

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 61: First Battle Victory, Fierce as a Tiger

Gray Wolf retreated continuously. His upper clothing had been torn apart by Su Jie, his hands braced against the ground.

But Su Jie lunged with a "Hoe Strike," breaking through his defense, striking with his entire body. Gray Wolf's chest took a headbutt, feeling as if his sternum had cracked, the pain leaving him breathless.

In the instant Su Jie pounced, he unleashed a seamless barrage—hand strikes, elbow strikes, shoulder strikes, abdominal strikes, rib strikes, hip strikes, back strikes, knee strikes, stomping kicks, and headbutts. Every part of his body became a weapon, striking wherever it landed!

To outsiders, Su Jie's move was far from elegant. Once he lunged, he grabbed whatever he touched, tore what he grabbed, ripped what he tore, and split what he ripped—like a madwoman in a frenzy. Yet this was the true combat essence of traditional martial arts, embodying the predatory style of wild beasts. A tiger pouncing on a sheep or an eagle seizing a rabbit—lunge, press, then fling, tear, rip, knead, and crush, using full force to shred the prey in the shortest time. It was the most ferocious and ruthless.

In less than three seconds, Gray Wolf retreated three steps. Not only was his upper clothing shredded, but his belt and pants were torn to tatters, even his underwear reduced to rags, exposing unsightly parts. Fortunately, his agility, strength, and keen danger sense spared him; otherwise, it wouldn't be his clothes torn apart but his limbs and head!

"This is the truest Chinese martial arts!" Su Jie had never fought like this before. He knew many variations of the "Hoe Strike", but in real combat, there was no chance to display them all—once unleashed, it was kill or be crippled. Now, with Gray Wolf wielding a dagger against him, Su Jie fought desperately, unleashing the move's full potential without restraint.

In those two or three seconds, his body stretched freely, exhilaration surging as he let out a long howl. With a final stomp, he struck Gray Wolf's stomach, sending him crashing into the alley wall before sliding down. Gray Wolf struggled on the ground, trying to crawl but failing.

Stripped bare, Gray Wolf covered his vital parts with both hands, curling into a ball.

"What? Not so cocky now?" Su Jie pulled out his phone, recording Gray Wolf's naked state as evidence.

"You wait, kid," Gray Wolf spat, still talking tough.

"Brother, why go this far? It's a lawful society. I could send you to the police, but in the spirit of healing and saving, I'll let it slide this time. Reform, start anew—gold awaits the prodigal's return." Su Jie smiled.

Hearing this, Gray Wolf nearly died of rage, blood foam spewing from his mouth.

"Get lost." Su Jie kicked him. "Can you move? If not, I'll call Haoyu Group to pay for your doctor."

Gray Wolf struggled to his feet, fleeing naked through the other end of the alley. The hatred in his eyes told Su Jie he wouldn't let this go.

Su Jie packed his things and left, avoiding further trouble. His sister still worked at Haoyu Group, after all. He kept the evidence—these videos would be a surprise blow when the time was right. Acting rashly now would only alert the enemy, ruining his plan. He knew Haoyu Group's power dwarfed his own; clashing head-on was like an egg against a rock.

The skirmish—from Gray Wolf's appearance to being beaten and their brief exchange—lasted two or three minutes, barely affecting Su Jie's training schedule. He headed to Starshine Combat Fitness Club as planned, training with Hua Xing and others.

Bang!

Sparring with Hua Xing, after testing each other with punches and kicks, Hua Xing suddenly used jiu-jitsu, attempting a takedown. Su Jie shook him off, flipping Hua Xing onto the ground instead.

"Why are you so strong today?" Hua Xing asked, puzzled. He sensed a leap in Su Jie's skill, courage, and spirit.

"Nothing much, just a sudden realization," Su Jie replied, feeling at ease during training. His fight with Gray Wolf had been an epiphany, like a Buddha awakening—his body flowing freely. That was true combat.

Still, he'd held back. If he'd pounced again after kicking Gray Wolf airborne, he could've killed him. But Su Jie couldn't cross that line. He even admired Gray Wolf's ability to dodge his relentless assault and escape after taking a stomach kick—a testament to the foreign mercenary's skill.

He threw Hua Xing down a few more times. This national-level fight coach was now completely outmatched. Training until night, Su Jie returned home, sleeping soundly as if nothing had happened—his mental resilience unshakable.

For an ordinary student, even a petty thug's threat would be terrifying, let alone Gray Wolf's. But Su Jie didn't care, sticking to his routine. This was thanks to Odell's training, especially the "Great Corpse State," refined to a "neither dead nor alive" mental state. Nothing seemed to shake him. He'd set his life's path and would follow it.

Vaguely, a truth brewed in his heart, ready to erupt but lacking an outlet. Before bed, he texted his sister Su Mocheng about encountering some "rich kids" today, leaving the decision to her while offering input.

Tomorrow and the day after were school holidays—rare breaks for senior students. Most would relax, but Su Jie had no such notion. He slept at 9 p.m. with the "Great Corpse State," waking at 3 a.m. for training until 6 a.m.—literary, martial, and endurance practice—for nearly four months without a single day's break. Without Odell's beatings, he trained himself, slapping, pressing, or striking walls and trees. His body, forged day and night, was undergoing a transformation.

At 3 a.m. the next day, he trained in the neighborhood park. During literary practice, he reflected on his seconds-long clash with Gray Wolf, growing more excited as insights flooded in. Ignoring formal techniques, he imagined Gray Wolf attacking with a dagger, dodging and countering. Soon, one Gray Wolf became two, three, four. He evaded with footwork, striking back with ruthless precision, lost in this self-crafted mental state.

Bang!

He elbowed a tree, shaking it violently, then clawed off a chunk of bark. On a person, it'd tear flesh and bone. Finishing, Su Jie felt invigorated. Next time he faced Gray Wolf, he could end it faster, maybe even disarm and subdue him barehanded.

"Young man, isn't your intent a bit too vicious?"

As Su Jie wrapped up, a voice came from nearby—a middle-aged man in linen clothes, likely an early riser exercising. Near the park was the Hunyuan Tai Chi Martial Arts Hall; its students and teachers trained daily. Once, Su Jie had seen an old man perform pure taiji forms, each move brimming with power, unlike typical park taiji. He'd thought the academy had substance and planned to visit, but hadn't found time. This man's clothes, though, bore no Hunyuan Taiji mark.

It was still dark, only 4 a.m. after an hour of practice, silence reigning. Early November brought autumn chill to the park, with few out this early.

"I've only trained a few months; I'm not good," Su Jie said humbly. The deeper his martial arts grew, the more cautious and modest he became—insights from the Book of Changes. Odell had taught him its first lesson: the "Qian" hexagram, a mountain within the earth. One should have a mountain's lofty virtue, hidden in the vast earth, unnoticed, for all to prosper.

"Lying's not a good habit, young man. That intent and skill—even twenty years of hard training under a master might not achieve it," the linen-clad man said, frowning. Stepping closer, he studied Su Jie's face, as if reading it.

Su Jie started to explain, but the man raised a hand. "No need. I believe you. Your face says you're not lying."

"Can a face reveal lies?" Su Jie felt this man was bluffing.

"The face reflects the heart. It reveals character, past, even future," the man said, handing Su Jie a handwritten card: "Master Ma."

"If I'm right, you're in grave trouble—bloodshed looming, even harming your family. Trust me, come to this address. I can help."

"Fortune-telling? Bloodshed?" Su Jie smirked. He didn't believe in fate, especially after studying the Book of Changes. Supposedly, all fortune-telling stemmed from it, but to him, it was a guide to life and virtue, not divination. No wonder scholars across dynasties deemed it essential for self-cultivation, family, governance, and peace.

He who grasps the Book of Changes defies fate. "Heaven moves with vigor; the gentleman strives ceaselessly. Earth's form is receptive; the gentleman bears all with thick virtue."

With these truths, one breaks through all, invincible—how could fate bind him?

Chapter 62: The Master in Linen Robes

The middle-aged man in linen robes had a business card that introduced him as “Master Ma.”

His profession? Face reading, fortune telling, feng shui, destiny alteration, and qigong for health—basically, the textbook image of a con artist.

Still, Su Jie didn’t see the need to provoke someone for no reason.

Even a con artist usually had some real skills—how else could they deceive people?

“Hello, Master Ma,” Su Jie greeted politely. “If I run into any trouble, I’ll be sure to visit the address on your card.”

Clearly just a polite formality.

But Master Ma understood as much, though he didn’t take offense. Instead, a mysterious smile appeared on his face. “Young man, your Great Corpse State is quite well-practiced—but your death isn’t clean. There are still remnants left behind.”

With that, he turned to leave.

“My death isn’t clean?” These words stirred something deep in Su Jie. A sudden realization flashed in his mind. “Master Ma, wait!”

