

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 31: A Single Core, All Moves as No Move

"Your low blow kick is rather ruthless."

Watching Gu Yang guide others, Su Jie recalled the earlier scene and felt a slight chill in his lower body. "Why are all your moves aimed at kicking the crotch or poking the eyes?"

Zhang Manman blushed slightly. "We girls are weaker, so we can only aim for the vital spots with quick strikes."

Just as Su Jie was about to say something, a commotion erupted at the academy gate. A convoy of luxury cars drove in, with many people carrying cameras following a central vehicle. Security personnel were maintaining order, making it clear that someone significant had arrived.

Many students who had been training gathered around, and the entire field was filled with a buzz of excitement.

"Who is it? Which leader?" Su Jie asked hastily.

"It's Liu Zihao," Zhang Manman replied. "That international action superstar."

"Liu Zihao?" Su Jie recognized the name.

Liu Zihao was a household name and the most famous international action star of the moment. Many blockbuster movies featured him as the lead. His action scenes were clean and precise, and he performed many high-difficulty stunts himself without using a double. Combined with his handsome face and perfectly sculpted physique, every movie he starred in became a massive hit.

The principal of Minglun Martial Arts Academy was Liu Guanglie, a legendary figure. He was not only an experienced traditional Chinese medicine doctor but also mastered various martial arts and excelled in business operations. Within just a few decades, he had turned Minglun Martial Arts Academy into the largest martial arts academy in the country. He also managed pharmaceutical and health product conglomerates.

Among his children, the most famous was Liu Zihao, who had been learning martial arts since childhood. He entered the entertainment industry and became famous at just 12 or 13 years old with a martial arts film. Every film he starred in since then had been a hit, quickly catapulting him to stardom.

In addition to acting, Liu Zihao also competed professionally, winning championships in numerous international free-fighting tournaments and even

defeating several world-renowned champions. These accomplishments boosted his fame even further.

On top of all this, Liu Zihao was also a business prodigy. He founded his own film and investment companies, amassing immense wealth and becoming a prominent figure in the business world.

If life were a novel, Liu Zihao would undoubtedly be the overpowered CEO protagonist.

"He's preparing to shoot a large-scale martial arts film, and the location is his alma mater, Minglun Martial Arts Academy," Josh said as he walked over, his eyes filled with admiration as though he were gazing at a deity. "I checked the academy website yesterday, and they're recruiting extras. I've got to go. If I get selected and can act alongside Liu Zihao, that would be nice." (G: here he actually says 奈斯 which sound like 奈 - nài and 斯 - sī = Nice.)

"Nice (奈斯)" was the phonetic translation of the English word "nice," which had become a popular internet slang for something enjoyable or great.

Su Jie had also seen Liu Zihao's action movies. His skills were indeed sharp, and his acting was impressive. He could be fierce and wild like a beast when playing tough roles or tender and affectionate when portraying soft-spoken characters. Unsurprisingly, he had a massive female fan base.

"Alright, since Liu Zihao is here and the production crew is casting extras, you can all sign up if you're interested," Gu Yang clapped his hands. "If you're selected, it could be a good opportunity."

Instantly, the training class dispersed, with everyone rushing off like birds scattering.

"Su Jie, are you going?" Zhang Manman and Josh asked.

"I'm not interested in the hype," Su Jie shook his head. He wasn't particularly excited about this and preferred to use the remaining days before the semester began to learn as much as he could. Gu Yang's techniques were proving to be very useful, giving him deeper insights into traditional martial arts and improving his combat skills. He also felt a greater understanding of the "Hoe Strike" technique.

"How about we practice together again?" Su Jie suggested to Zhang Manman.

"Forget it. I'm going to check it out," Zhang Manman waved her hand. "My family has business dealings with Liu Zihao. If I can make a connection here, it'll help with a lot of things."

"Then I'll practice on my own," Su Jie nodded. He followed a strict training schedule every day.

Once everyone had left, Gu Yang smiled. "You're not one to follow the crowd, are you? It seems you've mastered the 'Long-armed Ape Reach' technique. Do you want to learn something new?"

"You're willing to teach me? Didn't you say we should only learn one move a day?" Su Jie asked, somewhat surprised.

"That's for the other students. You're different. Since you learn quickly, it doesn't matter. The saying 'don't bite off more than you can chew' refers to people who, without fully mastering one thing, rush off to learn something else. You've already absorbed the Hoe Strike move into your bones, so the more moves you learn in the future, the more they'll blend into this one, and the more variations will emerge." Gu Yang asked with interest, "Do you now understand the essence of the Hoe Strike move?"

"The essence of this move isn't the drill, nor raising the hand, and certainly not the pounce, fall, flip, or strike. The real internal training lies in that sudden burst of reaction. It's about mastering the moment of explosive response when startled. With any move, you can capture that shock and burst of energy. Every animal, and human too, has an amazing reaction when startled. Our training core is to enhance this reaction, and enhance it again," Su Jie explained his view.

"You've already reached the point of 'getting the meaning, not the form'." Gu Yang sighed, "That's right. The true essence of Hoe Strike is to train this response. Whether it's a person or an animal, in a relaxed state, the mental state is calm, but when startled, the mind becomes extremely tense, and the burst of power is astonishing. However, the body often can't withstand this explosive power and might get injured, or even suffer from exhaustion. Through training, we aim to normalize this explosive power, so that the body can handle it and gradually strengthen it. The more we increase both the explosive power and physical

condition, the more this move will improve. Once that's achieved, the technique itself doesn't matter much. I've never seen a genius like you."

"Coach, I'm not a genius." Su Jie said, somewhat speechless. "Actually, I find martial arts much easier than studying. If you ask me, a single math course is far more difficult to learn than martial arts. Also, subjects like physics, chemistry, and biology are much more profound than martial arts."

"Uh..." Hearing Su Jie's comment, Gu Yang was at a loss for words.

He realized that Su Jie had a point. Natural sciences like mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology were all profound, the foundation of human civilization. People could live without learning martial arts, but not without studying these sciences.

Even someone who had immersed their whole life in martial arts, like Gu Yang, felt that martial arts could never surpass any of the subjects in natural science.

"I originally prepared eighteen moves, representing the essence of various martial arts academies. Since you learn quickly, I'll teach you all of them today," Gu Yang said. "The first move is 'Long-armed Ape Reach' from the Monkey style. Next is 'Tiger's Roar and Crane's Call' from Hong Quan. Then there's 'Mandarin Duck Chain Kick' from Spring Leg, 'Breaking Bones' from Eagle Claw, 'Cannon Fist' from Shaolin, 'Little Ghost Grinding the Mill' from Bagua Palm, 'Hard and Soft Horizontal Cut' from Karate, and 'Body Throw' from Judo..."

“Wait, Karate and Judo too?” Su Jie interrupted.

“All martial arts and combat techniques in the world have their own core signature move,” Gu Yang replied. “Each has its own unique force-generation techniques and core philosophies. For example, Muay Thai’s essence is a sweeping kick. I also have boxing’s slipping and weaving drills. Alright, I won’t go on introducing. Once you’ve learned the moves, you can think them over and look them up online. Of course, the internet is full of mixed information that can lead you astray, but our academy’s official website has videos, lessons, and explanations, so it’s quite reliable.”

Su Jie nodded. In the past, he couldn’t understand any martial arts manuals, but now after watching some videos online or reading classic old manuals, every word felt profound, and he could grasp the meaning deeply. Additionally, watching training and competition videos from world champions allowed him to intuitively learn, gaining practical knowledge.

Martial arts were simple, Su Jie thought to himself. At least it was simpler than studying. The key was to endure the initial painful and confused period.

After several hours of training with Gu Yang, he had learned all eighteen moves before lunch. The moves were simple, but they contained deep techniques from various martial arts academies, which weren’t easy to fully comprehend in a short time.

Su Jie thought he needed to reflect on how to integrate all of these into the “Hoe Strike” move.

After lunch, Su Jie waited for his food to digest, set an alarm, and took a one-hour nap in his dorm. He used the “Great Corpse State,” then began his physical strength training.

This training method was still guided by Odell, with strict rules about the order of exercises and which body parts to train. There could be no mistakes.

Once his training was almost complete, he began using a large hoe to dig outside, then returned to smash flies on the glass with a large hammer.

Once his body was exhausted, he rested, and it was already evening. After dinner, he continued with combat practice.

To his surprise, he was placed in a position for the small arena competition.

Because Liu Zihao had set up a crew at the academy, recruiting extra actors, many students went to watch the event.

Su Jie felt quite at ease. He won ten matches in a row, finally losing to a provincial-level professional sanda athlete. However, he wasn’t knocked out; he lost due to the score and passive fighting.

In the fight, Su Jie was as clever as a ghost. When he found someone stronger, he immediately ran around the ring, passive in his approach, making the opponent furious but unable to land a single hit.

He discovered a trick: in every competition, there were many rule loopholes that could be exploited, often allowing one to win a breather. Unlike street brawls where there were no rules and anything went. So as long as one knew how to use the rules in a match, victory was relatively easy.

“Did this student really win ten matches in a row? Is he a professional?”

The small arena competition had quite a few spectators, including some big shots.

Su Jie’s impressive performance immediately caught people’s attention.

“He’s a temporary entrant,” someone quickly got a hold of Su Jie’s information.

After the match, Su Jie noticed that his account had an extra 20,000 yuan. He felt relaxed and happy. This meant his college tuition and living expenses were taken care of.

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Chapter 32: A Millennium of Innovation

Who Reigns Supreme, Technology or Manpower?

"Making money is really easy. I used to see news about online streamers earning hundreds of thousands, even millions, a month and thought it was an exaggeration. But now, in just about a month, I've made 150,000. I can hardly believe it," Su Jie said after finishing his match, heading straight to find Uncle Mang.

The mere thought of the electric current stimulation made him want to leave, but his nature was inherently tenacious. He thrived on challenges, forging ahead against the current. So, gritting his teeth and steeling his resolve, he made his way to Uncle Mang.

"I thought you wouldn't come today," Uncle Mang said upon seeing Su Jie. "Kid, your willpower is truly remarkable."

"Let's do this." Su Jie felt like he was walking to his execution. At this moment, he deeply empathized with the underground revolutionaries who endured torture before the nation's liberation.

The process remained the same: first massage, then acupuncture, followed by nutritional supplements, and finally, the electric current stimulation.

This time, the electric shocks were as excruciating as ever—utterly unbearable. When the pain reached its peak, he even thought he might be brain-dead.

Fortunately, the inner-strength tonic he had taken seemed to have some pain-relieving properties. He didn't completely lose consciousness and instead used his iron-body martial arts to relax, leveraging the electric stimulation to train his ability to switch between tension and relaxation—his internal energy control.

Gradually, he began to understand the benefits of electric stimulation.

Compared to physical impact training, electric currents could reach deeper, penetrating even the bone marrow and activating every neuron and muscle fiber.

After enduring a hellish ordeal, Su Jie surprisingly managed to avoid losing control of his bodily functions—a clear sign that his physical endurance had improved significantly.

Uncle Mang was even more thrilled than he was, continuously recording various data points.

Once the session was over, Su Jie lay down for half an hour. When he finally got up, he felt incredibly light—his entire day's fatigue had vanished.

"Incredible. Your muscle fibers have become significantly more resilient in just one day," Uncle Mang exclaimed after analyzing the data. "You must come again

tomorrow. I can tell you with certainty that this electric stimulation not only does no harm to your body, but it also greatly enhances your physical capabilities. Even deep fascia and tendons, which are nearly impossible to train, can grow stronger through this method."

The human body has training blind spots.

No matter what movements one performs, there are always areas that remain untrained. In ancient times, people attempted to address this by using meditation to circulate their "Qi and blood," hoping to stimulate these areas.

But the effects were minimal.

Now, with precise electric stimulation, every "training blind spot" could be effectively exercised.

This was undoubtedly one of the most advanced and scientific training methods available.

No wonder the U.S. used it to train their top agents.

