai Chi, were just physical exercises, relying on muscle and bone training. As for other mysterious powers, they were all just nonsense. He decided to redirect

the conversation. "Uncle, what do you think I'm missing in this move? Can you give me some pointers?"

"What you're missing is hatred and fierceness!" Odell's Mandarin was fluent and unaccented.

"Hate and fierceness?" Su Jie was puzzled. "Why would you need that?"

"Martial arts itself is for battle," Odell explained. "The earliest martial arts were the result of our ancestors' fighting with wild beasts. Without hatred, without fierceness, they wouldn't have survived." Odell set down his backpack, lifted his hand as if to swing a hoe, then let it fall back down.

The motion was ordinary, but when it fell, Odell let out a roar.

"Yah!"

This roar was like a monster's growl, causing Su Jie to shudder all over and his teeth to chatter. He felt as though the other person had, in an instant, turned into a fierce tiger or a ghost, full of rage to tear everything apart.

"Hate is the power born from the human heart when anger reaches its peak," Odell explained. "The more intense the hatred, the greater the martial arts skill."

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 plans 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.

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.

The courtyard had stone vats filled with water, complete with lotus flowers and goldfish. The house itself featured pure wooden furnishings, as well as calligraphy, chessboards, and paintings—resembling the home of an ancient scholar or hermit.

Su Jie continued to ponder Odell's words as they parted.

While walking, he practiced digging and hoeing the soil.

He repeatedly meditated on the sentiment of "Resenting the sky without a handle, resenting the earth without a loop," gradually beginning to grasp its essence.

Seeing his expression, Odell nodded approvingly. "Practicing in every action, whether standing, sitting, or lying down, is the best state for training. Your coach, Gu Yang, is actually a martial arts expert. Unfortunately, the regulations of the Minglun Martial Arts Academy prevent him from teaching combat techniques to temporary class members. However, I can teach you."

"You're willing to teach me?" Su Jie asked joyfully.

"I'll be here for another month before heading to Tibet and India to search for something I'm looking for," Odell said, nodding. "Since I have free time, you can come to me whenever you're available to learn. This is what we call fate."

"Then could you take a look at this move of mine? What needs improvement, and how can it be applied in combat?" Su Jie quickly asked.

"The technique I mentioned earlier, 'Resent the Sky Without a Handle, Resent the Earth Without a Loop,' is a training mindset," Odell explained. "For combat, there's a different mindset: '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.'"

As he spoke, Odell suddenly slid forward, pouncing right in front of Su Jie.

Su Jie only felt a flash of darkness before his eyes, as if the entire world was shrouded, leaving him completely unaware of what was happening. Then, his face, throat, chest, and abdomen were lightly tapped in quick succession. Though the strikes were soft and caused no harm, he found himself on the ground.

Odell's speed was astonishing. Compared to him, Josh was like a child.

"So fast!" Su Jie's heart raced wildly. Just now, he felt as if a shadow of death had enveloped him.

Odell had executed the move he referred to as "Hoing the Earth," advancing, lifting his hand, and striking as he descended.

"'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.

Once Su Jie maintained the posture, Odell continued, "This stance, when minimized, resembles a monkey. When expanded, it embodies a tiger. Pressing downward mimics an eagle, while hugging the head imitates a bear. Charging forward evokes a galloping horse, and light, nimble movements reflect a flying swallow. When you use a hoe to dig into the earth, pause and imagine yourself transitioning into any of these forms. Use your mind and intent to control the transformation of your muscles and tendons, generating power from the ground."

As he spoke, Odell picked up a stick and struck Su Jie's toes. Though painful, Su Jie endured it without complaint.

"By striking your toes with a stick, you instinctively clench your teeth to endure the pain. Your toes tense up, gripping the ground firmly, and the pain lessens. This principle is also used in building resistance and in martial arts techniques that involve channeling energy throughout the body. However, what's commonly referred to as 'energy' here isn't true energy—it's just the mind controlling the muscles. It's artificial energy, not True Qi, nor is it a supernatural force."

Then, Odell firmly pinched Su Jie's calf muscle. Su Jie felt an intense, stabbing pain and almost cried out.

Being pinched with force—this was the sensation.

"When I pinch this muscle, you must tense it up. Tighten the muscle so that it pushes my fingers away!" Odell's voice was loud and commanding.

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.

At this point, Odell brought out some herbal oil, applying it to Su Jie's body and massaging away the bruises. He then said, "Now, immediately do 200 heel raises, 100 crunches, 30 push-ups, a three-minute plank, and a ten-minute spinal activation routine."

He demonstrated the exercises himself.

Although Su Jie was utterly exhausted, like a beaten dog, he gritted his teeth and persevered.

Odell's training plan was highly targeted and effective. His sharp eyes identified any imbalances in Su Jie's muscles or joints during the session, and he prescribed exercises to address them immediately.

Moreover, Odell adjusted each exercise to ensure Su Jie wouldn't get injured while maximizing the effectiveness of the workout.

This was the level of a world-class coach.

Whether in sports or martial arts, having a good coach was critical. Without a professional and experienced coach, it was impossible to achieve meaningful results through blind practice.

Gu Yang, Su Jie's previous coach, was overly conservative. His words were often vague, akin to the cryptic teachings of an old monk discussing Zen.

In contrast, Odell explained everything in detail—principles, reasoning, and methodology.

Odell's teachings incorporated elements of traditional martial arts, but also included modern training techniques focusing on physical fitness and muscle and skeletal development. These were the same methods he used to train top-tier fighters worldwide.

With just a glance, Odell could identify Su Jie's weaknesses and immediately create a training plan to address them.

Three hours later, Su Jie was completely drained.

"Alright, now relax, rest, take deep breaths, and imagine yourself lying in a forest with a gentle breeze and flowing streams. Let your mind completely unwind."

At this point, Odell played some soothing music, and Su Jie nearly fell asleep.

"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.