But Master Ma didn’t turn back. He just let out a long sigh and said, “If one does not wish to die, one must first die. The Sage lies still like death, moves with the precision of a machine...”

And then he walked out of the park.

Su Jie didn’t go after him. Instead, he kept replaying Master Ma’s words in his head.

The pinnacle of his Great Corpse State was a state known as the “Living Dead.” Rumor had it that reaching this state would fundamentally alter a person’s vitality. It wasn’t martial arts—it was the cultivation of mental fortitude.

Wang Chongyang, the founder of the Quanzhen Sect, known as Master Chongyang in history—not the one from wuxia novels—had achieved this state.

He also referred to himself as a “Living Dead.”

“If one does not wish to die, one must first die...” Su Jie recognized this as a classic Chan Buddhist awakening phrase—words meant to jolt the soul awake in a flash of clarity.

The one that “dies” is the tangled mess of thoughts deep within the heart; the one that remains is the purest, clearest self.

That’s the essence of the Great Corpse State.

And the line “The Sage lies still like death, moves with the precision of a machine” came from the The Writings of Master Lie’s “Fate and Strength” chapter. It meant that those of high virtue and longevity in ancient times—those who aligned with the Dao—would lie still like they were dead, but when they moved, it was with mechanical precision and perfect regularity.

In the Esoteric Scripture of the Yellow Emperor, “Sages” were recorded as people who lived in harmony with nature, transcended the mundane world, and attained serene longevity.

The Great Corpse State came from Chan Buddhism, while The Writings of Master Lie represented Daoism.

Clearly, both Buddhism and Daoism considered the key to mental cultivation as “death before rebirth.”

“So-called death is training the mind until it reaches a state of no thought, no desire. The body remains alive, but not a single thought arises. In that moment,

the brain enters a tranquil state. And in this state, its potential is unlocked, influencing the entire body.” Su Jie had been reading many scientific papers lately and understood how mental strength impacted physical health.

Of course, physical training was relatively straightforward, but mental training was only just beginning to be explored in scientific fields—it was practically untouched territory.

Su Jie sat down on a park bench, lost in thought.

How could one reach that realm of “still as death, moving like a machine”?

What exactly did that feel like? Did it really hold such immense power?

Had Odell reached that level?

Was this the state of mind Odell had been searching for—or perhaps something even higher?

Su Jie regretted not asking him more questions during training.

Of course, Odell was a foreigner. He probably couldn't fully grasp the deeper levels of Buddhist and Daoist cultivation, which was exactly why he sought out so many masters.

Those people might not have been skilled fighters—but they were true cultivators.

Thoughts raced like lightning through Su Jie's mind. He wrestled with one question after another.

“What is the meaning of life?”

“How do we truly distinguish between life and death?”

“Where do we come from, and where do we go?”

He sat there, dazed, with turbulent thoughts rising and falling before slowly settling. Time slipped by unnoticed.

Eventually, the sky brightened, and more people came out to exercise. Some passed by, curious as to why he was sitting so still, but they soon moved on.

Su Jie didn't care. He was still deep in contemplation.

It was as though he were lost in a dark maze, unable to find his way.

Suddenly, the sky darkened. Wind stirred, clouds gathered, and thunder rumbled in the distance. A deafening crack of lightning shook the ground—then came a torrential downpour, rain splashing down in sheets.

It was already November—almost the start of winter—and thunderstorms were rare.

But this was the south, where the weather was still mild. Occasionally there'd be a thunderstorm, but one this fierce was unusual.

People scattered from the park like birds and beasts.

Autumn rain could easily lead to colds.

The thunder snapped Su Jie out of his trance. His entire body was soaked.

All his thoughts seemed to converge at once in the thunder's roar. It felt as if he had grasped a vital truth.

He looked at his watch. It was already noon.

He had sat on that park bench, lost in thought, completely detached from the outside world—for six or seven hours.

To him, it had only felt like a single second.

At that moment, he truly understood what it felt like for the cultivators in ancient records to sit in the mountains for days and nights on end.

If it weren't for the thunder that woke him up, he would probably still be lost in thought.

He quickly returned home to take a shower and change into clean clothes.

Just as he finished, his sister, Su Muchen, came back.

"I saw the message you sent me," she said, still wearing her white lab coat, clearly having rushed back from the lab.

"What do you think? Should I interact with these people or not?" Su Jie asked.

"I was just about to come home and talk to you about that," Su Muchen said, sitting down to take a sip of water. "The company formed by Lu Shu and his group is extremely wealthy. They'll likely agree to the terms they promised. But my current research is at a critical stage. If I interrupt it now, it'll be hard to pick back up. And once I switch companies, Haoyu Group definitely won't give me access to my previous research data. Not to mention all the accumulated progress I've made so far. Haoyu Group has a very strong system in place. Lu Shu's company is really just good with capital. Aside from having money, they don't have much technical depth."

"I've ridden in one of their self-driving cars. The tech seemed pretty solid," Su Jie recalled.

"That technology isn't theirs. They only invested in another company and got a prototype from them," Su Muchen explained.

"But Sis, you're not into business operations. How do you know all this so clearly?" Su Jie asked, surprised.

"Thanks to this," Su Muchen replied, pulling out a tablet. It was about the size of a textbook, two or three times thicker than a smartphone, and sturdy with a metal case—it could probably be used as a brick in self-defense.

She tapped the screen, and a synthetic voice came through.

"Chen Jie at your service." The voice was robotic, devoid of human emotion.

"I want you to repeat the results of the task I asked you to check last night," Su Muchen said via voice command.

"Qingfeng Group is composed of Lu Shu, Jiang Yuan, Fan Chuan, and Li Zhi. Based on publicly available information about their finances, shareholders, personalities, and events following their company's registration, analysis indicates that switching jobs is not advisable... Displaying detailed analysis charts now."

As the mechanical voice spoke, the screen lit up with numerous data graphs and subtitles.

"This advanced?" Su Jie was stunned. This wasn't some run-of-the-mill software analysis. As he looked closer, he found it to be even more powerful than top-tier business analysis teams. "What is this? Is this the AI you've been working on? It's insane! Can this thing be used to trade stocks?"

"Of course it can. In fact, most of the U.S. stock market is already analyzed and traded by AI. These systems are accurate, emotionless, and can process the fundamentals and technical aspects of the entire market within a second, constantly updating with real-time data. It's terrifying," Su Muchen explained confidently.

"I've heard about that. In the stock market, it's called algorithmic trading—basically, a battle of software strength. But regulations here are stricter," Su Jie nodded. "By the way, Lu Shu gave me a phone and a SIM card. Can you check it for me?"

Su Muchen took the phone and card from Su Jie and began inspecting them skillfully. After starting it up, her expression subtly changed. "This is a D@rk Web access point and account."

"D@rk Web?" Su Jie had never heard of it before.

"The D@rk Web refers to internet platforms that can't be accessed through regular search engines. What we see on the surface web is just the tip of the iceberg," Su Muchen said. "On the D@rk Web, all kinds of illegal transactions happen—you can buy anything from intel and weapons to even hire assassins. Transactions on the D@rk Web aren't made with real-world currencies like the U.S. dollar. They use blockchain-based currencies like Bitcoin, which was extremely popular a while ago."

Su Jie had heard of Bitcoin—a virtual currency. He remembered reading that in 2010, a programmer used 10,000 bitcoins to buy two pizzas worth 25 dollars.

That meant one b!tcoin was worth just \$0.0025.

But now, Su Jie saw online that a single bitcoin was worth tens of thousands of dollars.

In less than ten years, its value had increased by millions of times. What kind of growth rate was that?

Every time he saw such news, Su Jie felt it was too surreal, like something out of a fantasy novel. How could something invisible and intangible be worth so much? And yet countless people were willing to pay real money for it. Was the world crazy, or was he the one going insane?

“On the D@rk Web, you can even use cryptocurrencies like Bitcoin to buy the latest drugs developed by the U.S. military or secret research results from labs all over the world—as long as you have the currency. That’s the terrifying part of the D@rk Web. There are many organizations with unimaginable power operating there. They use it for global trade, smuggling, money laundering, and other crimes. Some even aim to use cryptocurrencies to control the global financial system. When I was doing my computer research, I accidentally uncovered a few clues—it was horrifying,” Su Muchen shivered. “This is a Pandora’s box, little brother. You’d better not open it. Lu Shu gave you this account and login device with no good intentions. He wants to drag you into it.”

“In that case, I won’t log in,” Su Jie said after some thought. “I’ll just give the phone and card back.”

Though he was curious, Su Jie had long since learned how to suppress impulsive thoughts.

“That’s for the best,” Su Muchen nodded.

Chapter 63: The Tip of the Iceberg

The website, account, and password that Odell left behind were most likely meant to connect to the d@rk web.