Later, Su Jie returned to his dormitory to sleep. Josh hadn't returned yet, probably off chasing after his idol, Liu Zihao.

"Huh? My package arrived?" He noticed a package in his mailbox, quickly retrieved it, and opened it to find what looked like an electronic wristwatch.

After setting it up, he washed up and went straight to bed.

Recently, as soon as he closed his eyes, he would use the "Great Corpse State" to stretch his body slightly, allowing him to enter deep sleep instantly. If someone were watching him at that moment, they would see him lying flat on the bed, his breathing fine, even, and deep. With each inhale, his body would expand outward like an inflatable figure, from a deflated state to full expansion.

Then, as he exhaled, his entire body would collapse inward, becoming as soft as cotton.

Through this natural breathing rhythm, his body achieved optimal stretching and relaxation, following a perfectly tuned frequency.

Strictly speaking, the "Great Corpse State" wasn't martial arts or a combat technique. It originated from Tibetan esoteric practices and yoga, representing a deep form of cultivation that integrated mind, body, worldview, and philosophy. It was a practice of self-exploration and enlightenment.

Simply put, it was a spiritual cleansing.

From a scientific perspective, it was a method of psychological training.

Odell had traveled multiple times to Tibet, India, and other spiritual centers worldwide, seeking "supernatural" power. He believed that such power stemmed from the mind, so he searched far and wide for training techniques, testing them through his own practice and human experiments.

Su Jie was one of his test subjects.

Among all his experiments, Odell found that the "Great Corpse State" was the most effective and easiest to implement. However, truly mastering its essence remained incredibly difficult.

It was extremely rare for someone like Su Jie to enter the right state on their first try. Because of this, Odell took the time to train him, recognizing him as a valuable talent.

Gu Yang was the same, as were Nie Shuang and Uncle Mang.

However, Su Jie found it perfectly normal—after all, studying and learning were much harder than this.

While Su Jie was in deep sleep, in a secret training room at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, Liu Zihao was also training. He was tall, handsome, and had a perfectly toned body with no excess fat. His muscles trembled slightly with each breath, producing a faint buzzing sound.

Bang! Bang! Bang!

He furiously pummeled the sandbag, which weighed over a thousand pounds, yet his punches made it sway as if it were a mere scrap of paper.

His arm span was astonishingly long, and each punch was so fast that it left only a blur. Every strike carried a deep penetrating force.

Snap!

Suddenly, he kicked the sandbag, sending it flying before it burst apart, scattering its contents all over the floor.

Training complete.

A mechanical voice echoed through the training room. On a large screen in the room, a virtual female face appeared—it was an artificial intelligence training system.

Liu Zihao stepped onto a machine, which immediately began analyzing his data: heart rate, pulse, muscle density, bone structure... Numerous statistics were compiled together.

After several minutes of calculations, the screen displayed a set of recommendations.

"You can still replenish your nutrition today. The recommended meals and supplements are as follows..."

A complete nutritional plan appeared on the screen, followed by suggested body treatments.

"Trapezius muscle, soleus muscle, biceps... Lactic acid buildup detected. Recommended treatment: alternating ice and heat therapy, along with the application of the following medications..."

A full recovery plan was laid out.

"How is it?"

A woman walked into the training area—it was Nie Shuang.

"You went to a training camp in the U.S. How was it?" she asked.

"Our academy's training system is outdated," Liu Zihao shook his head. "Our data analysis and physical assessment methods are far behind. Of course, it's also due to our academy's limited budget—we don't have the funds for advanced research. But on this trip, I met Feng Shao from Haoyu Group. The movie we're shooting is funded by him."

"Haoyu Group? The top domestic company in AI, big data, and network industries?" Nie Shuang was visibly surprised. "If they help us develop a training system, our academy's training would truly advance. Human coaches have limitations—they can't analyze and refine every detail of a student's training. But AI-assisted training eliminates errors, ensuring precise movements and significantly reducing injuries during practice."

"You have no idea how powerful AI has become," Liu Zihao narrowed his eyes. "Some systems can even control robotic arms for precise massage therapy, muscle relaxation, and impact resistance training—enhancing the body's resilience without causing internal damage. Their precision is far beyond human capability. Even Uncle Mang's massages can't compare."

"Additionally, martial arts techniques have been rigorously analyzed, making them more aligned with biomechanics. In the future, martial arts systems will undergo a complete transformation."

"That makes sense," Nie Shuang agreed. "Take Go, for example. Humans spent thousands of years refining its strategies, believing they had grasped the ultimate truths. But when AI appeared, it shattered those strategies—like a god revealing that everything we thought we knew was wrong. Martial arts will likely face the same revolution."

"Humans learn from every fight, creating better combat techniques over time. But AI can simulate billions—even trillions—of fights in mere seconds. What takes humans millennia to refine, AI can perfect in just a few hours. It's terrifying."

"There's something else," Liu Zihao added. "I heard a rumor that the world's number-one combat coach, known in the industry as the 'God-Maker'—Odell—is here. Did anyone try to recruit him?"

"No one noticed him," Nie Shuang was shocked. "That coach has trained numerous world champions and is a top-tier martial artist himself. But wasn't he with the 'Typhon' training camp? That's the most secretive, brutal, and elite training camp in the world. Didn't you train there for a while?"

"The Typhon camp relies heavily on AI training systems now, making Odell redundant. So he left—essentially, he got laid off. The camp's leadership tried to retain him, but he felt insulted and still chose to leave," Liu Zihao explained. "I actually tried to recruit him myself, but he turned me down."

"I recently discovered a martial arts prodigy in the temporary martial arts class," Nie Shuang said. "I was planning to have him enter professional combat competitions, but he refused. He has a physique similar to yours—he might even serve as your stunt double or join the 'Liu Family' team in the future."

"Oh?" Liu Zihao showed little reaction and simply nodded. "Since you recommended him, bring him to see me tomorrow when I have time. If he's talented, obedient, and willing to sign contracts with both the academy and the company, I might consider mentoring him."

Nie Shuang frowned slightly but said nothing as she left the training room.

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Chapter 33: Encountering a Trap, Calm and Prepared

The next morning, Su Jie began his usual training routine.

As he went through his exercises, he felt an increasing sense of comfort and flexibility. His body was much more agile than before. He started with some basic joint stretches in the open field, his body heating up as dopamine gathered in his system from the physical activity. It was that pleasant, slightly tipsy feeling—like the aftereffects of a drink.

This was the perfect state to be in.

This was the best warm-up before martial arts practice.

According to Odell's theory, warming up before exercise with aerobic activities produces dopamine and endorphins in the body. Dopamine is stimulating, while endorphins serve as painkillers. It gives a feeling akin to being mildly drunk: the sense of being invincible, yet still clear-headed. This is the optimal state for martial arts training.

Swish!

Su Jie shifted his weight, and his body surprisingly performed a backflip, landing smoothly on the ground.

"What? I can do a backflip now?" he exclaimed in surprise.

He had always practiced practical movements, from digging and turning the earth to the later horizontal punches and strikes. He had never practiced flashy moves like backflips. These acrobatic stunts—like high kicks and flying kicks—had no use in real combat. If you used a backflip in a real fight, your opponent would exploit the opening and strike you down in an instant.

Even in traditional martial arts, high kicks were forbidden. Martial arts sayings even advised not to kick higher than your knee.

Of course, in competitions, high whips and sweeps can score points or knock out opponents, but Su Jie analyzed carefully and realized that the arena is a far cry from true combat.

He had never practiced backflips before, but now, without effort, he could perform one. This was a result of his improved physical fitness and balance. It had all come naturally.

Backflips are useful in performances and often earn applause. Some actors even rely on them to make a living.

He continued testing his flexibility and balance, performing many acrobatic-like movements with ease.

‘Could this be the result of the electrical stimulation? I’ve only been at it for two days, and my muscles are so relaxed? It’s a shame this method can’t be used by others—seems like no one at the academy is doing it. Forget about electrical stimulation; even Uncle Mang’s massages are too intense for most. Is it my willpower that’s naturally so strong? Or is it because of Odell’s training?’

Su Jie thought for a moment but concluded that his progress was most likely due to the foundation laid by Odell’s training.

After his martial arts practice, he started practicing the “Hoe Strike” technique and integrated it with representative martial arts techniques from the ancient Yang school’s eighteen moves.

Soon, he was able to perform the movements smoothly. With just a thought, his limbs moved in sync, and he could precisely activate various techniques, though the core remained the “Hoe Strike.”

‘The Hoe Strike is the highest form of martial arts, a secret technique passed down in ancient martial arts circles, known as the ‘Heart and Will’ technique. By mastering just this one form, comprehending its essence, you can seamlessly integrate all techniques into it, and they become second nature. Now, I truly understand the benefit of this technique. But something still feels missing, like I haven’t reached perfection. Am I lacking in the mastery of the mind and will? My understanding of the mind is that it’s like a jar of clear water, and will is the impurities that gradually appear in the water...’

Su Jie sat cross-legged, deeply contemplating.

He imagined himself as a jar of clear water, and as various thoughts flooded his mind, the water became murky and foul-smelling.

He shook his head to clear his mind, focusing on his breath until his mind returned to a state of clarity.

In this clear water, one thought appeared—the core training of the Hoe Strike technique.

The thought grew stronger, and eventually, the entire jar was filled with the technique's practice and application, leaving no room for anything else. After practicing, it suddenly returned to clarity.

“That’s it.” Su Jie suddenly jumped up, holding a heavy iron hoe, and with a powerful swing, it dropped.

He now wielded the hoe effortlessly, as if it had no weight.

“This is it. This is the harmony of mind and will,” Su Jie realized. *‘When not in use, the mind must remain pure, free of distractions. But once you activate it, all your focus converges into one strong thought—only the technique exists, and everything else, including your opponent, ceases to exist. After stopping, the powerful thought returns to clarity. This transition allows you to unleash your greatest power, making your technique pure. But what is the scientific principle behind the harmony of mind and will? I should consult an expert. I know that too much thinking can lead to mental fatigue and shorten life. Many centenarians in rural areas have lived simple lives with few distractions, which is why they live so long...’*

Su Jie finally grasped the true core of the technique—the harmony of mind and will. He began to practice it earnestly.

Sure enough, as he practiced, it felt completely different from before. It seemed as though all his strength could be released, and his speed, accuracy, control, and impact were greatly enhanced.

It was like a company that had once been poorly managed with no central figure. Everyone was unsure who to follow, resulting in low efficiency. But when a strong leader arrived, everything was reorganized, and the company's efficiency increased by a thousandfold.

'Chinese martial arts seek a unified force, which is the efficiency of muscles working together. Even a weak body can unleash great power if the movements are coordinated. But this unity is physical. The true unity, however, lies in the harmony of mind and will,' Su Jie finally understood the core of Chinese martial arts. He no longer had any doubts. Now, he understood why Odell had trained him in the "Great Corpse State"—it was a way to cultivate a pure, undistracted mind.

"There is no more doubt. What's left is to train my inner self, making it purer, and then train my body, making it stronger."

Su Jie knew that understanding the true essence of martial arts was one thing, but truly becoming strong was another. It still required constant forging and refining, where both mind and will had to be practiced until they could be triggered in an instant.

At this moment, Su Jie was truly enjoying the "flavor" of Chinese martial arts.

He was like a foodie who had worked hard to pursue fine cuisine, finally tasting the dishes made by a master chef.

After his morning training, he went to academy to have breakfast, feeling completely satisfied.

The road was already bright, and he was running back to academy.

“Hmm? What’s that ahead?”

Halfway there, he suddenly noticed someone lying by the roadside. There seemed to be blood around them, and they were groaning in pain. It was still early, so there weren’t many people around.

Su Jie glanced at his newly bought watch, quickly ran over, and asked, “What happened?”

The person was a middle-aged man, around his forties, and seemed seriously injured. “I’ve been beaten. Please, help me get to the hospital.”

“I’ll help you,” Su Jie said, quickly helping the injured man to his feet and taking him to the nearest hospital.