No wonder Su Jie couldn't access or search it through regular means.

According to Odell, that site offered access to many things not available on the open market—items that could enhance physical abilities. That sounded plausible.

“Big Sis, just how advanced do you think modern technology is? I read some reports and theories saying that certain laboratories have tech that's thirty to forty years ahead of what’s publicly available. Do you think that's true?” Su Jie suddenly raised a question.

He'd seen videos online of robots doing martial arts moves and backflips, robot dogs that could open doors on their own, and AI bots that could communicate with each other and talk to people.

But logically, anything released to the public definitely wasn't the cutting-edge stuff.

"Of course it's true. A lot of that tech is monopolized by oligarchs and is never made available to the general public. But on the d@rk web, you can sometimes get your hands on it," Su Muchen replied. "For example, if you're training in combat, you can buy dr*gs on the d@rk web used by top international agents and fighting champions. They can dramatically enhance your physical abilities."

"I figured as much." Su Jie now understood why Odell had given him that account and password.

"Little bro, promise me you won't log in and then sneak off to do it anyway," Su Muchen warned him again, still uneasy.

"Don't worry." Su Jie already had a plan in mind.

Right now, he was focused on training and honing his mental resilience. He was determined to reach the state of a "Living Dead."

As his training grew more profound, he began to understand that the highest level of martial arts wasn't just about physical enhancement—it was about spiritual cultivation.

Otherwise, with Odell's status as a "Godmaker" and the top coach at the Typhon Training Camp, wouldn't he have had access to all kinds of drugs and technology? Yet he still chose to leave it all behind to pursue the ultimate spiritual state.

If not for Odell's example, Su Jie might have focused too heavily on external things.

But now, his priority was on elevating his mental state.

"That's good. You've always been true to your word. You've never told a lie, even now when you're already so grown up," Su Muchen said, still trusting her little brother. She handed him a tablet as thick as a brick. "This is the training device I mentioned last time. You can upload your usual training videos and sparring sessions into it. The AI in here will build a model, automatically generate animations, and simulate fights against current professional fighters—even world-class champions. The analysis has an 80% accuracy rate."

"Really?" Su Jie remembered he had quite a few training videos stored on his phone.

He had a habit of recording every training session and sparring match. Afterward, he'd watch them closely to analyze and reflect.

It was the best way to grasp key points and understand what worked and what didn't.

That was one of the reasons why modern training could advance so much faster than in ancient times.

In the heat of combat, many people felt they performed well, but after watching the footage, they'd find their techniques full of flaws. That's the difference between being in it and observing from the outside.

In the past four months, Su Jie had already fought over 300 times.

At Minglun Martial Arts Academy alone, he had participated in over a hundred fights. And at the Starshine Combat Fitness Club, he fought even more frequently. But even after hundreds of sparring sessions, none had as much impact on him as that one street fight against the "Gray Wolf."

He copied the videos from his computer and phone onto the tablet, letting its AI system create modules and run analysis.

That process would take several hours.

“This is already the best hardware on the market,” Su Muchen said. “Right now, this is the smallest it can get. Any smaller and the program wouldn’t be able to run.”

“With this kind of hardness and weight, there’s no way it could circulate commercially,” Su Jie nodded. “The hardware tech still needs to level up.”

“This is where AI and humans differ. A lot of people think that if AI gains consciousness, it could threaten humanity’s position. But that’s not really the case,” Su Muchen said. “Setting aside whether AI can even become self-aware—AI is just software. No matter how powerful a computer’s software is, it can’t physically improve its own hardware. But humans, on the other hand, can undergo massive transformation as their mental resilience grows.”

“That makes sense.” When Su Jie heard that offhand remark, it reminded him of the thoughts he had earlier that morning in the park. A new insight began to form.

In truth, computers and humans were very much alike.

The hardware, monitors, and case were like a person’s physical body. The operating system and various software were the soul—that is, the heart and mind in martial arts.

The heart was the operating system, and the mind was the software.

“Big Sis, so what are you trying to say now?” Su Jie asked.

“What do you mean?” Su Muchen was a little stunned.

"Of course it's about changing jobs," Su Jie said while fiddling with his brick-thick tablet. "If we don't jump ship to Lu Shu's company, we can go elsewhere. There are plenty of strong companies out there now. Haoyu Group is seriously underpaying you guys. But that's not even the worst part—Feng Yuxuan openly said he wants to bind you guys to him for life, said you're his slaves, that even your bodies belong to him. I personally saw him taking two C-list actresses into a hotel for some 'business meeting'.

And the worst part? Back when you guys were starting your business, the reason your company went bankrupt was because Feng Yuxuan was messing around behind the scenes. He wanted to buy out your tech and take it all. Whatever, I'm done talking about it."

Su Jie waved his hand at the end, clearly having said this many times before.

"Right now, our team is at a crucial breakthrough point. Once I've finalized this phase of our research, I'll take the girls and we'll jump ship," Su Muchen said.

"Even though our current pay isn't great, you have to admit Feng Yuxuan invested in us when we were just fresh grads starting up."

"Pay isn't the main issue. I just have a bad feeling about the Feng family. I'm afraid something might happen."

Su Jie remembered how Feng Hengyi blatantly sent someone nicknamed 'Grey Wolf' to threaten him. They were totally unscrupulous. And Feng Yuxuan himself wasn't just no gentleman—he was complete scum.

What made Su Jie even more uneasy was that this scumbag was pursuing his sister.

And not just her—he was also chasing after her best friend from the same team.

Su Jie had even overheard that himself.

Unfortunately, the evidence had been snatched away.

Su Jie knew his sister's situation well. She and her dorm mates in college were all top students—high achievers with good looks, all holding PhDs at a young age. They were true winners in life.

But after graduation, when they started a business together, they hit roadblocks everywhere. In the end, the company went bankrupt and fell into debt, only to be bought out by Feng Yuxuan at a dirt-cheap price.

Feng Yuxuan wasn't just after their technology. He wanted them—the women—as well.

*'This b*stard thinks he's the main character in some domineering CEO novel!'* Su Jie cursed in his heart.

"Oh right! Sis, you better be careful. I suspect the Feng family is connected to the d@rk web!" Su Jie suddenly remembered something.

"I suspect that too," Su Muchen said seriously. "A lot of the equipment in our lab clearly didn't come through normal channels."

Just then, Su Muchen's phone rang.

"I have to head to the company. Feng Yuxuan said he's coming to pick me up personally. He wants to treat our team to a meal and discuss a pay raise. Looks like he already caught wind of Lu Shu trying to poach us. I'm heading down now," she said as she hurriedly packed her things.

“I’ll go down with you,” Su Jie stood up.

“No, don’t get into a fight with him,” Su Muchen quickly stopped him.

“What, you still don’t trust your own little brother? Do I seem like the impulsive type?” Su Jie replied.

“Alright then.” Unable to argue with him, Su Muchen had no choice but to head downstairs with him.

Sure enough, a car was parked downstairs. Next to it stood a young man who truly looked “impressive and dignified.” He was extraordinarily striking—1.9 meters tall, even taller than Su Jie. His body was well-proportioned, dressed in a casual yet stylish suit that gave off a professional vibe. His face carried a playful arrogance, but his eyes were piercingly sharp. Hidden deep in his pupils, though, was a trace of cold indifference that only someone skilled in reading people could spot.

This was the classic type—warm on the outside, cold on the inside. The kind of ambitious leader who could rally followers in business or politics, but also rule them with an iron fist.

This was Feng Yuxuan.

His name matched his aura.

The term “dignified and impressive” could have been coined just for him.

Seeing Su Jie come down, Feng Yuxuan nodded slightly, as if he had expected it. He warmly took Su Muchen’s bag and helped her into the car.

“Your brother probably wants to talk to me. You wait in the car. I’ll join you after we’re done. Don’t worry, I’ll clear up all his misunderstandings about me today.”

“Alright, you two talk.” Su Muchen had no choice. She was great at research, but when it came to dealing with people, she was not only unskilled—she was actually terrible at it.

“Let’s go talk somewhere else,” Feng Yuxuan said, walking over and looking down at Su Jie. “I know what you want to say, but let’s keep our distance.”

“Exactly what I was thinking.”

Back in the day, Su Jie might have felt intimidated by Feng Yuxuan. But now, he couldn't care less. His eyes were sharp, staring straight into Feng Yuxuan's.

The tension between them was thick as they walked over to a narrow hallway on the side of the complex. Once they were out of sight from the car and Su Muchen, they stopped.

"You know why I came to see you personally?" Feng Yuxuan didn't bother with small talk or sugarcoating. His tone was cold and straight to the point.

"Because I met with Lu Shu's people?" Su Jie looked at that handsome face, feeling a deep sense of disgust. He wished he could just punch it flat.

But he was no longer the impulsive guy from a few months ago. That rashness of youth was gone.

His martial arts training had taught him that the best way to deal with an enemy was not through impulsiveness, but by biding his time, finding their weakness, and striking with a single, decisive blow.

Chapter 64: Head-to-Head: Within Five Steps

"That's right." Feng Yuxuan looked at Su Jie.

On the surface, it seemed like a heart-to-heart talk, but deep down, he felt that even saying one more word to him was a waste of time. "My patience and time are limited. Do you know how many important people I meet every day? I made time to meet you personally just to tell you—stay in line. It's good for your sister, good for you, and good for your whole family."

"Are you threatening me?" Su Jie felt a flame burning inside him, yet he remained still.

"It's not a threat, it's just a fact." Feng Yuxuan wasn't worried about Su Jie secretly recording or filming anything. He raised a finger. "Your little tricks are amateurish. If you weren't Su Muchen's younger brother, even my subordinates' subordinates wouldn't spare you a glance. Remember, this meeting with Lu Shu and those people is a one-time thing. I'm only allowing it this once. If it happens again, as per usual protocol—whatever betrays me must be destroyed. I think you know the consequences for those who've crossed me."

"Back then, you slept with a small-time celebrity. Later, she had a falling out with you and publicly accused you online. But the information was wiped clean shortly after, and not long after that, she disappeared overseas. That was your doing, wasn't it?" Su Jie picked up on what Feng Yuxuan truly meant: if Su Muchen jumped ship, he would destroy her.

Normally, with how deep his martial arts had become, Su Jie didn't get riled up by anything. But seeing Feng Yuxuan's blatant threats, his anger nearly exploded. The only reason he didn't strike was because he was holding back.

"Don't think that just because you've trained a bit, you're suddenly someone important." Feng Yuxuan spoke bluntly, clearly not denying the incident with the celebrity. "People like you are still just low-class. Other than being aggressive, what else are you good for? I could casually find ten goons who could each beat you ten times over. Honestly, with your level of martial arts, I could flatten you with one hand."

"You really think provoking me like this will make me lash out?" Su Jie's gaze suddenly turned sharp like a blade, radiating an unprecedented killing intent.

That's right—killing intent!

The intense urge to kill someone.

Su Jie had a calm personality and rarely got angry. Even after years of training, while he had gone hard in fights, he had never felt this kind of intense urge.

Even when facing "Gray Wolf," he had never wanted to kill.

But now, standing in front of the impeccably dressed, commanding Feng Yuxuan, he truly felt the desire to kill.

For the first time, the killing intent in his heart was so intense, so uncontrollable.

It was like a wild horse breaking free, galloping without restraint.

"Just be a regular citizen and stop fantasizing all the time. A few days of training and you think you're a martial arts hero? A few high test scores and you think you're destined for greatness? Commoners are just commoners. They don't rise."

Feng Yuxuan clearly had no patience left to talk to Su Jie. He turned and walked away.

Su Jie forced himself to suppress the killing intent in his chest and kept a clear head. He didn't shout any dramatic lines like "the river flows east for thirty years, west for thirty years—don't look down on the poor youth."

Because he didn't think he was beneath Feng Yuxuan.

Even if the other party was worth hundreds of billions and commanded enormous influence—they were both just men. Two shoulders, one head. No one had three heads and six arms.

"Within five steps, we're all just flesh and blood."

Su Jie watched Feng Yuxuan leave and muttered to himself, "Even the Bodhisattva of mercy has the wrath of a Vajra."

Feng Yuxuan returned to the car. From a distance, Su Muchen watched her brother walk out and asked, "How did the talk with my brother go?"

"Very well." At that moment, Feng Yuxuan seemed like a completely different person—gentle and charming. "Your brother's misunderstandings about me have more or less been cleared up. After he graduates, talk to him about joining Haoyu Group. I'll give him a decent position. After all, we'll be one family in the future."

"What family?" Su Muchen didn't look too happy. "I'm a researcher. Let's wait until this project is completed before we talk. Our contract is only until then, and whether we renew it or not is something I'll have to discuss with the rest of the team."

"Up to you. We don't keep people by force here. Don't worry, I'm not as petty as the rumors say." Feng Yuxuan opened his arms generously.

"Then take me to the research institute," Su Muchen told the driver.

The driver looked at Feng Yuxuan. After getting his nod, he drove off.

After dropping Su Muchen off at the research institute, Feng Yuxuan returned to his office.

His office was massive—around two to three thousand square meters, taking up an entire floor. It was luxuriously decorated with high-end carpets, rows of bookshelves, and a separate high-tech gym area.

The desk alone was big enough to lie ten people side by side.

There were many buttons on the desk.

He pressed one, and shortly after, a female secretary in professional attire, standing at a striking 1.8 meters tall, walked in. "Boss, what are your instructions?"

"Keep an eye on Su Muchen's team for me. I want to know when they go out, what they're doing, and who they meet with." Feng Yuxuan gave the order, then slammed the desk in frustration. "Wasting half a day on some punk—ridiculous!"

"Boss went to see Su Muchen's younger brother, didn't he? That kid's still in high school," the female secretary, Feng Yuxuan's confidante, remarked. "For someone like the boss to meet someone like that—what an insult."

"Every day, countless CEOs of listed companies, foreign consortium leaders, even high-ranking politicians line up to see me. Yet I had to put on a show and cancel this morning's event. And that little punk not only didn't appreciate it, he even tried to step on my head!" Feng Yuxuan slammed the table. "If this project weren't at such a critical stage, I'd have made him disappear off the face of the earth already."

"Boss, we must endure small slights to achieve the bigger plan. Once our project succeeds, everything will fall into place. I'm also following your orders and looking for a new team to replace them," the secretary replied with meticulous care.

"This must be done. Also, how's my third brother doing now?" Feng Yuxuan asked.

He was referring to Feng Hengyi.

"Mr. Yi signed a few training assistants at Minglun Martial Arts Academy. He also partnered with Liu Zihao on a project. Aside from that, he's constantly asking the group for money. He's only been back for less than three months and has already requested five hundred million yuan in cash from the company. Most of it's already spent, and there are no detailed reports on the project. The shareholders are starting to complain. Do you think we should report this to the old man?" The secretary frowned.

"Don't worry about it. Let him dig his own grave. That little brother of mine has been doing special ops training since he was a kid, but he doesn't get the nuances of business or people. He's just a blade in the old man's hand—or maybe an experiment. The old man can still tolerate him for now, but once he causes

financial trouble for the company and threatens its foundation, that'll be the best chance to push him out," Feng Yuxuan waved his hand. "Just give him whatever he asks for. I guarantee he'll be gone within a year."

"Understood. I'll proceed as you say," the secretary nodded and walked out.

Once she left, Feng Yuxuan pressed a button and five men entered. Every one of them looked fierce and battle-hardened. Two of them had knife scars and bullet wounds all over their bodies—they looked like they had walked straight out of a war zone.

"Get ready. Time for today's training."

Feng Yuxuan was a skilled fighter himself. That was why he dared to say he could take down Su Jie with one hand.

He had trained every day since he was young, focusing on combat and martial arts—specifically military-style lethal techniques, not flashy competition moves. He knew very well that with his status and wealth, there was no need to step into a ring—just to defend himself if attacked.

He had, in fact, survived several real-life assassination attempts.

Shua!

He stripped off his clothes, revealing a physique only a seasoned fighter would have. Two female massage therapists entered and applied ointments to his body, working out the tension with massages and deep tissue work to fully relax him.

An hour later, he launched into a burst-intensive training regimen.

Squats, deadlifts, battle ropes, bench presses, target shooting—all as fierce as a storm.

That was just the warm-up.

After warming up, he sparred with the five warriors in simulated combat.

Like a perpetual motion machine, he trained nonstop for four hours before stopping.

Then came the team of health specialists who ran physical checks, took measurements, and returned to develop personalized nutrition and wellness plans.

Many outsiders saw him as a playboy, but in reality, no matter how busy he got, he carved out four hours a day for training and recovery—without fail.

Otherwise, with his indulgent lifestyle, his body would've long since broken down.

But not only had it not broken down, it had actually gotten stronger.

That was also why he looked down on Su Jie. The money he had spent on his body over the years—he couldn't even count. The annual costs alone were more than Su Jie could earn in ten lifetimes.

His investment in Liu Zihao and partnership with Minglun Martial Arts Academy was, in fact, largely driven by interest in the academy's secret health and wellness techniques.

Meanwhile, Su Jie lay sprawled on his bed back home, not training but thinking.

He had secretly recorded Feng Yuxuan's earlier comments, but when he got back, he discovered that the equipment had been interfered with somehow—nothing had been captured.

Then he suddenly understood why Feng Yuxuan had the audacity to threaten him so brazenly.