They had only walked for a minute when Su Jie found himself covered in blood. Suddenly, a group of people appeared from a distance, riding motorcycles and making a loud roaring noise. They blocked Su Jie's path.

"Brother Qiang, what happened?"

The group immediately approached and asked the injured man, "How did you get hurt? Who did this to you? Was it this kid?"

"I was just helping him. When I found him, he was already lying on the road," Su Jie calmly explained.

"Bullsh!t!" At this moment, a strong man wearing sanda shorts jumped off one of the motorcycles and was about to slap Su Jie. "How could someone beat Brother Qiang? It was you! You beat him and were trying to take him somewhere else. Were you trying to kill him and silence him?"

Su Jie quickly dodged.

By this time, people nearby had already started recording on their phones.

“It’s him! I was out running this morning and bumped into him. He attacked me without warning, beat me up badly, and tried to drag me to a remote place to bury me. He’s a murderer!” The middle-aged man, Brother Qiang, suddenly screamed, completely different from his earlier gasping and weak demeanor.

“Grab this kid and take him to the police station! What a murderer!” At this moment, the man in sanda shorts with his shirt off lunged toward Su Jie and threw a powerful punch at his chest. It was a hook punch, very forceful, indicating that the man had trained for a long time.

Without thinking, Su Jie swiftly moved to the left side of the man. He didn’t strike; instead, he lightly swept his leg in a technique from the ancient Yang family’s 18 forms—the "Mandarin Duck Chain Kick."

This move primarily involved hooks and sweeps, designed to quickly trip an opponent by hooking their foot, causing them to lose balance and fall. Compared to other moves, it wasn’t as damaging, but it was clean, swift, and stealthy. The enemy wouldn’t even realize what hit them, making it a useful technique to subdue an opponent and make them reconsider.

Thud!

The man fell flat on his face, covered in dirt, but wasn’t injured. He was, however, dazed and couldn’t get up for a while.

At this moment, fists started raining down from the others nearby.

Su Jie received several punches to his head and body, but fortunately, his internal martial arts training was strong, and he didn't suffer any injuries. With a few more blows, he created an opening and pushed through.

Of course, at this point, he could have struck harder, knocking out a few of them. But Su Jie knew that if he went too far, the others would surely get hurt, maybe even seriously, and that would lead to legal trouble.

"Kid, if you try to run, I've already recorded everything. As soon as you move, we'll call the police. You won't get away."

One of them hopped on a motorcycle, ready to chase after Su Jie.

"What are you doing?"

Just then, a loud shout came from a distance, and someone ran over quickly.

'Is it him?' Su Jie realized that the person running toward him was none other than Coach Zhou Chun. It was because of him that Su Jie had caused him to lose a jar of precious internal strengthening wine.

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Chapter 34: Staying Calm, A Failed Scheme Backfires

"Stop right there!"

Zhou Chun walked over. His tall stature and imposing presence immediately intimidated everyone present.

"This is a student from Minglun Martial Arts Academy. Why are you attacking him?" Zhou Chun questioned loudly, then turned to Su Jie. "Don't be afraid, come stand behind me."

Su Jie obediently moved behind Zhou Chun.

"Coach Zhou, your student attacked someone. He beat up Brother Qiang like this! Look, he's even got Brother Qiang's blood on him. What do you plan to do about it?" A motorcyclist stepped forward, his voice even louder, almost a roar.

This group of people all looked tough and well-trained, seemingly fighters from a boxing gym.

"You really hit Brother Qiang?" Zhou Chun turned to Su Jie. "Who told you to attack people? Even though you're a temporary student, you still have to follow academy rules. If outsiders bully you, the academy will stand up for you. But if you assault someone without reason, the academy won't protect you."

Su Jie remained calm. "Coach, I only helped someone up, but I was framed."

"Framed? Do you have proof? There are no surveillance cameras here, and all these people are pointing fingers at you. Even if you go to the police station, you won't be able to explain yourself clearly. You might even get detained. Why don't you just take a step back? I'll negotiate with them, and we'll treat this as a lesson learned. Otherwise, if you're detained, your parents will be notified, and so will your former academy. This will turn into a big mess." Zhou Chun deliberately tried to intimidate him. An ordinary student would have been scared out of their wits.

"Then, Coach, please talk to them," Su Jie said quickly. "I guess I was just unlucky for helping someone."

"That's more like it." Zhou Chun stepped forward, walked a short distance away, and had a discussion with the group. Then he returned and said to Su Jie, "Good

thing I have some influence. These guys don't want to make trouble with Minglun Martial Arts Academy. But they also refuse to leave empty-handed. Since you're a student, you probably don't have money to compensate them. Here's the deal—they all belong to the same boxing gym. You'll sign a contract with them and fight in competitions to pay off your debt. Once that's done, this matter will be settled. Otherwise, you'll be detained, maybe even sent to prison, and your future will be ruined. It's not worth it."

"Oh, really?"

Su Jie looked at Zhou Chun for a moment before suddenly laughing. "Coach Zhou, that boxing gym—it's either owned by you, or you have a stake in it, right?"

"What did you say?" Zhou Chun's expression darkened, his face twisting into a sinister look. "I went out of my way to settle this for you, and now you're accusing me of orchestrating this whole thing? Do you think you're some big shot worth all that effort? Since you don't appreciate my help, go ahead and get detained!"

"Coach, do you know what this is?" Su Jie raised his wrist, showing an electronic watch.

"What are you trying to say?" Zhou Chun's face turned grim.

"This is a watch with a hidden camera. It records in high resolution. I bought it online for just 998 yuan. From the moment I helped that person up, I recorded

everything. Why don't we take this to the police station and see for ourselves?" Su Jie spoke as if he had just woken up from a nap, completely at ease.

Smack!

Suddenly, Zhou Chun lunged forward, trying to smash the watch.

Su Jie quickly pulled his hand back and said, "Coach, when was the last time you used the internet? This watch connects to my phone's mobile hotspot. The footage is automatically uploaded to the cloud. Even if you take my watch now, it won't do you any good. Unless you're a hacker who can break into a major company's servers to delete the video, I'm afraid you're out of luck."

"You little b*stard," Zhou Chun snarled, his expression revealing that Su Jie had hit the nail on the head. This whole setup had indeed been his plan—to trick Su Jie into signing a contract with his boxing gym and fight for him.

He had assumed that Su Jie was just a student who would cave under a little intimidation. But he never expected Su Jie to remain so composed, handling the situation even better than most adults. Instead of being scared, Su Jie had turned the tables, making Zhou Chun suffer a major setback.

"Coach, you thought I was just some high academyer who could be easily scared into compliance. But I'm not just any student. I was the top scorer in the high academy entrance exam and got into the province's top academy. Right now, I'm

ranked among the top three students there. Even without this camera watch, do you really think the academy leadership would let you get away with this scam?" Su Jie looked at Zhou Chun as if he were a fool. "You might be a professional fighter, but your brain doesn't seem to work very well. Don't get angry, though. Calm down. If you hit me now and I upload this video online, what do you think will happen to you?"

"You got lucky this time. What will it take for you to delete the video?" Zhou Chun narrowed his eyes, exuding a murderous aura. But it was just for show—Su Jie had already seen through his bluff.

"I'm not deleting the video. If I did, you'd just try to frame me again later." Su Jie waved dismissively, not wanting to waste any more time with Zhou Chun. Every minute and second was precious—he needed to focus on his training.

"Stop right there!" As Su Jie tried to leave, the group of motorcyclists shouted again, attempting to block his way.

Su Jie didn't even look at them. Though they seemed aggressive, he didn't consider them a threat. Even if they all rushed him at once, he was confident he could escape without a problem. And if he really fought back, he might even seriously injure a few of them.

This was the confidence that martial arts training had given him.

"I'll count to three. If you don't step aside, I'll post it online immediately," Su Jie said to Zhou Chun.

"You little b*stard!" Zhou Chun was so furious that he nearly exploded. "I want to see how you leave today. Never mind whether your watch's pinhole camera is real or fake—even if it is real, you're here, and once we catch you and make you sign the contract, do you think you can just walk away? Put your fingerprint on it now!"

"Sorry, but I'm leaving."

Suddenly, Su Jie exerted force, darted outward, hooked his foot, and then pushed. The three men surrounding him were sent flying and collapsed onto the ground. He then broke through the encirclement and sprinted away.

Immediately, everyone shouted and chased after him.

However, Su Jie's speed and endurance were beyond what these people could handle. After a few minutes of pursuit, he was already nearing the academy. Zhou Chun hurriedly signaled for the others to stop.

"Brother Chun, what do we do?" asked the middle-aged man who had staged the accident, known as 'Brother Qiang.' "That kid is way too cunning. Should we chase him into the academy?"

"Are you stupid?" Zhou Chun almost slapped him. "If that kid really recorded us and this blows up, we'll be in serious trouble."

"I think he's just bluffing. He probably didn't record anything. We shouldn't let him fool us," said a well-built man wearing Sanda shorts, his tone vicious. "But I have to admit, that kid is impressive. I've been practicing Muay Thai for five years, and he took me down with just one kick. Brother Chun, you were right—if we can trick him into signing a contract with our boxing gym, he'll be a gold mine for us."

"At first, I thought it was overkill for you to go to such lengths for a kid, but now I see he's no ordinary person. What do we do next?"

Hearing their discussions, Zhou Chun waved his hand. "Go back to the gym and don't say a word about what happened today. I'll handle this. I need to find out if he really recorded anything. If he didn't, I'll make him pay."

After saying this, a new scheme formed in Zhou Chun's mind.

"What a hassle," Su Jie muttered as he returned to academy. He took a shower to wash off the blood on his body. "Zhou Chun is supposed to be a professional fighter who has competed in numerous national-level tournaments, yet his character is this rotten. But I guess it's not surprising—he's not actually part of the national team, just a club fighter."

The modern fighting scene was divided into official national tournaments and large-scale commercial competitions.

Official national tournaments were rare, and members of the national Sanda and fighting teams were formal athletes. According to regulations, they couldn't participate in commercial matches and were only allowed to compete in sports events. However, after retirement, they could enter commercial competitions.

Commercial fights, on the other hand, were thriving. Many corporate-sponsored tournaments, like the "XX Cup" or "King of Kings," offered lucrative prize money and even attracted global participation.

Several major corporations in the country organized free-fighting tournaments, with championship prizes exceeding five million yuan.

Of course, this was still nothing compared to international boxing. Top international boxing champions could earn hundreds of millions or even billions of dollars from a single fight.

Nie Shuang from Minglun Martial Arts Academy saw Su Jie's potential and wanted to sign him, but Zhou Chun had also set his sights on him and resorted to underhanded tactics to scare him into signing.

"Looks like I've become a hot commodity," Su Jie chuckled, twisting his watch. He wasn't bluffing—his watch really did have a pinhole camera, and the footage was already uploaded to a cloud storage server.

After Gu Yang warned him about Zhou Chun last time, Su Jie had stayed on alert and bought this device online. Sure enough, it came in handy. Otherwise, he wouldn't have been able to clear his name, no matter how justified he was.

In reality, there had been many cases of people helping elderly folks only to be falsely accused.

Not to mention, this incident had taken place in a remote area without surveillance cameras. The injuries and blood on those men were real, and he had gotten some on himself as well, making things even harder to explain.

"The world is a dangerous place," Su Jie, a high school student, sighed. "Luckily, I spend a lot of time online and have seen all kinds of things. Better safe than sorry—I need to be even more cautious from now on."

Shaking off the unpleasant encounter, Su Jie had breakfast and prepared for another full day of training.

His current training regimen was immense—at least three times the intensity of what Odell had gone through in his time. But he enjoyed it. A day without training felt unbearable.

Now that he had money, he could afford plenty of nutritional supplements to keep up with his regimen. On top of that, Uncle Mang's acupuncture, massage therapy, electric stimulation, and internal fortification wine had significantly improved his physical condition.

He assumed his stance and trained for about an hour, sweating profusely. That morning, in the wilderness, he had gained insight into the essence of "unity of heart and mind" in martial arts. His execution of the "Hoe Strike" technique had reached a near-mastery level, aligning with the old manuals' description of "true intention arising from unintentional movements."