"How do I take down Feng Yuxuan? How do I help Sis get out safely? How do I improve myself?" These were the only things on Su Jie's mind. "Haoyu Group has many business rivals. Since Sis's team has caught Lu Shu's eye, it must mean they're incredibly valuable. If I can drive the tiger to eat the wolf, it might work. But I also have to beware of being eaten myself..."

Sometimes, when you use one beast to drive away another, they might just team up and devour you together.

In business, there are no permanent enemies—only permanent interests.

That was why Su Jie didn't trust Lu Shu and the others.

He was certain that if Haoyu Group offered them greater benefits, those young masters would sell out Sis's team in a heartbeat.

Chapter 65: The Dead Are Gone, But the Divine Lives On

Su Jie was nothing like a high school student.

He had always been mature, thinking like an adult from a young age.

Right now, he was carefully considering how to resolve the crisis ahead.

On the surface, Feng Yuxuan was merely making threats without taking any real action. But Su Jie knew that this man was wealthy, powerful, ruthless, and driven by immense financial interest. If Su Jie disrupted his plans, he would definitely retaliate with lethal force.

Capitalists were willing to risk the guillotine for a 300% profit.

Years ago, Feng Yuxuan hadn't even spared a minor celebrity who betrayed him. How could he possibly let Su Muchen off?

For someone with such vast resources, crushing an ordinary person with no power or influence would be all too easy.

Su Jie would never put his own safety in the hands of his enemy's mercy.

'Relying solely on physical strength won't get me far. No matter how good my martial arts are, I can only fight so many people. As the saying goes, two fists can't take on four hands. And modern society doesn't solve problems through brute force. Of course, improving physical fitness and spiritual cultivation is always worthwhile.'

Su Jie had tested his combat ability at the Starshine Combat Fitness Club. Right now, he was capable of defeating Hua Xing—a former national-level martial artist—in the ring.

Of course, that didn't mean he could beat active national-level fighters.

There was a big gap between those retired and those still competing.

Hua Xing himself admitted that he was only at 60% of his peak performance.

Even at his peak, among national-level fighters, he was only average—not a top-tier champion.

Back then, Hua Xing stood no chance against the elite; the moment they clashed, he'd be overwhelmed.

'On the ring, I can't beat those top active fighters. But if it's on the street, maybe I still have a shot,' Su Jie thought. He realized that the Hoe Strike technique and the Eighteen Freehand Techniques he had learned weren't suitable for rule-based combat—they were too restrictive and had little impact.

However, in no-rules street fights—especially against multiple opponents—those moves were incredibly useful.

At Starshine Combat Fitness Club, Su Jie and the others had simulated multiple-opponent combat scenarios.

Su Jie discovered he could handle two to three opponents at most. If there were more than four, he would be quickly defeated.

Of course, those opponents were all well-trained fighters, practically professionals—not ordinary people.

The gap between an average person and a seasoned martial artist was massive.

If it were regular folks, Su Jie had no idea how many he could take on.

He also realized that in multi-person brawls or one-vs-many fights, most ring techniques became useless—and trying to use them would just get you hit.

Take grappling arts, for example: even if you locked down one opponent, the others would start kicking you like crazy. You'd just become a punching bag on the ground.

In those chaotic fights, even Sanda's leg techniques were ineffective. Boxing turned out to be way more practical.

Through repeated experimentation and testing during simulated group battles, Su Jie found that the most effective move was the Heart Intent Fist. No wonder it was called the "King of Ten Thousand Fists" in ancient martial circles.

Clearly, the experience passed down from generations of ancient martial artists who fought bandits and rebel armies was incredibly valuable.

'I can handle one Gray Wolf, but if there are two, the risk goes up a lot. Three, and I'm definitely dead. And Feng Yuxuan seems to have a whole crew of these guys. Why would a tech company hire so many foreign mercenaries?'

Lying in bed, Su Jie was thinking about how to defend himself if he got ambushed again.

"Real combat martial arts can be divided into ring fighting techniques, street survival skills, and large-scale military combat techniques."

Over the past few days, Su Jie had studied this in detail. The most popular in modern times were the one-on-one techniques used in the ring. Most people trained in these disciplines: Sanda, Muay Thai, Karate, Taekwondo, boxing, and so on.

Then there were street survival skills—traditional martial arts.

Back in ancient times, martial artists often faced danger while wandering the Jianghu. Highway robbers, sneak attacks with cudgels, poisoned food at shady inns, and even wild animals. There were no rules. To protect themselves, they developed the essence of practical traditional martial arts.

Military techniques, used in large-scale warfare, were different again.

Lately, Su Jie had been reading books like Qi Jiguang's New Treatise on Military Efficiency and Yu Dayou's Sword Classic. These men were generals who trained soldiers. Their martial arts emphasized courage over finesse—no fancy moves, just direct, deadly charges. Simple and practical, relying on stances like bow stance and horse stance.

The point of the horse stance was to maintain stability and avoid being knocked down during a charge.

In large-scale battles, if you fell—even without enemy interference—you could be trampled to death by your own side.

Ring fighting and street survival skills focused on agility and evasion, while military combat prioritized staying grounded.

Martial theories, the history of martial arts, real combat principles, health-focused qigong, traditional Chinese medicine—everything Su Jie had studied these past few months—were fermenting and simmering in his mind.

One scene after another of combat scenarios flashed through his thoughts like lightning.

For the first time, he felt a real sense of danger—and even a desire to kill.

That thought of killing pushed him to his limits, drawing out all of his potential. His mind became more agile than ever, his cerebral cortex extremely stimulated.

“This feeling is strange... When hatred toward someone reaches the extreme, and you want to kill them, your whole being gets fired up. Hatred really can accelerate growth—because emotions dominate the cerebral cortex. No wonder Southern-style Wing Chun centers around the concept of ‘vengeance.’”

Su Jie quietly felt his heart and mind—he had made huge progress.

In traditional Southern Wing Chun schools, the word “(仇) Hatred” had to be written in big letters right at the center of the dojo.

With a heart filled with hatred, he practiced martial arts and progressed at an extraordinary pace.

Of course, this hatred wasn't personal—it was for the country.

Many Southern martial arts styles were born from that particular period in history, fueled by the desire to overthrow the Qing and restore the Ming, to reclaim the land. Practicing martial arts with national hatred in their hearts stirred their spirits, allowing them to develop powerful techniques.

Su Jie was overwhelmed with emotion. While thinking of strategies to deal with Feng Yuxuan and the Haoyu Group, his thoughts shifted to how he could strengthen himself. Then, he began to consider various martial arts techniques, how to defend against attackers like Grey Wolf, and eventually, he started reflecting on the history of different schools and styles, the backgrounds that gave rise to them, along with what he had learned from history.

It was as if his thoughts pierced through the mists of time, reaching back into different eras to dance alongside martial arts masters of old.

Every culture and every martial art has its own unique historical background.

Once you're familiar with their history, the social conflicts and transformations they faced, it's not hard to understand their techniques, training methods, and core philosophies.

That's what it means to seek the origin of martial arts with your heart.

To use intention to part the mists of history—

Only then can you grasp the truest form of martial arts.

With the dedication of an archaeologist or historian, you can restore martial arts and history to their original form, unearthing the truth buried beneath the dust of time.

Boom!

After Su Jie's mind reached this heightened state of activity, he suddenly fell silent—and actually drifted off to sleep just like that.

If you didn't listen closely, you wouldn't even be able to tell he was breathing or had a pulse. He seemed to be in a state of suspended death. Yet his consciousness remained sharp. His body was deeply rested, and he had full awareness of everything happening around him. He could even hear conversations happening on the floors above and below him, even across several levels of the building.

The sensation was bizarre, almost like an “out-of-body experience.”

But in reality, it was his perception expanding so much that he could sense things regular people couldn't even imagine.

His spiritual cultivation had suddenly risen to a new level.

‘Could it be that I’ve reached the realm of the ‘Living Dead’?’ Su Jie had this feeling in his heart. ‘This is the realm of Ancestor Chongyang... Could it be that I’ve reached his spiritual level? No! I’ve only just touched the threshold. I haven’t truly entered.’ (G:Referring to Wang Chongyang, a significant historical figure known as the founder of the Quanzhen School of Daoism.)

Suddenly, Su Jie snapped awake.

He understood—he had touched the threshold of the “Living Dead” state.

This was the realm described in "The Writings of Master Lie", where the "perfected ones live as though dead."

But he hadn't yet stepped fully inside.

He was like a gourmet who had smelled the aroma of a master chef's feast on the table—but hadn't yet taken a bite.

And just that scent alone was more satisfying than the most delightful experiences in the world.

This state of mind was the true essence of cultivation.

Su Jie already had a strong foundation, and with today's surge of "killing intent," his mind had become incredibly active. He had finally brushed against that threshold. Even though he hadn't entered, he had already caught a glimpse of the secrets inside.