He repeatedly refined this move, his body naturally flowing into countless variations.

The eighteen freestyle combat techniques Gu Yang taught were indeed masterpieces. Anyone with real skill who practiced them thoroughly could seamlessly integrate them into actual combat.

Su Jie, having real battle experience, understood their depth and value.

"Good."

Just as Su Jie was practicing, a voice came from the side.

It was Nie Shuang.

At that moment, Nie Shuang's eyes sparkled with excitement. She was an expert, and she could clearly see the state Su Jie was in.

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Chapter 35: A Firm Refusal No Idol Worship

"Ah, it's Sister Nie. Are you looking for me?" Su Jie stopped and asked.

"Your martial arts..." Nie Shuang was still in shock. "How is this possible..."

"What's wrong?" Su Jie asked.

"It's nothing." Nie Shuang quickly said, "Speaking of which, I need to thank you. Without you, I wouldn't have won that jar of internal-strength wine from Zhou Chun. By the way, Zhou Chun is a narrow-minded person, and he has some influence outside. He didn't send anyone to trouble you, did he? Last time, I told Gu Yang to warn you to be careful. Have you been on guard?"

"I actually have something to tell you." Su Jie sent the video to Nie Shuang and briefly explained what had happened that morning.

"D*mn it! Zhou Chun is actually this despicable!" After watching the video and listening to the recording, Nie Shuang's face turned red with anger. It took her a while to calm down before she stared at Su Jie. "How do you want the academy to handle him? You now have evidence, and if you report this to the police, he could be charged with extortion."

"I don't really care." Su Jie shook his head. "Even if he were convicted of extortion, the sentence wouldn't be long, especially since he didn't succeed. Besides, he never directly got involved—he just played the role of a mediator. Even if I reported him, at most, he'd receive a warning or some disciplinary action. Of course, there's another way—I could post this video and an article exposing the situation online, making it a trending topic. That would ensure he gets the punishment he deserves. But if I do that, Minglun Martial Arts Academy's reputation would take a huge hit. Imagine the headlines: 'Coach at the Nation's Top Martial Arts academy Tries to Frame a Student.' Wouldn't that tarnish the academy's name? But if Zhou Chun keeps pushing his luck, I won't have a choice. One more thing—I don't want to gain fame this way."

'This kid has a sharp mind,' Nie Shuang frowned. 'He presents logical arguments, analyzes the situation thoroughly, and even implies something deeper...'

Su Jie's words suggested that the academy was responsible. If he exposed the incident, it would damage the academy's reputation. Though he seemed to be considering the academy's best interests, his underlying message was clear.

"In the end, Zhou Chun is still a coach at this academy. For him to do something like this, the academy cannot escape responsibility," Nie Shuang said decisively. "So, on behalf of the academy, I'll make three promises: First, Zhou Chun will be dealt with strictly. Second, we will compensate you. Third, we will ensure that Zhou Chun never troubles you again. Now, tell me, what kind of compensation do

you want?"

"Compensation? I don't need any for now." Su Jie thought for a moment. "In about ten days, I'll be leaving the martial arts academy to return to high school. Without Uncle Mang's acupuncture therapy and electrostimulation, my progress will definitely slow down. Do you have any suggestions?"

"I still say the same thing," Nie Shuang sighed with regret. "You should just enroll in our martial arts academy officially. You can still take the college entrance exams, and it won't interfere with your training. Not only will you get free tuition, but you'll also receive a scholarship. Plus, we'll provide you with resources to help you become a professional fighter. Even geniuses need consistent, intensive training—otherwise, they're just wasted potential. If you go back to a regular high academy, you won't have as much time to practice. You also won't have the same environment, training partners, or real combat opportunities. No one succeeds alone. In ancient times, Shaolin Temple gathered countless martial artists who trained and exchanged techniques daily, which led to the creation of many martial arts styles. The same goes for Minglun Martial Arts Academy. Martial arts, like scientific research, can never be developed by just one person."

"I'll think about it. Anything else?" Su Jie remained unmoved.

"Alright." Nie Shuang shook her head. "How about this? I'll give you a jar of our specially made medicinal balm. Combined with Uncle Mang's massage, it'll help your body stabilize its conditioning. Also, I want to introduce you to someone. It took a lot of effort for me to recommend you to him. If he takes a liking to you, you'll have plenty of opportunities in the future."

"Who?" Su Jie asked.

"Liu Zihao." Nie Shuang tried to see some sign of idol worship in Su Jie's eyes, but there was none.

Liu Zihao was an international action superstar with countless devoted fans wherever he went. In fact, ninety-nine percent of the students at Minglun Martial Arts Academy had enrolled after watching his movies.

Yet, Su Jie didn't seem the least bit interested.

'From his movements, I can tell he has deep martial arts skills,' Su Jie thought to himself. 'I don't worship idols or chase after celebrities, but observing a master isn't a bad thing.'

Josh, on the other hand, was fanatical about Liu Zihao. He always said that he admired only two Chinese people: Bruce Lee and Liu Zihao.

Getting to meet Liu Zihao and asking for an autograph would probably make Josh go crazy with excitement.

"Thank you, Sister Shuang," Su Jie said politely, showing his appreciation.

"Follow me." Nie Shuang led the way, but she was still thinking, *'This Su Jie... He doesn't seem like a high academy student at all. He's way too mature. Most high schoolers at this age are obsessed with celebrities or gaming. Even top students would be trembling with excitement at the thought of meeting a superstar. But he acts like it's just another ordinary event. Usually, only kids from poor families mature early because they have to take on responsibilities sooner. But Su Jie's family seems well-off...'*

Before long, Nie Shuang brought Su Jie to a secluded building deep inside the academy. Security guards were stationed outside, preventing outsiders from entering as if they were guarding an important official.

However, seeing Nie Shuang, the guards did not stop her and allowed her to bring Su Jie inside.

The building was quiet and entirely made of wood, giving it a peaceful and refined atmosphere. It was likely designed by a professional architect to promote relaxation and focus. The academy generally kept this area off-limits, and the outer gates were always closed.

At the highest level of the building, there was a large square study, about two hundred square meters in size. The room was spacious, filled with bookshelves and a large desk.

A young man, dressed in loose-fitting clothes, was practicing calligraphy with a brush.

Beside him stood a female secretary in professional attire, carefully grinding ink for him.

"Is that Liu Zihao?" Su Jie observed the young man. He looked somewhat different from his on-screen persona—handsomer, with a more well-proportioned physique, and an even stronger presence.

In movies, Liu Zihao usually played tough and cold-blooded roles, but in reality, he exuded an air of refinement and scholarly elegance. At first glance, he didn't seem like a mere martial artist but rather a cultured intellectual.

"I've brought the student. Take a look," Nie Shuang said to Liu Zihao, who was writing.

Liu Zihao didn't look up. He spent ten full minutes finishing his calligraphy piece before finally glancing at Su Jie. Then he nodded. "Not bad. Take him out to sign the contract."

"Sign a contract? What contract?" Su Jie was stunned and looked at Nie Shuang. "I never agreed to sign any contract when I came here."

"Congratulations." At that moment, the female secretary assisting Liu Zihao with his ink came over. "Our company is currently recruiting actors from the academy,

and many people have applied. But so far, no one has caught our eye. You're the first one the boss has taken a liking to. You should do your best. Of course, it's also thanks to Sister Nie Shuang's recommendation. Work hard! Come with me."

As she spoke, the female secretary led Su Jie downstairs and handed him a contract.

"This is... a slave contract?"

Su Jie had only come here as a favor to Nie Shuang. He wasn't a fan of celebrities, nor was he particularly interested in meeting Liu Zihao. Of course, if he could get an autographed photo for Josh, his idol, that would be fine.

But now, they were expecting him to sign a contract as if it were some great favor.

Looking through the contract, Su Jie saw that it required him to work for Liu Zihao's company for twenty years. Moreover, for the first three years, he wouldn't receive any salary and would even have to pay a training fee. If he couldn't afford it, the amount would be deducted from his earnings in the future if he became famous—through acting roles, commercial performances, or martial arts competitions.

In other words, signing this contract would make him a bound artist under Liu Zihao's company, completely under their control.

Su Jie wasn't interested in being an actor, a martial arts competitor, or a celebrity. But even if he were, he would never sign such a contract.

Of course, other young men and women might have signed it without hesitation. But Su Jie had his own life plans and was far more mature than most adults.

"What? You have objections?" The female secretary frowned when she saw Su Jie hesitating. "Do you know how many people dream of signing this contract? If it weren't for Sister Nie Shuang's recommendation, you wouldn't even get the chance to see it."

"Sorry," Su Jie replied politely. "I can't sign this contract right now. I need to discuss it with my parents first." His response was already quite tactful.

"Young man, you should cherish this opportunity. Our company won't wait for you," the female secretary said impatiently. "I'll give you one last chance—three minutes. If you don't sign, you won't get another opportunity."

"Sorry," Su Jie said again, still maintaining his courtesy.

Swish!

The female secretary snatched the contract away and turned to leave.

At the door, she stopped and said, "By the way, please leave immediately."

Su Jie shook his head and walked out of the building.

Upstairs, the female secretary returned with the contract, her face full of disdain. "That kid is still too young. He has no idea what kind of opportunity he just lost."

"What happened?" Liu Zihao had been chatting with Nie Shuang and respected her quite a bit. Seeing the secretary come up, Nie Shuang asked the question.

"That kid refused to sign the contract and left," the female secretary said.

"Sigh..." Nie Shuang sighed. "What a waste of talent."

"Forget it. There's no shortage of talent out there." Liu Zihao didn't care at all. "He's just a student with decent physical fitness. Why are you so fixated on him?"

"I suspect that he has undergone training from the godmaker Odell, which is why his physical abilities have improved so quickly. On top of that, he's the only student in the academy who can endure Uncle Mang's massage techniques. Right now, Uncle Mang is giving him acupuncture and electrical stimulation. You know, that electrical stimulation is used by the U.S. military to train super agents, yet he can withstand it. I'm really curious about his extraordinary willpower. Either Odell trained him using some special methods, or he has an unusual level of resilience," Nie Shuang shared her suspicions.

"Oh?" Liu Zihao was intrigued. "Uncle Mang is a medical doctor and a computer science expert. He's also highly skilled in martial arts. If not for that unfortunate incident, he wouldn't have ended up at our academy. My father personally funds his research every year. I didn't pay much attention to Su Jie before, but he actually has such strong willpower?"

"I wouldn't recommend someone recklessly," Nie Shuang said, waving her hand. "Don't be fooled by the fact that he's a student. He's actually more capable than most adults. This contract of yours probably isn't suitable for him."

"No matter how talented a young person is, if they have the wrong personality, they're difficult to manage. I want obedient actors, not troublemakers. The more talented someone like him is, the more likely they'll turn against you in the future," Liu Zihao said dismissively. "Ever since I returned from the Typhon training camp, I've realized that technology is the most important thing. With the right technology, even ordinary people can be trained into super soldiers."

"I'll try to convince this student first," Nie Shuang said as she stood up and left.

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Chapter 36: Secret Ointment, Strengthening Bones and Body for Complete Shaping

"Today, Nie Shuang actually brought out her family's secret ointment for you."

While massaging Su Jie, Uncle Mang took out a jar of ointment. The ointment was a vibrant green, emitting a fragrant aroma. When applied to the skin, it gave a cooling sensation, as if one were bathing in an icy world, refreshing the mind and invigorating the spirit.

"What kind of ointment is this?" Su Jie knew that Nie Shuang had always treated him well. Although he had refused her offers multiple times, she still gave him the ointment as compensation for the Zhou Chun incident.

This matter had nothing to do with her originally, but to protect the academy's reputation, she still attempted to keep his mouth shut.

"The Nie family used to prepare dishes for the imperial court. You've heard of the famous Nie's Private Kitchen. Besides that, they also had ancestors who served as imperial physicians, responsible for the emperor's health. As the saying goes, 'culinary and medicine are inseparable.' Even now, many medicinal dishes in the academy follow Nie family recipes," Uncle Mang explained.