It was that kind of spiritual state.

After waking, he began to practice martial arts.

Right there in his cramped bedroom.

Originally, the room was so small it could barely fit a person—it was impossible to train in, with no space to stretch out. But now, as he began practicing, everything flowed naturally. The room felt vast, as if it were as wide as the massive training field at Minglun Martial Arts Academy. Every movement could be executed freely.

He twisted and turned, moved swiftly and smoothly, without any hindrance at all.

It was as if the limitations of space no longer existed for him.

Even the tiniest corner could now be used to practice martial arts without compromising the essence of the movements—everything flowed like a mountain spring or drifting clouds.

'This is the state where a dragon can rest calmly even in a cave meant for eels and serpents. My martial arts have improved again,' Su Jie thought to himself with growing clarity.

Just like drinking water—only you can know whether it's hot or cold.

His martial arts had indeed improved, but how much it would affect his actual combat ability was still unknown. Su Jie couldn't wait to test it out.

Martial improvement certainly boosts combat strength, but exactly how much? That was still uncharted territory.

“I'll head over to Starshine Combat Fitness Club later today to test myself. Then I'll talk to Lu Shu and the others to explain the whole situation. Those rich boys might be useful too. Of course, they're all slick as foxes—definitely not easy to deal with. I'll need to come up with a plan...”

Su Jie made a daily plan for studying and training, then followed it step by step.

Although he hadn't fully reached the realm of the “perfected ones who live as though dead,” he still did his best to embody the idea of “moving like a machine.”

Chapter 66: Flawless and Smooth: The Villain Returns

“Lie down!”

Su Jie gave a swift hook with his foot, sharp as a sickle cutting wheat, and his opponent immediately lost balance and crashed to the ground.

Inside the ring at the Starshine Combat Fitness Club, his opponent was an amateur martial arts enthusiast. However, he had been training for ten years and was also a small business owner—wealthy and with plenty of free time.

His technique and physical ability were excellent, able to go toe-to-toe with city-level athletes. But in front of Su Jie, one shout was all it took for him to fall—he couldn't even escape.

“Coach Su, your martial arts are getting more and more incredible,” the small business owner said admiringly as he got up.

“Let me try!”

Another challenger stepped forward—a tall, burly office worker who weighed over 200 pounds. But even he was sent crashing to the floor in just three seconds with a single leg sweep.

No matter their size or weight, everyone looked like scarecrows in front of Su Jie. If he said they'd fall, they'd fall. If he said lie down, they'd lie down.

Su Jie had been eager to test the martial arts realm he had just grasped, so he came to the Starshine Combat Fitness Club.

As expected, his technique had become much smoother. It was as if he could sense the flow of air and the subtle shifts in movement. Just a light nudge, and his opponents spun like tops.

This was the essence of Taiji. Japan had a similar martial art called Aikido.

“This all comes from my physical condition. Technique is secondary,” Su Jie knew well in his heart.

He now weighed 85 kilograms, standing tall at 1.85 meters. With this weight, he could already compete in the super middleweight division of boxing. A few more kilos, and he’d qualify for the heavyweight stage.

But just by looking at him, he seemed quite lean—like he weighed less than 70 kilograms.

That was because his body was extremely solid, with a thick and sturdy frame—like it was forged from refined steel.

Odell’s training had given him the best physical foundation. But if that was all there was, his fitness level would still be no different from regular provincial or city-level athletes. He wouldn’t have been able to break through to the level he was at now.

It was Uncle Mang's massages that had pushed his external martial arts to a profound realm.

Thinking back—Uncle Mang's massages were so intense even a national-level athlete like Zhou Chun couldn't endure them. But Su Jie had, and he had reaped the rewards.

Then came acupuncture, which was even more painful than massages.

After that, he underwent electrotherapy—the cutting-edge method used to train elite special agents abroad.

Even that, Su Jie endured, and in the end, it successfully reshaped his body.

He had met the right people at the best age.

At fifteen or sixteen, his body was in its most rapid growth phase.

Had he only met Odell and Uncle Mang after turning eighteen, he might not even have achieved a third of his current results.

Not just him—even an ordinary child with proper nutrition could grow a full centimeter in just one or two weeks during that age range.

One of Su Jie’s classmates had been only 1.65 meters tall in his first year of high school, but by the end of the semester, he had shot up to 1.8 meters.

Every time Su Jie thought of this, he felt incredibly lucky for his decision to attend the summer martial arts training camp at the Minglun Martial Arts Academy. At the same time, he felt a lingering fear—what would his life be like now if he hadn’t made that decision?

Fate was so strange and unpredictable that Su Jie couldn’t help but feel deeply emotional.

And it constantly reminded him—he must not waste these golden years. He had to seize every opportunity.

“Su Jie, your martial arts have improved again.”

Hua Xing stepped in and sparred briefly with Su Jie.

As soon as they engaged, Su Jie stepped in, tore through, and used a takedown to swiftly bring Hua Xing to the floor. Clean and efficient.

At that moment, two more coaches jumped in to join Hua Xing and surround Su Jie.

Su Jie crouched low, his height instantly dropping to around 1.4 meters. He dodged the strike zones, moving like a nimble monkey, and slipped into a blind spot in their formation—then lunged.

One of the coaches was immediately knocked down.

Just then, Hua Xing's sweeping kick landed on Su Jie's back. But his external martial arts training had made him incredibly tough. It was as if nothing had happened. He reached back, grabbed Hua Xing's leg, and threw him to the ground again.

Only one coach remained. He had just charged in and managed to land a punch on Su Jie's shoulder.

Su Jie endured the blow. With another swift hook kick—down he went.

In just five seconds, all three coaches were flat on the floor.

“No, this still won’t do. I can’t afford to take even the tiniest hit,” Su Jie shook his head. “Teacher Hua Xing, if your leg just now had been a blade, I would’ve been seriously injured.”

On the surface, it looked like Su Jie had cleanly and decisively taken down three attackers. But the price he paid was a kick and a punch.

If that kick and punch had been replaced by a dagger and a machete, what would the outcome have been? Su Jie knew all too well—especially when dealing with people like the "Gray Wolf," who were extremely skilled with knives. Just one hit could cut an artery, damage tendons, or even fracture bones.

"Looks like, even with my progress, dealing with three Gray Wolves armed with daggers would be a life-or-death gamble. Sure, I could kill them, but I wouldn't walk away unscathed either."

As he thought about the situation that just happened, the reality confirmed what he had already imagined in his mind.

"Of course," Hua Xing said. "A group fight with weapons is completely different from a one-on-one unarmed duel. In ancient times, generals placed the most importance on armor, weapons, and horses."

"I get the logic, but seeing it firsthand really drives home how limited the human body is," Su Jie shook his head. "No wonder Qi Jiguang emphasized battle formations against powerful enemies. It's nothing like the demonstrations or chasing down street thugs."

"If you wore a full suit of armor and carried weapons, you'd definitely be a fierce general in ancient times—taking on ten opponents wouldn't be a problem," Hua Xing chuckled. He was also fascinated by ancient military combat. "But unfortunately, we'll never get to see that kind of battlefield. Modern warfare starts with missiles turning cities into ashes. No matter how good your martial arts are, you're just an ant in comparison."

This group of martial arts enthusiasts couldn't help but sigh emotionally at the thought.

"Coach Su, you're not even seventeen and already this skilled. If you went pro, wouldn't you easily become national champion?" one of the students asked.

"Coach Su, you're so young. Have you even gotten your certification yet?" another new student chimed in.

Su Jie had only been working as a coach here for a month.

But with his skills and level, he quickly stood out and attracted a lot of students who became his fans. He had become quite popular at this fitness club.

What's more, he was humble and patient. He never tried to trick people into buying memberships just to boost performance, which made even more people want to learn from him.

"Of course I have my license," Su Jie smiled.

He got his certification in just three days.

These days, it was pretty easy to get a coaching license. For an average fitness enthusiast, all you had to do was pay a training institution, go through a short training, memorize a few outlines, and you'd likely pass the exam.

That's why many small gyms had poorly qualified coaches. Some even hired muscular guys with no certification at all—just to get people to sign up for memberships before vanishing.

But Starshine Combat Fitness Club was a high-end fitness center, and their coaches were all highly qualified.

Luckily, Su Jie had never been afraid of exams. Whether written or physical, he passed them all in one go.

"Su Jie, you should really enter a competition and win a championship. When you come back, your value as a coach would skyrocket," Hua Xing chatted with him during a break. "Right now, you're making just 100,000 a month. I thought that was high, but with your skills, it's actually low. Let's not even talk about domestic standards—top-tier coaches abroad with a bit of fame can charge over \$10,000 per private session. There was even a rumor that before the biggest crossover fight of boxing champion Pasci's career, he hired Odell—the legendary 'Godmaker'—as his coach. The deal wasn't even a set salary, but a third of the champion's prize money! That match pulled in \$200 million, with over a billion in total revenue. The organizer made a fortune, and Odell walked away with \$60 million."