Su Jie had indeed heard of Nie's Private Kitchen. The reason Odell came here was not just to find hidden masters and learn from them, but also to taste this renowned cuisine.

The authentic Nie's Private Kitchen was exceptionally delicious and highly nutritious, truly a feast for the senses. After eating with Odell for a month, Su Jie had not only enjoyed every meal but also noticed significant physical growth during that time.

The medicinal dishes in the academy, however, were not true Nie family recipes—just some modified versions.

"This ointment is for strengthening the tendons and bones, right?" Su Jie asked.

"That's right, but that's only part of it," Uncle Mang replied. "You know that during the Qing Dynasty, apart from archery and horseback riding, the emperors also trained in 'buku', which was wrestling. Wrestlers always applied a layer of oil to their bodies to prevent injuries and protect their tendons and bones. Back then, a Nie family physician was responsible for creating the emperor's ointment, and it was incredibly effective.

Now, the Nie family has thoroughly analyzed the ingredients of this ointment and refined it through numerous lab experiments. The current version focuses on rapid recovery, enhancing tendon and fascia elasticity, and protecting the joints. It penetrates through the skin into the tissue layers, working from the outside in—making it the best medicine for external body conditioning.

This jar of ointment isn't available on the market. It's an experimental product from the lab and isn't ready for mass production yet."

As Uncle Mang massaged him, the ointment spread across Su Jie's body, seeping into his pores. He felt as if an iron band had wrapped around him, compressing his entire body inward. It almost seemed like he had shrunk.

Of course, it was just an illusion, but it indicated that the medicinal effects had started to take effect within his body.

Su Jie knew that some tightening creams on the market made women's skin feel firmer after application. Over time, continuous use made the skin appear tighter and prevented sagging.

Similarly, this secret ointment worked in the same way—but on a deeper level. It penetrated into the body, creating a sensation of tightening in the bones, tendons, and soft tissues.

He felt as if he had become shorter and smaller, yet denser—like cotton being compressed into solid wood.

But this was purely a sensation. To achieve real results, he would need to use it for a long time.

After the massage, acupuncture followed, and then electrical stimulation.

Today, Su Jie seemed to have adapted more to the electrical stimulation. Though it was still painful, it wasn't as unbearable as before. Moreover, the ointment's medicinal effects were kicking in—his bones tingled from within. Instead of being pure torture, the electrical current actually felt satisfying, like scratching an unbearable itch.

With the ointment's effects, the electrical stimulation lasted much longer than usual.

Yet, when it was over, Su Jie felt an unprecedented sense of exhilaration. Not just comfort—but sheer exhilaration.

As he left, satisfied, Nie Shuang appeared and asked Uncle Mang, "How did the trial go this time?"

"The clinical trial results were excellent," Uncle Mang replied. "As expected, combining your family's secret ointment with electrical stimulation not only relieved pain but also maximized the medicinal effects, achieving rapid body shaping.

Based on our calculations, with daily stimulation like this, in one week, his tendon and muscle flexibility, elasticity, and overall strength could increase by 30%."

"I brought out this secret ointment not just to keep him quiet but more importantly to support your experiment," Nie Shuang said. "Su Jie has strong external martial arts conditioning, making him the perfect test subject. If the experimental data proves effective, we can use this combination to train others or even enhance our own physiques."

"Exactly," Uncle Mang nodded. "These past few days of experiments have provided us with valuable data—at the very least, we've determined how much pain a person can endure, how resilient the nervous system can be, and how muscle spasms from pain stimulation can enhance elasticity. We're also figuring out the right balance in the data."

"In fact, research on physical fitness is already well-documented in training camps worldwide," Nie Shuang said. "What's lacking is data on the interaction between mental resilience and physical strength. For example, what kind of endocrine response is triggered when a person is in extreme joy?

Or what substances does the body release to protect itself in moments of extreme pain? These are the key subjects we need to study."

"You're absolutely right," Uncle Mang agreed. "From Su Jie, I've gathered a lot of information on how psychological endurance affects physical endurance. Many psychological hypotheses have been confirmed through him—he's an excellent test subject."

"If I'm not mistaken, Odell has been conducting similar experiments on him since he arrived."

"Odell is pursuing the so-called supernatural abilities," Nie Shuang remarked. "But in my view, it all comes down to achieving absolute mental tranquility—an insight that sees through everything, allowing the mind to influence the body in profound ways.

That's why he went to Tibet and India—to observe those who cultivate their minds and see how far they can go.

Physical conditioning is relatively easy, but mental conditioning is far more difficult. However, I can see that your research is already yielding some results."

"I've made some progress. Before, I hadn't made much headway. I used massage as a cover to make bets, but in reality, it was all to find the perfect research subject. It wasn't until Su Jie arrived that I made a breakthrough and obtained some critical data. Right now, the biggest issue is that our academy's computers and artificial intelligence aren't very advanced. If we could introduce cutting-edge analysis systems, my research would advance by leaps and bounds."

"Just wait," Nie Shuang said. "Zihao has secured an investment from Feng Yuxuan, the successor of Haoyu Group, which is the leading company in domestic artificial intelligence computing. The two of them have a good relationship, and Feng Yuxuan has agreed to join our academy's artificial intelligence human training project."

"Haoyu Group is indeed very strong in computing. If this project gets up and running quickly, my data and ideas, once researched, could significantly elevate our academy's training standards. Not only would we be able to produce more top-tier fighters, but we could also cultivate elite security personnel for the nation," Uncle Mang said.

"If things progress further, you might even have a chance to regain your sight," Nie Shuang remarked.

"Don't bring that up again. It's better this way. Being blind means I don't have to see the superficiality of the world, and my mind can remain at peace," Uncle Mang replied coldly.

Inside the Martial Arts Academy

The training field was filled with students practicing, creating a heated and intense atmosphere, completely different from regular academies.

In ordinary schools, especially high schools, physical education classes were often sacrificed in favor of academic subjects to prepare for college entrance exams. But here, martial arts took priority, and every student had exceptional physical conditioning.

"If a fight broke out between schools, Minglun Martial Arts Academy could probably take on a hundred regular high schools," Su Jie thought to himself while practicing alone on the training ground. The thought was somewhat amusing.

As he trained, he browsed the academy's website.

The website was well-built, clearly developed by a professional team. Its responsiveness and layout were on par with major web portals.

It featured academy news, coverage of both domestic and international fighting tournaments, and numerous instructional videos from teachers covering traditional martial arts, various combat techniques, and jiu-jitsu. Additionally, there were many martial arts manuals—yes, actual martial arts manuals—including old boxing records and modern fighting techniques compiled by the academy's instructors.

The website also hosted various forums where students could exchange insights and learning experiences.

In this region, Minglun Martial Arts Academy had the best website. Even students from other martial arts academies and training centers were active in its forums. It was a well-established community with a strong martial arts culture.

Su Jie spent an hour browsing the site daily, learning new things and staying updated on the latest trends.

"Minglun Martial Arts Academy really does offer a lot of high-end medicinal treatments. For example, this special ointment called 'Tiger ointment'—it looks like a simplified version of what I've been using, but it's still insanely expensive." He noticed that a small bottle of the ointment cost thousands of yuan.

In fact, the most valuable aspect of the academy's website was its medicine section. It sold medicinal oils, ointments, and various supplements designed to enhance physical conditioning. The academy's principal was originally a renowned traditional Chinese medicine practitioner, so all the formulas were highly effective.

Beyond that, the forum contained numerous testimonials from students, overseas martial artists, and professional athletes who had used these treatments. Many shared their experiences and improvements, giving Su Jie plenty of valuable information. Even after he left the academy, he could still purchase specific products for his own training.

"What? A contract with Haoyu Group?" Just as he was about to browse further, he noticed a news update.

"Haoyu Group... That's where my sister works." Su Jie frowned deeply.

Then, he saw a picture of Liu Zihao shaking hands with someone.

The man was tall, handsome, and even more striking than Liu Zihao. His sharp features and imposing presence rivaled that of top celebrities.

Haoyu Group's young successor, Feng Yuxuan.

"It's him." Su Jie's eyes flashed with a hint of cold determination. If Gu Yang were here, he would immediately recognize it as hatred.

"Good thing I didn't sign a contract with Minglun Martial Arts Academy. Otherwise, I'd be at their mercy. If Liu Zihao is teaming up with that guy, then there's no way I can work with this academy." Su Jie shook his head, closed the website, put away his phone, and resumed training.

After a while, his mind finally calmed, and he regained focus.

"Normally, I can enter a focused state in just a few seconds, but after seeing that news, it took me a full five minutes to settle down. This proves that external factors can still greatly affect my mentality. I wonder when I'll be able to train myself to remain unmoved by outside distractions, to do what needs to be done with unwavering determination."

Su Jie acknowledged his weakness.

"That guy still affects my state of mind."

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Chapter 37: Observing Chicken Fights Feels More Natural

Ever since Su Jie comprehended the realm of "heart and intent in harmony" in the wild, his martial arts had been improving at an astonishing rate every day. It was like a child going through a growth spurt with good nutrition and ample sleep, visibly getting taller by the day.

Now, Su Jie was intelligent, fully focused, using the most scientific training methods, and had excellent nutrition and medicine. He also received massages from a medical doctor specializing in sports recovery. On top of that, he had gained insight into the profound essence of boxing techniques. Under such conditions, his training progress in a single day was equivalent to several months for other students at the martial arts academy.

This was no exaggeration. Just in terms of training volume, Su Jie performed the "Hoe Strike" move at least tens of thousands of times each day.

Ordinary students could not do nearly as much. Even if they forced themselves to complete a third of his routine, they would be so sore that they wouldn't be able to move for days.

However, with proper massage, acupuncture, medicine, and electric stimulation, Su Jie not only eliminated muscle fatigue and restored his body to normal but also accelerated his growth, allowing him to increase his training volume day by day.

This intense training continued for seven more days.

It was now August 24th, with only eight days left until the new school year started on September 1st. Normally, Su Jie should have bought a ticket home to prepare for school, but he had no intention of leaving.

During these seven days, he devoted himself entirely to training, thinking of nothing else—solely focused on improving his physical and mental strength. Every day, after training, he would undergo Uncle Mang's grueling massages, acupuncture, and electric stimulation. He also applied the Nie family's specially formulated medicinal ointment.

At his age, he was in a prime growth period. In the previous days, he had been growing rapidly, and if it had continued, he would have soon surpassed 1.9 meters in height. However, with the effects of the electric stimulation and medicinal absorption into his bones, his growth seemed to have halted. Instead, his body became denser and more solid.

Before, his rapid growth had made him feel somewhat weak, but now that his height had stabilized, he could feel the hardness and resilience within his bones.

This was not just psychological—it was real. Tests showed that his bone density and toughness were exceptionally high, surpassing ordinary athletes and even some professional fighters.

Although Su Jie's physique remained the same as before, without significant muscle mass increase, he felt much stronger and more powerful. His body seemed as if it were forged from steel, and with every punch and kick, he felt capable of destroying anything in his path.

Beyond that, he found that he could now perform complex movements with ease—even flashy parkour-style flips and multiple mid-air rotations, despite never deliberately training them. He only had to visualize the moves in his mind, and his body could execute them effortlessly.

This was the result of his physical fitness reaching a peak and his mind and body achieving perfect coordination.

During these seven days, Su Jie had once again made a major breakthrough in his martial arts, stepping onto a whole new level.

He still participated in the queue for fights every day. Sometimes, he managed to get a spot, sometimes not, but whenever he did, he won at least ten matches in a row and made a decent amount of money.

This was also because, with the start of the school year approaching, the number of participants had increased.

By late August, the martial arts academy had fully resumed its curriculum. During the day, the training fields were packed, and every practice area was overcrowded. Even Josh and Su Jie's training had to come to a halt because the arenas were always occupied.