Su Jie knew about that crossover fight—he'd seen the news. It was a massive matchup between the king of MMA and a boxing legend, hyped up by every major media outlet.

But there was almost no coverage of the boxing champion's coach. That information was buried, shared only among a tiny circle within the industry. That's why Odell wasn't well-known—just bits and pieces could be found online.

In the fitness and fighting world, a coach's actual skills came second to having won titles and built a name for themselves.

"Don't be fooled by him. This guy only did a two-month crash course at Minglun Martial Arts Academy, and now he dares pose as a master and act like a coach? Ridiculous." A voice suddenly cut in.

Su Jie looked over right away—and it was Zhou Chun!

"It's Zhou Chun!"

"Last month, he won the Shangwu Cup fighting tournament and defeated Bai Lang, who was ranked tenth nationwide. That win put him in the top ten nationally."

"The Shangwu Cup is a commercial event with national reach, though it's a notch below veteran competitions like 'Heshan,' 'Jingwu,' or 'Hero.' Still, Zhou Chun's now considered a national-level expert."

Some martial arts enthusiasts also recognized Zhou Chun at that moment.

He walked over, accompanied by a man who looked like a lawyer and a senior executive from the Starshine Combat Fitness Club Club.

"Manager Xu, I'm here on behalf of Haoyu Group to evaluate investment opportunities in Starshine Combat Fitness Club," Zhou Chun said to the executive. "But your club's standards are seriously lacking—letting a con artist like this work as a coach?"

"He has a license, and his skills are solid," Manager Xu said, sweating nervously. Su Jie had been brought in by their "Young Master" Qian Zheng—no one dared

object. On top of that, Su Jie was well-liked and widely acknowledged as highly capable.

Plus, Su Jie's presence attracted students from other clubs who came just to check him out.

They weren't necessarily here to train—just curious. After all, a high school student defeating professional coaches one after another was already headline-worthy. Everyone came to witness the hype, which boosted business significantly.

At first, Manager Xu thought Qian Zheng was just fooling around, but it turned out Su Jie had actually helped bring in more revenue.

"I was there in July when he was training at Minglun Martial Arts Academy. This whole investment might be off the table now," Zhou Chun said to Manager Xu. "But if you insist he's not a fraud, I'll prove it to you later. I hear Mr. Qian is coming soon. For his sake, I'll wait until he arrives and expose this fraud in person."

Chapter 67: A Million-Yuan Bet

"You look pretty comfortable now, kid. Earning a high salary and training in such a nice facility. But let's see how long you can keep up the scam. Hand over the money you conned and turn yourself in to the police. Admit you're a fraud." Zhou

Chun walked toward Su Jie, and as the surrounding people sensed trouble, they quickly dispersed.

“Zhou Chun, you were probably expelled from Minglun Martial Arts Academy after what happened last time. Then you turned to the Haoyu Group. If I’m not mistaken, you became Feng Hengyi’s punching bag, which drastically boosted your skill level,” Su Jie replied calmly, hitting the mark with his guess.

It was likely Zhou Chun had come this time specifically to target him.

Because Su Jie wanted his sister, Su Muchen, to switch jobs, he had already become a thorn in the Feng family’s side.

“You’ve got a death wish,” Zhou Chun narrowed his eyes and lowered his voice. “Let’s see what that tramp Nie Shuang and Gu Yang have taught you. And that blind old man—can’t believe you’re doing so well here. But your good days are over.”

“Boss, you’re here,”

Just as Su Jie was about to respond, Manager Xu hurried to the door to greet someone.

The newcomer was flanked by assistants and secretaries. He wore gold-rimmed glasses and, though dressed in a suit, gave off a scholarly air.

This was Qian Youguo, the boss of Starshine Combat Fitness Club and Qian Zheng's father. He single-handedly founded Starshine Combat Fitness Club and was quite wealthy. However, compared to the giant that was Haoyu Group, he still fell short.

He had taken this visit very seriously upon learning that Haoyu had sent someone to evaluate investment opportunities, choosing to show up in person.

Haoyu's moves were always shrewd, entering markets ahead of the curve.

Qian Youguo had been paying close attention to Haoyu. When the company partnered with Minglun Martial Arts Academy, he knew they were stepping into the fitness and combat sports market.

With such a giant entering the field, the entire industry was about to be reshuffled. Clubs that weren't vigilant would likely get wiped out in the upcoming quake.

Qian Youguo wanted to seize this opportunity. If lucky, it could be his ticket to skyrocketing success.

Haoyu Group had many video platforms, entertainment resources, a film company, and self-media channels—not to mention a massive advertising force. If they made a move, they could go nationwide in an instant.

“What’s going on?”

He had originally come to meet Zhou Chun but immediately sensed something was wrong.

Manager Xu whispered a quick explanation of what had just happened.

Qian Youguo immediately understood.

“Mr. Zhou, sorry I’m late. Let’s sit down and talk this over. This is all my son’s fault—kids don’t know any better, please don’t take it to heart.” He tried to smooth things over. “Manager Xu, take young Su to the finance department to settle his pay.”

That was a clear sign Su Jie was being dismissed.

Su Jie frowned but didn’t take it to heart. He had only become a coach at Qian Zheng’s request; otherwise, he wouldn’t have come at all. Since Qian Youguo said so, he didn’t argue and prepared to leave.

“Hold on, you little con artist! Think you can just walk away? Planning to scam people somewhere else?” Zhou Chun sneered. “Mr. Qian, I can’t let this slide. This punk needs a lesson. Scamming people at such a young age—clearly his parents failed at raising him. Let me do it for them.”

“Zhou Chun, how do you plan on educating me? A little match between us?” Su Jie stopped in his tracks when he heard Zhou Chun bring up his parents. “How about we make a bet? We each put up 300,000 yuan. We’ll fight right here. Whoever loses has to hand over the prize money and admit in front of everyone that they’re a fraud. Do you dare?”

“You’ve got guts, kid.” Zhou Chun’s grin turned vicious. “300,000? That’s too little—make it a million!”

“I don’t have that much,” Su Jie raised an eyebrow. He only had 200,000 yuan on him. With Starshine Combat Fitness Club’s payout, he’d have 300,000 at most.

Originally, he had saved up 200,000 from working at Minglun Martial Arts Academy. His sister Su Muchen had given him another 100,000, and Starshine Combat Fitness Club’s monthly salary should’ve brought him to 400,000. But over the past few months, he’d spent 100,000 on various nutritional supplements and premium secret formula herbal balms from the academy’s website.

“I’ll lend it to you.” At that moment, Hua Xing stepped forward.

“Hua Xing? You want to be the hero now? I’ll deal with you later!” Zhou Chun’s gaze was like a venomous snake. He wasn’t polite to Hua Xing either. After all, Hua Xing had been his rival in the past, just a bit older. Now retired and working as a coach, Zhou Chun looked down on him even more.

Zhou Chun was an active athlete on the rise, ranked in the national top ten.

Meanwhile, Hua Xing had peaked at around the 30th rank during his prime.

“Su Jie, I believe in you.” Hua Xing patted Su Jie on the shoulder. “I don’t know why he hates you, but he’s notorious for being petty and using dirty tricks during matches. He’s never fought fair. Since getting in with the Haoyu Group, his skills have improved fast. But considering his age, he’s close to retirement. There’s no more room for growth, which means he’s hiding something. Be careful.”

After a few words of caution, he turned to Qian Youguo. “Old Qian, all the students are watching. This is turning into a match. We have the license to host competitions—why not make it official?”

Qian Youguo’s eyes lit up. “Mr. Zhou, what do you think?”

“Set it up,” Zhou Chun said. “Consider it part of my evaluation. If the event is well handled, I can submit a positive report to the company.”

Qian Youguo nodded and signaled to Manager Xu.

Manager Xu immediately began organizing things and returned shortly with a contract for both parties to sign.

As Zhou Chun signed it, a ruthless glint flashed in his eyes like a snake ready to strike.

'This guy's born vicious. He's definitely planning to go all out on me,' Su Jie instantly realized.

“Please transfer the deposit to the designated account,” Manager Xu said.

Su Jie and Zhou Chun immediately started the transfer.

Hua Xing helped Su Jie borrow seven hundred thousand.

The match instantly drew a crowd.

The place was in an uproar. Fighters were always eager for action, and with a good show like this, how could they not join in? Some even started messaging their friends.

At that moment, Manager Xu quickly organized staff to isolate the area and strictly prohibited any photo or video recordings from being uploaded online. They even blocked the signal in the venue—it was clear they had a lot of experience organizing such events.