Since the day Josh was knocked down by Su Jie in a street match, he had been secretly training every day. No one knew exactly what he was practicing, but Su Jie rarely saw him anymore.

Su Jie guessed that Josh was holding back his frustration, preparing for a rematch.

The Morning of August 24th

Su Jie trained from 3 a.m. to 6 a.m. as usual before heading back to the academy for breakfast. On the way, he suddenly stopped.

He had spotted a group of chickens foraging in the wild.

As they walked, they bobbed their heads with each step, pecking at insects in the soil. Sometimes, two chickens would fight, leaping into the air, feathers flying, and even drawing blood—yet neither backed down.

This scene suddenly sparked something in Su Jie's mind.

The "Hoe Strike" move had similarities with the way chickens moved.

Chickens had exceptional balance. In fact, among all animals, birds had the strongest sense of balance.

A bird could stand on one leg on a swaying branch without falling, no matter how strong the wind blew. Chickens shared this trait.

Even the most balanced human could not match the stability of birds.

Su Jie became completely engrossed in watching the chickens peck and fight. He crouched there for over an hour, studying their movements and incorporating their balance into his own techniques.

"The Ancient Martial Manuals Say..."

At that moment, a voice spoke up beside him:

"The ancient martial manuals say, 'Every strike should resemble an eagle's catch, every stance a tiger's pounce, and every step a chicken's leg.' The old masters created martial arts by observing the natural world. Chickens, the most common animals, have an exceptional trait—balance.

"Nowadays, to prevent camera shake, some people even mount cameras on a chicken's head. Every movement is rooted in balance. Without balance, one cannot generate power or speed. If someone can achieve the same balance as a chicken, their movements in combat will be stable and their strikes will be tremendously powerful."

Su Jie turned sharply and saw that it was Gu Yang.

"Coach, what are you doing here?" Su Jie snapped out of his trance.

"It looks like you've made another breakthrough. You can now observe the true 'spirit' in all things. I only attained this level of understanding after turning forty," Gu Yang said, visibly impressed.

Su Jie stood up and practiced the "Hoe Strike" move again, incorporating the balance he had observed from the chickens. He immediately felt his stability improve, and his speed seemed to increase just a fraction.

"You should take the time to observe a real tiger hunting or an eagle diving for prey. These things must be seen firsthand to truly grasp their essence. Words alone won't do them justice," Gu Yang advised.

"In martial arts, we call this 'perceiving the spirit.'"

"You're right. Some things can only be understood through direct observation—no amount of verbal explanation can capture the essence of 'spirit.'"

Su Jie finally understood what "spirit" truly meant.

In an instant, there was a deep shock in his soul, followed by a sudden realization, as if a light had flashed in his mind.

"Many people have moments of sudden realization in their lives, but after a few days, it fades and doesn't integrate into their spirit. This is the meaning of 'it is easy to acquire the Way, but difficult to preserve it,'" Gu Yang said. "What you need to do now is to fully integrate this flash of insight, the divine intention you've gained, into your heart, never to fade, and then act on it in your daily life, making it your own."

"Got it." Su Jie nodded, deeply agreeing with this.

"Let's go. You haven't had breakfast yet, right? After eating, there's a large-scale event at school today. I've signed you up. Of course, whether you participate or not is up to you. You should go back and continue your studies. Actually, everything you need to learn has already been taught. There's not much more I can teach you now, and from here on, you'll need to self-study." Gu Yang said, "However, there is one thing you're lacking. Do you know what it is?"

"What am I lacking?" Su Jie asked.

"Money," Gu Yang replied. "To push your physical abilities to the extreme, you need countless resources and wealth. Your physical condition is already top-tier, you've achieved the Way, but to preserve this Way and push it even further, wealth is essential."

As they spoke, they entered the school cafeteria. Su Jie followed the routine, ate, and waited for digestion before asking, "Coach, what event did you sign me up for?"

"There are more than ten martial arts schools in this area, and there's a league during the start of the school year that anyone can join. You can take part in one last major competition before you leave, and make a fair amount of money. The champion of this event will earn around 500,000." Gu Yang said.

"That much?" Su Jie was surprised.

"This league, involving ten martial arts schools and over a hundred local martial arts gyms, is sponsored by Haoyu Group, so the prize money is much higher than usual. You've probably earned quite a bit from smaller competitions recently, but it's still not enough." Gu Yang waved his hand. "With your current state, winning the championship shouldn't be a problem."

"I've earned 170,000 from these recent competitions," Su Jie said, clicking his tongue. He realized that with skill, one could make quite a bit of money.

"Afterward, we'll head to the sports hall for the preliminaries." Gu Yang patted Su Jie's shoulder. "I think practical combat is still quite important for you. You've already mastered the correct training methods, so even if you go back to studying, you can continue practicing. The only thing you're lacking is practical experience."

'Since it's Haoyu Group funding it, I might as well take the money. If I don't, I'd be wasting an opportunity,' Su Jie thought to himself.

When they arrived at the sports hall, it was already 8 AM, and despite the early hour, the place was crowded yet orderly, like a large-scale sports event. The school had many staff managing the venue, which was divided into multiple rings.

Su Jie quickly found his ring number on the registration machine, then sat on a chair outside the ring to wait.

This competition was free fighting, focusing on standing techniques, not mixed martial arts. Once a competitor fell, they would score points and could no longer pursue the fight.

The sports venue had more than thirty temporary rings, each with a referee. The competition was intensively prepared.

It would start at 9 AM and continue until evening, with a knockout system. There were three sports halls, meaning there were hundreds of people competing at any given time.

This fast-paced, high-efficiency competition was becoming very popular.

This area was the heart of martial arts in the country, with competitions as common as eating and drinking. Nearly all students were accustomed to the daily routine of competitions.

Of course, because of the frequency of competitions here, even ordinary students who fought a few times would become formidable figures.

Su Jie was assigned to ring 13.

There were more than ten chairs under the ring, all occupied by competitors.

Looking at his number plate, Su Jie sat in his assigned spot and saw a young man sitting next to him. The young man was fair and handsome, about the same age as Su Jie, with his eyes closed in rest.

Su Jie knew that, according to the rules, this young man was his opponent. He couldn't help but greet him.

"Hey, we're opponents later, right?" Su Jie smiled.

The young man opened his eyes, glanced at Su Jie, and then indifferent, closed them again, ignoring him completely, as if Su Jie wasn't even worth his words.

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Chapter 38: There's Always Someone Stronger

"This guy is really arrogant."

Su Jie noticed that the young man ignored his greeting. Feeling wary, he observed him carefully from the corner of his eye.

Since this young man was his opponent, Su Jie had to know his enemy well—only then could he be invincible.

After secretly observing for a while, Su Jie couldn't find anything particularly special about him. His physique was average, his breathing and demeanor showed no signs of a master, and he didn't exert any overwhelming presence. No matter how he looked at it, the young man seemed like an easy opponent.

"Never mind. The champion's prize money this time is 500,000. If I win, I can truly achieve financial independence and free up a lot of time to do what I want." Su Jie cleared his mind and adjusted his state.

"Su Jie, Feng Hengyi! Get up here!"

The referee on the stage called out their names, and both Su Jie and the young man immediately stood up.

The previous match had just ended, and it was now their turn. The competition was tightly scheduled, just like dumplings being dropped into boiling water one after another.

Su Jie put on his gloves and stood in position, waiting for the referee's signal to begin the fight.

His opponent, the young man, also put on his gloves but then closed his eyes, placing one hand behind his back as if he were lost in his own world, completely disregarding Su Jie.

If his earlier indifference was just cold aloofness, this was outright contempt and humiliation.

Su Jie's eyes narrowed. In that instant, he suddenly felt a sharp sense of danger from Feng Hengyi. This person was truly confident—there seemed to be something terrifying hidden within him, ready to erupt at any moment, with the power to destroy him.

Even though Feng Hengyi had his eyes closed, Su Jie felt as if he were being watched by a ferocious beast, sending shivers down his spine.

'I'm no match for Feng Hengyi.'

A thought suddenly surfaced in Su Jie's mind, one he couldn't suppress no matter how hard he tried.

The referee glanced at Feng Hengyi's posture but said nothing—he had seen all sorts of unusual fighting styles in the ring, even students using drunken boxing.

"Begin!"

At the referee's signal, Su Jie began moving. His steps were as light as a chicken walking, exceptionally balanced and stable. As he moved in a circling pattern, he gave off the impression of a bird perched on a branch—ready to take flight at the slightest disturbance.

In other words, his movements made it nearly impossible for his opponent to land a hit.

He had mastered the alertness of a chicken—always ready to flutter away at the slightest sign of trouble.

"One."

As Su Jie circled, searching for an opening, Feng Hengyi remained still, merely uttering a single number.

"Two."

"Three!"

On the third count, Feng Hengyi moved.

In a flash, he lunged forward, and his fist was already inches from Su Jie's face.

"So fast!"

Even though Su Jie was being extremely cautious, he hadn't anticipated Feng Hengyi's explosive power. In that instant, Feng Hengyi didn't seem human—he had transformed into a human-shaped beast, his energy and spirit condensed into a single blade.

No, it was more like a bullet.

For a split second, Su Jie felt as if Feng Hengyi's punch had ignited like a gunpowder barrel, expanding rapidly before his fist shot forward like a bullet.

The speed and explosive force of that punch far exceeded Su Jie's limits.

Bang!

Su Jie raised both arms to shield his face, and even with the gloves cushioning the impact, the sheer force sent him airborne. His feet left the ground as he completely lost balance.

Before he could recover, Feng Hengyi's second punch arrived. The first had been a jab; this one was a cross—heavier and more powerful.

Already off balance, Su Jie had no way to withstand it. However, he instinctively maintained a defensive stance known as "Tiger Covers Head"—like a tiger emerging from its cave, keeping its head protected to avoid a sneak attack.

Boom!

The arena trembled as Su Jie crashed to the ground. Even with his arms shielding him, the punch had knocked him down hard. His blood surged chaotically, and his arms felt numb, as if he had been hit by a car.

"Stop!"

The referee immediately stepped in and asked, "Can you get up? Counting down... ten, nine... five, four, three, two, one. Feng Hengyi wins!"

It took Su Jie nearly twenty seconds to regain his senses. He forced himself to use his body's conditioning techniques to restore some feeling in his arms. If this had been an MMA fight, where his opponent could continue striking after he went down, he would have already been knocked unconscious.

"My gloves are shredded."

As Su Jie got up, he noticed that his gloves looked like they had been mauled by a wild beast—completely torn apart after just two punches.

"You should be grateful you had gloves on," Feng Hengyi said coldly. "Without them, those two punches wouldn't have just knocked you out for a few seconds."

With that, he turned and left the stage without even glancing at Su Jie.

"To think I lost, eliminated in the first round. What happened to those thoughts of winning the championship?" After stepping off the stage, Su Jie felt deeply frustrated, not even wanting to see anyone, feeling embarrassed.

After all the training over the past few days, he thought he was a master. But then, this arrogant and cold young man appeared, someone his age, and with just two punches, shattered all his confidence.

'Can't be discouraged, need to keep a calm mindset,' Su Jie warned himself again. 'I'm just a beginner, a newbie who has been training for less than two months. It's normal to be defeated. That said, my speed and physical fitness are already strong. Why is Feng Hengyi so strong? His explosive power is something I can't compare to. It's like pulling a trigger, and the bullet is out of the chamber. This seems like boxing, or some techniques from traditional martial arts. But for him to achieve this, his physical and mental strength must be far superior to mine.'

Within three minutes, he quickly calmed down, dispelling all his frustration, then began to think about his weaknesses, why he lost, and how to improve moving forward.

After ten minutes of thinking, he had everything figured out and walked out of the gym, feeling light-hearted.

Gu Yang was still on the field, teaching the class members hand-to-hand combat techniques. When he saw Su Jie come out, he waved him over, "Why are you out so quickly?"

If Su Jie kept winning, he would have had to stay in the venue to await further news. It would have been impossible to come out.

The only reason for him to come out so quickly was that he had been eliminated.

"I got eliminated in the first round," Su Jie said honestly. "It really is true that there's always someone better. Two punches and I was on the ground, my gloves were even shattered."

"Shattered gloves?" Gu Yang was initially skeptical, but when he saw the gloves Su Jie brought out, he couldn't help but fall into thought. "This power is extraordinary. Come, let's go see your opponent."

Leaving the class members to continue practicing their techniques, Gu Yang took Su Jie back into the gym, just in time to see Feng Hengyi in the second round of the competition.

Whoosh!

The two merely touched, and Feng Hengyi's opponent collapsed onto the ground, clutching his stomach and convulsing in pain, and even the referee didn't notice what had happened.

However, Su Jie barely saw it clearly. Feng Hengyi had landed a clever hook to the abdomen, a technique from boxing. It was elegant and fast, almost like a bullet leaving the chamber.

Of course, no human speed can match that of a bullet. But the essence of a punch, as fast as a bullet's exit, could be learned from such a moment.

"Impressive. The heart is like gunpowder, the punch like a bullet, quick-witted and deadly," Gu Yang said. "Let's go. You didn't lose unfairly. So it was him. If I'm not mistaken, he's from the Typhon Training Camp."

"Typhon Training Camp?" Su Jie was surprised. "I've heard of Typhon. It's a giant from Greek mythology with a hundred heads, called the king of all beasts."

"In this world, there are several secret training camps dedicated to researching the limits of the human body. The US has long had its so-called 'Superman' program. The Typhon Training Camp is the most famous one. They use big data, AI, and all sorts of high-tech methods, collecting all the martial arts data and analyzing it through scientific systems to train practitioners. They have the most advanced training methods, the best supplements, and countless clinical trial data, offering the most effective ways to train the body and mind. This is something our Minglun Martial Arts Academy could never match. But the Typhon camp is a secret base, not open to the public. No one knows where it is. You could think of it like America's Area 51," Gu Yang shook his head. "This Feng Hengyi must be from the Feng family. I don't know why he's here to stir up trouble. Our league is sponsored by Haoyu Group, and it's not like there's a lot of money involved. The Feng family is so petty that they want to take it back?"

The founder of Haoyu Group was Feng Shoucheng, who had turned a small business into a massive multinational enterprise. He had several sons and daughters.

Su Jie's older sister, Su Muchen, worked there.

"Another person from the Feng family," Su Jie's anger rose again, but he quickly calmed down and became very composed.

"This guy has killed people, and not just one," Gu Yang suddenly lowered his voice.

"Coach, what do you mean? How do you know?" Su Jie was startled.

"I can feel it. My instincts are never wrong," Gu Yang waved his hand. "Su Jie, your skills, physical fitness, and mental toughness are all top-notch, but you haven't experienced the cruel side of martial arts. You can't understand the terror and essence of life-and-death struggles unless you go through it. That's your flaw. I told you before, the primary goal of martial arts is survival. Farming and production are for survival, but killing in battle is also survival. You've already mastered the farming and production part."

"I understand now," Su Jie nodded.

"How do you feel about this loss?" Gu Yang asked.

"Actually, it's normal. There's no fighting without losses. I'm just a beginner who's been training for two months. I just need to keep my mindset calm and learn from my mistakes," Su Jie shook his head. "The road in life is long, and I'm still at the starting line. I just need to focus on every detail."

"If you have the chance, you could also go to the Typhon Training Camp and see it for yourself," Gu Yang said.

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Chapter 39: Shooting Practice A Glimpse of Mastery

'I have no idea how to get into the Typhon Training Camp. I'd love to see what kind of training they offer to produce experts like Feng Hengyi.'

Su Jie kept pondering this thought. Even if he prepared in advance, he was certain he wouldn't be a match for Feng Hengyi. Whether it was physical fitness, mental fortitude, or technical skills, his opponent surpassed him in every way.

However, the most crucial aspect was the explosive power in Feng Hengyi's punches—they struck like bullets.

Su Jie attempted to mimic that force, but no matter what he tried, he couldn't capture its essence.

He pulled out his phone and searched for shooting ranges.

"Su Jie, what are you looking up?"

Zhang Manman had just finished her practice session and walked over. She seemed to have heard about what had happened and came to comfort him.

"Nothing much, just searching for a shooting range. I want to experience real gunfire firsthand," Su Jie replied, looking up.

"Oh, so that's what you're looking for." Zhang Manman chuckled. "You should've asked me. I'm quite familiar with shooting ranges in the U.S., and my dad has a friend here who runs a large shooting club in the city. If you want to give it a try, I can take you there."

"Really?" Su Jie was delighted. "Then I'll have to trouble you. I owe you one."

"Come on, no need to be so formal. I need to practice too—if you don't train for a day, your skills get rusty." Zhang Manman responded cheerfully. "Let's go. I'll ask the coach for leave."

Before long, Zhang Manman led Su Jie out of campus, where a black Mercedes sedan was already waiting at the entrance. The two got in, and the car sped off.

After about two hours, they arrived in front of a place resembling a resort.

A man was already waiting for them—a middle-aged gentleman with silver-white hair and an air of sophistication. When he saw Zhang Manman, he immediately broke into a warm smile.

"Manman, what brings you here today? And you even brought a friend?"

"This is my classmate from the martial arts academy. He wants to practice shooting." Zhang Manman walked up and hugged the man. "Uncle Fu, my dad keeps mentioning you in the States."

"I just spoke with him on the phone yesterday." Uncle Fu chuckled. "Your friend wants to practice shooting? I'll have someone guide him. Xiao Li, come over."

At his command, a young man in a black suit jogged over, followed by an electric sightseeing cart. The three of them boarded the vehicle and entered the estate.

The estate was vast, with picturesque scenery. Su Jie saw a golf course nestled between the mountains and lakes—a leisure club fit for the wealthy elite.

A sign at the entrance read: "Heart-Cleansing Manor."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Gunshots echoed from a massive hall. As they entered, they saw many people wearing noise-canceling earmuffs, firing at targets. The deafening shots sent chills down one's spine, yet also ignited an exhilarating rush.

"This must be your first time shooting, right?" Uncle Fu asked.

"Nice to meet you, Uncle Fu. I'm Su Jie," he introduced himself. "Yes, this is my first time."

"Xiao Li, teach him," Uncle Fu instructed. "Manman, let's find a place to catch up."

"Alright." Zhang Manman raised an eyebrow. "Su Jie, have fun on your own."

"Got it."

Su Jie walked up to a shooting stall as Xiao Li approached, picking up a handgun and fluently explaining how to load and grip it.

"You're learning really fast. Have you practiced before?" Xiao Li was astonished. Su Jie had fully grasped the technique after just one explanation.

"I held a rifle during high school military training, but we only practiced marching drills. I've never fired live rounds before."

After getting a good grip, Su Jie aimed. His mind quieted as he focused.

Bang!

The bullet was fired.

At the moment of the shot, Su Jie's mind was utterly calm. He seemed to "feel" the firing pin striking the primer in an instant, igniting a powerful burst of energy. The gunpowder explosion propelled the bullet down the rifled barrel, accelerating it to its maximum velocity—launched in a single, irreversible motion.

'A heart like gunpowder, fists like bullets—when inspiration strikes, even a bird cannot escape.'

'This is the true essence of the martial arts manual's teachings. Without personally experiencing shooting, one can never grasp its true meaning.'

Su Jie's mind grew even more serene.

Bang! Bang! Bang! Bang!

He fired consecutive shots, each one hitting the bullseye.

"Holy crap!" Xiao Li was stunned. "Are you sure this is your first time shooting? Even though this is a beginner's target designed for newcomers, landing a perfect score on the first try is unheard of!"

"It was just luck," Su Jie quickly replied. "I'll keep practicing on my own, so I won't trouble you, Brother Li."

"Alright, if anything comes up, let me know right away." As Xiao Li walked away, he couldn't help but mutter to himself, "This can't be his first time shooting. Every beginner struggles with stability on their first attempt, unable to control the recoil. But he's steadier than me."

Su Jie was completely immersed in shooting practice.

For him, practicing shooting wasn't just about improving accuracy—it was about understanding its essence.

The gunpowder ignited, propelling the bullet in a spiraling trajectory out of the barrel.

This instantaneous change and explosive force had many similarities to martial arts.

Martial arts were about continuously learning from everything, integrating their essence into one's practice.

Gradually, Su Jie felt as if he himself had become a gun. With the slightest movement, his heart ignited, and his fists followed. This wasn't about exerting force or perfecting posture; it was purely about the connection between mind and intent.

After half an hour of live-fire practice, Su Jie set down the gun, having fully grasped its rhythm and essence.

He called out to Xiao Li and asked if there were any sandbags available.

"Sandbags? You mean a place for combat training and fitness? Yes, we have one. I'll take you there." Xiao Li wasn't sure what Su Jie intended to do, but he knew Su Jie was an important guest and had to be served with utmost care.

Soon, he led Su Jie to another facility filled with various fitness equipment. Several people were training, with instructors guiding them.

To Su Jie's surprise, this place also offered modern combat disciplines like boxing, judo, taekwondo, karate, aikido, and Muay Thai. However, there was no sign of traditional martial arts, such as the ever-popular Tai Chi.

"This is a resort, primarily focused on relaxation, entertainment, and wellness," Xiao Li explained. "If you want to work on fitness, muscle-building, or body sculpting, we have top-tier bodybuilding coaches. If you want to learn other disciplines, we have professional instructors for one-on-one training. We also offer specialized massage therapists and nutritionists. Here's the information."

As he spoke, Xiao Li gestured for a nearby attendant, who quickly brought over an exquisitely crafted card.

Surprisingly, the card was made of metal, listing various available services, all offered around the clock.

"Having money is really something..."

Su Jie sighed inwardly as he examined the card. He could tell that the resort's services were indeed top-notch. Many of the instructors were highly skilled, and the one-on-one coaching was a huge advantage.

It was nothing like Minglun Martial Arts Academy. Although Coach Gu Yang was excellent, he had to train dozens of students at once, making it impossible to give everyone individual attention. Only Odell had ever provided Su Jie with true one-on-one instruction.

Additionally, students at Minglun Martial Arts Academy had to do their own laundry, line up at the cafeteria, and handle chores like cleaning. But here, the service staff acted like personal attendants, taking care of everything in the most comfortable and considerate way.

For instance, a wealthy person coming here for a retreat and wellness training wouldn't have to worry about anything—just daily exercise and relaxation.

Of course, the cost was extremely high. First, entry required an annual membership, with a base fee of over a million. On top of that, there were numerous additional charges. Spending a few million a year here was completely normal.

Yet, when Su Jie looked around, he noticed that the place was packed.

He couldn't help but wonder, "Are there really that many rich people in the country? Spending millions a year like it's nothing? Do they just pick money off the wind?"

One thing was certain—he couldn't afford this.

"What kind of coach do you need?" Xiao Li asked. "I can arrange one for you immediately."

"No need, no need," Su Jie quickly waved his hand. "I'll just do some punching practice on my own."

He headed straight for the boxing area, looking for a hanging sandbag.

The sandbags came in several weight categories: 30 kg, 50 kg, 100 kg, and 200 kg. The 100 kg and 200 kg bags were professional-grade and extremely difficult to move.

He walked up to the heaviest sandbag and began warming up.

There were several people training in the boxing area. Strangely, they were all women, dressed in form-fitting athletic wear that accentuated their curves.

Generally speaking, boxing was considered a man's sport—brutal and intense. Women usually preferred slower-paced aerobic exercises like yoga or dance. However, recently, women's boxing had been gaining popularity.

Su Jie had seen news reports about female celebrities training in boxing daily, which had sparked a trend among elite women in society.

For women, boxing had two main benefits. First, it helped with body sculpting and maintaining an ideal physique. Second, it provided a means of self-defense. Su Jie found it to be a great choice.

Although professional boxing matches were harsh, women learning the sport weren't training for competition. They were simply practicing for fitness and vitality.

"That sandbag is for professional training. Most people can barely make it budge. Does he really think he can punch it?" one of the women boxing trainees paused to watch.

"Maybe he's just trying to show off. Ignore him, let's keep training."

Boom!

At that moment, Su Jie finished his warm-up. In a split second, he imagined an explosion igniting deep within his heart, propelling his entire body forward.

Instead of using his fists, he executed a move called "Hoe Strike."

With an upward thrust and a downward chop, he struck like a tiger pouncing from a mountain.

With a single hit, the massive sandbag—normally difficult for an average person to even shake—began to sway.

But Su Jie didn't stop there. He sidestepped, shifted his weight, and launched another strike in rapid succession.

Boom! Boom! Boom! Boom!

Dozens of consecutive "Hoe Strikes" followed, pushing his speed and power to their peak. His movements embodied the sensation of a bullet leaving a gun barrel, the rhythm of gunpowder igniting.

It was as if he had grown extra arms.

Rip!

A sharp tearing sound echoed through the hall.

The enormous sandbag suddenly burst open, spilling its filling all over the floor.

"This..."

The three women training in boxing were utterly stunned.

Even their coach—a retired national-level professional boxer—was visibly shocked. With his trained eye, he could tell that Su Jie's strikes were more terrifying than those of many professional fighters.

"Not bad."

Su Jie, however, paid no attention to the onlookers. He had just realized that his explosive power and striking technique had advanced significantly, as if he had taken a major step forward.

And it was all thanks to being "instantly defeated" by Feng Hengyi's two punches. That experience had given him invaluable insights and had "awakened" something deep within him—something he hadn't even realized was growing arrogant.

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Chapter 40: The Story Behind Heart-Cleansing Manor and Gu Yang

"Manman, this trip back to the country isn't just about learning martial arts, is it?"

In a quiet tea room within the manor, the middle-aged man with silver hair, Uncle Fu, said to Zhang Manman while sipping on fragrant tea. "Your father wants to return to the country and develop here; after all, home is where the heart is. He's mentioned it to me many times. But now he doesn't know what industry to focus on. Our line of work in real estate is already a sunset industry, and there doesn't seem to be any good direction for transformation."

"Real estate really isn't working anymore. Ten or twenty years ago, it was golden everywhere, but now the trends are in online games, film and television culture, artificial intelligence, video streaming, and blockchain technology. I've been back for quite a while, and I've been investigating and researching. I've found that the only promising industries in the future are two categories: high technology and cultural entertainment. Beyond that, health and wellness is still a viable option, like what Uncle Fu is doing now. It's essentially entertainment combined with

health and wellness, but it's aimed at the upper-middle class, not the low-end market."

Zhang Manman spoke with confidence.

"It seems you've put in a lot of effort. You went to Minglun Martial Academy not just to train, but to study the integration of martial schools and the film industry, right? And by the way, is your father looking to recruit Gu Yang?" Uncle Fu asked.

"Gu Yang was the leader of the 'Judge' mercenary squad back in the day. Ten years ago, he retired and suddenly returned to the country, choosing to be a small martial arts instructor. I don't know what happened, but his connections are vast, his skills are exceptional, and he's familiar with the rules of many dangerous places. He's a valuable talent. If he could assist my father, it would definitely take our Zhang family business to the next level. But from what I see, he seems to have decided to live a peaceful second half of his life." Zhang Manman replied.

"After experiencing so many storms, wanting a quiet life now isn't a bad choice," Uncle Fu said, shaking his head. "What's most important now is to discover young talent. By the way, Manman, what's the deal with the classmate you brought today?"

"He's a real talent—excellent martial arts, high intelligence. Not just a talent, but a genius," Zhang Manman spoke highly of Su Jie.

"Oh? I've never heard you praise anyone like this before," Uncle Fu said, intrigued.

"Boss," at this moment, a voice came from outside.

"Come in," Uncle Fu nodded.

A man dressed in a black suit, with a fierce aura, walked in and spoke to Uncle Fu. A look of surprise appeared on Uncle Fu's face. "Manman, it seems this classmate you brought is indeed impressive."

"What happened?" Zhang Manman asked, confused.

"Come with me."

Uncle Fu led Zhang Manman to a monitoring room and had someone play back the footage of Su Jie hitting the sandbag. His strikes were so powerful that it seemed as though he had multiple arms, eventually splitting the sandbag in half.

Even an ordinary person could see that such explosive power, if it hit a person, would likely tear them apart.

"Such explosive power... Even national-level professional athletes don't possess this, unless they're world-class professional fighters," Uncle Fu sighed. "Which martial arts family does he come from? Or has he undergone specialized training since childhood?"

"Neither. You might find it hard to believe, but he's someone who's only been training for two months. Two months ago, he was just a student with slightly better physical fitness, at most an excellent student in physical education," Zhang Manman said. "Of course, he uses a chopping force, striking from top to bottom with a dragging power. This is more destructive than the straight punches, hooks, or jabs in boxing. Actually, if he used a straight punch, he wouldn't have been able to break the sandbag. But his strength and explosive power are truly impressive. More importantly, he's young and has a lot of potential to be tapped into."

"He's not very old, is he? He looks to be in his teens," Uncle Fu asked.

"He's 16, in his second year of high school," Zhang Manman nodded. "And his grades are excellent. He's already mastered the correct study methods and is very disciplined. From him, I see the quality of integration between knowledge and action."

"Integration between knowledge and action?" Uncle Fu didn't believe it. "That's the high standard of conduct proposed by Wang Yangming. It's not so easy to achieve."

"Just wait and see. Anyway, he's a real talent," Zhang Manman said. "By the way, Uncle Fu, when my projects are ready in the country, I'll need your help."

"Naturally. We're family, why be so polite? Your father and I have been through thick and thin together. Without him, I would have died long ago at the hands of

foreign gangs," Uncle Fu waved his hand. "When I discussed coming back to the country with your father, he was cautious and played it safe, which caused him to miss out on many opportunities. Over the past twenty years, the country has truly been filled with money—if you're bold enough, you just have to bend down and pick it up. But now, making money isn't as easy as it once was. The chaos is settling, and the major players have already positioned themselves."

"There's still room to carve out opportunities," Zhang Manman nodded. "But it's definitely a lot harder now."

"The Minglun Martial Academy model is actually quite good. They've recently teamed up with the Feng family to do AI human body training, along with the martial arts film base. I think there are great opportunities there," Uncle Fu said. "How's your research going?"

"The Feng family has big ambitions, and they do control some of the core technologies of artificial intelligence. But if we poach the core research team, the 'Morning Dawn Studio', they will lose their biggest advantage immediately," Uncle Fu gave Zhang Manman some advice.

"Morning Dawn Studio?" Zhang Manman seemed to have gathered some useful information. "In that case, Uncle Fu must have had some plans already, even having core data about this aspect."

"Of course. The Feng family has been in the internet business, so they have plenty of cash. Over the years, they've taken a lot of my territory, causing significant losses to my business. I've definitely targeted them. This time, I'll give you some core personnel data from the Feng family as a gift for your father's development

back home. How does that sound?" Uncle Fu clapped his hands, and someone quickly brought over a stack of paper documents.

"Don't blame Uncle Fu for being cautious. Take a look at it, memorize it, and then I'll take it back and burn it. We won't need to transmit it over the network," Uncle Fu said, staring at Zhang Manman.

Zhang Manman flipped through the documents, carefully inspecting each page. She took a full hour to finish before suddenly closing the file and returning it to Uncle Fu.

"It looks like you've really received some special training, like an intelligence agent. You memorized all the data in just an hour," Uncle Fu remarked. "It seems your father was right to send you back to collect business information."

"Uncle Fu is too kind. This matter isn't as simple as it looks." Zhang Manman seemed to have engraved the data into her mind. "But right now, I'm alone and can't do everything on my own. I need to recruit people, find reliable hands, and form a team."

"So, you're interested in Su Jie? And Gu Yang?" Uncle Fu frowned. "Su Jie is fine; after all, he's just a young man and can be swayed. But Gu Yang is a man of great experience, someone who has already seen it all. What makes you think you can move him? Though, if you can, he's not only a top-tier expert but also the best manager. Years ago, when he became the leader of the Judgment mercenaries, he turned the team from a third-rate group into an elite one. However, he later withdrew from the world due to some disillusionment."

"I'll give it a try. Talents are rare. After all, it's easy to find a thousand soldiers, but a general is hard to come by," Zhang Manman said. "Besides, there are many details I'll need Uncle Fu's help with in the future."

"That's no problem. Just contact me directly if you need anything," Uncle Fu said with a beaming smile.

He had actually done a little test earlier and discovered that his old friend's daughter was indeed an elite.

At the sports hall, the boxing coach stepped forward. "Young man, what martial art are you practicing? Your downward strike has such great power."

"This is a farming-style move, called the Hoe Strike," Su Jie thought for a moment.

He hadn't systematically studied traditional martial arts. Though the Hoe Strike move was a core strike in the traditional "Heart Intent Fist" system, there were many other techniques in Heart Intent Fist (Xin Yi Ba) that he hadn't learned. He only practiced this one move, refining it repeatedly.

Aside from that, his physical training, breathing techniques, eating habits, and sleep were all from Odell's teachings.

Additionally, Gu Yang had taught him a few unarmed combat moves, and he had nearly a hundred matches' worth of experience from the ring. Of course, he also trained in modern combat techniques like wrestling, boxing, Muay Thai, and kickboxing.

He combined all these martial arts into this single move, the "Hoe Strike." With just a small adjustment, there were countless variations, but at the core, it remained unchanged—a hoe. It was this purity that gave it such immense power.

"Impressive," the boxing coach said. "Young man, how about we have a match?"

"What's your name, teacher?" Su Jie asked politely, knowing that the coaches here were formidable figures. Boxing had many advantages, especially its practicality in real combat. The moves were simple, but simplicity made it easy to learn yet hard to master.

Boxing only had straight punches, hooks, and jabs, without using legs. It was strong in both combat competitions and street fights, but the moves were considered ungraceful, with no aesthetic appeal, which is why it hadn't been widely accepted.

"Tan Jin," the boxing coach replied. Though he was in his early thirties, in the world of combat sports, especially in fighting disciplines, he could be considered an experienced veteran.

"I'd love to learn something from you," Su Jie said. He had just begun to grasp the subtleties of a punch like gunpowder and bullets. Punching a sandbag wasn't enough; a match would help him progress faster.

The two put on their gloves and stepped into the ring.

Three female boxers watched with great interest, though their gaze was mostly focused on Su Jie.

The three girls had beautiful, athletic, and curvaceous bodies. They seemed to have trained in dance, as their movements were elegant and showed signs of professional training. Su Jie even thought they might be celebrities.

However, he wasn't interested in entertainment or celebrity news, so he didn't recognize any stars—except for the internationally renowned Liu Zihao, of course.

But anyone who could be here must surely be wealthy or influential.

"We'll use the boxing rules. Just a friendly spar, no heavy blows," Tan Jin said, bouncing lightly, as if his feet were spring-loaded, constantly on the move.

Su Jie simply stood still, his eyes locked on Tan Jin's.

The eyes are the window to the soul. Many thoughts are revealed through the eyes—fear, pleading, murderous intent, hatred, and more. A sensitive person can read others' intentions just by looking into their eyes.

Suddenly, Tan Jin's eyes widened, as if a fierce tiger was about to pounce. In the next instant, his eyes sharpened like an eagle staring down its prey from the sky.

Su Jie noticed the shift in Tan Jin's gaze and casually glanced at his ribs, where the next attack would likely target—a hook aimed at his side.

In less than a second, just from three changes in Tan Jin's gaze, Su Jie had gathered this much information.

Whoosh!

Tan Jin made the first move.

His body swayed like a snake, moving from side to side. This was a typical boxing move, designed to find an opening in the enemy's defense while avoiding being locked onto. At the same time, it allowed him to adjust his optimal point of force and striking position.

In the midst of this, Su Jie felt as if Tan Jin were a raging bear, charging forward, swinging his shoulders, his movements filled with immense power.

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