“The match rules are—” Manager Xu had just begun to announce when Zhou Chun interrupted, “No rules. No referee. It ends when one party is knocked down, loses the ability to fight, and begs for mercy.”

“Boss, that’s against the rules,” Manager Xu hesitated.

“Do as he says,” Qian Youguo ordered. “Just assign more security. No filming, and don’t let this spread online.”

“You little con artist, dare to go through with this?” Zhou Chun casually shook out his limbs, took off his shirt, and began warming up. A vicious aura rushed forth—he was planning to go all out and seriously injure Su Jie.

Su Jie didn’t warm up. He simply stepped onto the platform. Neither of them wore any protective gear or gloves.

It wasn't according to regulations, but Zhou Chun insisted on doing it this way.

Su Jie didn't say a word. He just stared coldly at Zhou Chun.

Zhou Chun stepped onto the platform and looked into Su Jie's eyes, which made him feel even more disgusted.

"Then let's begin," Manager Xu cautiously asked Zhou Chun.

At that moment, Su Jie slowly walked toward Zhou Chun. His steps were heavy, as if he was carrying a thousand pounds. This clearly wasn't standard footwork for a fighter.

Bang!

Zhou Chun's body shifted. He suddenly lashed out with a kick aimed at Su Jie's knee joint.

He was fast—like a firecracker going off.

Su Jie's lower leg was struck squarely.

The sound of muscle colliding echoed through the venue—everyone heard the harsh impact.

In fighting, leg strikes are the most powerful—especially from a national-level expert like Zhou Chun.

That kick could snap a tree trunk as thick as a bowl. With such a solid hit, anyone would've suffered a broken leg.

But Su Jie didn't move. He kept walking forward.

“Damn it! Courting death!” Zhou Chun didn't hesitate. As soon as the kick swept through, he snapped back and launched a straight punch aimed at Su Jie's nose.

The punch shot forward like a military bayonet!

Su Jie kept advancing, closing the distance. The punch landed on his forehead with a loud *crack*.

Still, he didn't budge.

Whap whap whap!

In an instant, Zhou Chun launched a combo—one kick, two punches.

The kick hit Su Jie's ribs. The punches landed on his neck and chest.

Still, nothing.

In just two or three seconds, Zhou Chun had thrown five attacks.

Two kicks, three punches.

Every strike landed, every kick targeted a vital spot.

But Su Jie was like an indestructible Buddha, unfazed by the barrage.

He stood like a boulder beneath a waterfall, unshaken by a thousand years of pounding. As tough as steel.

His body was tempered through external martial arts—rage coursed through him. His bones were solid, blood boiling, hair like needles, body like a shield!

Zhou Chun quickly adjusted his tactics, preparing to strike with a finishing move.

Swish!

By now, Su Jie had already closed the distance. He ignored everything—whether blades or arrows—unshaken. Charging forward, he raised his hand for a palm strike.

Hoe Strike! Heart-Intent Palm technique!

‘No matter what tricks you pull, I only have this one move.

Even if a thousand troops stand before me, I will still use this one move.

I care not for my life. Still, it's this one move.

Within five steps—even in front of kings and nobles—this one move remains.'

His heart blazed like an inferno. His spirit surged within the flames. All his essence, energy, and spirit became one with this strike—ferocious, dignified, ruthless, bold, unstoppable.

This single palm had transcended. The form wasn't important—it was the momentum.

This momentum could move mountains and fill oceans!

This force could shake rivers and destroy demons!

Zhou Chun suddenly realized—under this strike, he had no way to retreat.

Su Jie had seized the critical offensive point, like a blade wedged into the center, cutting off all escape.

All Zhou Chun could do was watch as the palm came down, covering his entire face.

His whole face was swallowed by those five fingers.

As Su Jie's hand covered his face, Zhou Chun suddenly felt—darkness.

Then the palm struck down, and Zhou Chun felt like his face had collapsed—flattened!

He hit the ground. Lost consciousness.

Five seconds.

The fight was over.

For the first four seconds, Zhou Chun went berserk, treating Su Jie like a punching bag. In the last second, Su Jie countered with a single slap—and Zhou Chun dropped instantly.

“He’ll wake up soon. I held back and didn’t cripple him,” Su Jie said to the stunned Manager Xu. “Transfer eight hundred thousand to my card. Give the rest to Teacher Hua Xing.”

With that, he stepped down from the platform, grabbed his backpack, and walked straight out of Starshine Club.

Even when Qian Youguo called out repeatedly behind him, Su Jie didn’t look back.

Chapter 68: High-Speed Drift

Ding-dong!

A text message showed that 800,000 yuan had been deposited into his account.

This was all the money Su Jie had.

‘At least Starshine Combat Fitness Club stuck to the contract and transferred the prize money to me,’ Su Jie thought. Even though he earned 500,000 from this match, he didn’t feel happy at all.

He couldn't stay at Starshine Combat Fitness Club anymore.

It wasn't about the 100,000 yuan monthly salary for being a coach. It was about the friendships he built through daily sparring sessions. The atmosphere had been great, and he was reluctant to leave.

Martial arts had never been a solitary pursuit.

Hiding away in the mountains practicing forms, or punching a sandbag at home, would never lead to real progress. Only by treating martial arts like a science — gathering people to exchange and refine techniques — could one achieve true improvement.

'Forget it, Club is Club, friends are friends. We can always find another place to gather,' Su Jie thought as he stepped out of Starshine Combat Fitness Club. The cold wind blew past, pulling him out of the intense state he'd been in.

Earlier, during the fight with Zhou Chun, he had unleashed all his martial arts skills. Taking hits head-on and counterattacking without flinching looked simple on the surface, but in reality, it required courage, physical fitness, combat experience, and a perfect grasp of timing and angles — none of which could be missing.

Zhou Chun wasn't weak — quite the opposite. His strength was tremendous. Although he wasn't at Feng Hengyi's level, he wasn't someone Su Jie could easily defeat.

From the very beginning, Su Jie had crafted a battle strategy: to overwhelm Zhou Chun with momentum. If they simply traded techniques, Zhou Chun, with his vast experience in the ring, would quickly see through Su Jie's style after a few exchanges, leading to a hard-fought battle.

Right now, Zhou Chun was ranked tenth among professional fighters in commercial matches. His years of experience were not something Su Jie could match.

But Su Jie had gone all in from the start.

That's right — in that first moment of contact, Su Jie had been fighting for his life. He channeled his Qi throughout his body, used his body as a shield, and launched a desperate charge — a mindset inherited from ancient cold weapon warfare.

In large-scale ancient battles, soldiers who retreated often died faster. Only by charging forward without hesitation could they seize a slim chance of survival.

'My physical condition isn't bad.'

In just ten seconds, Su Jie replayed the battle in his mind. He gained a lot, especially in controlling emotions like courage and intent.

During the fight, he hadn't felt any pain. But now, as his adrenaline wore off, the spots where Zhou Chun had struck began to ache slightly, showing signs of swelling and bruising.

He pulled out a bottle of liniment and various medicinal powders from his backpack, mixed them together, and rubbed the mixture onto the injured areas. Coordinating his breathing techniques from his body strengthening training, he massaged the bruises. In no time, the swelling and bruising disappeared, and the pain was gone.

This was a remedy from the Minglun Martial Arts Academy — extremely effective at treating combat injuries. It wasn't any worse than treatment from professional doctors, and in some cases, it was even better.

The fact that he recovered so quickly also showed just how astonishing his muscle and soft tissue recovery abilities were.

"Su Jie, why did you leave?"

As Su Jie finished his treatment while sitting on a flight of stairs, Hua Xing caught up to him and plopped down beside him.

"The doctor just checked Zhou Chun. He's fine — just a temporary blackout," Hua Xing said. "Still, you managed to hold back even in that situation. I honestly didn't expect it. Right now, Qian Youguo is visiting Zhou Chun in the infirmary. Who knows what they're talking about."

"That's none of my business." Su Jie packed up the ointments and stuffed them into his backpack. "I'm not coming back to Starshine Combat Fitness Club. We'll find another place to train together later."

"I'm planning to leave Starshine Combat Fitness Club too." Hua Xing clapped Su Jie on the shoulder. "Qian Youguo and I are old friends. I helped him back in the day. After I retired, he invited me to Starshine Combat Fitness Club to coach and gave me some shares. But now, Haoyu is definitely going to invest and acquire Starshine Combat Fitness Club. Afterward, Zhou Chun will probably take over club operations. Rather than stick around and get sidelined, I might as well cash out now. I already talked to Qian Youguo — he agreed. Once I have the money, I'll open a new club. If you're willing, I'll give you a share."

"Me?" Su Jie waved his hand. "Starting a club requires a huge investment, and it's hard to turn a profit. I don't have that kind of money."

"You won't have to invest a cent," Hua Xing said. "You beat Zhou Chun in front of so many witnesses. Even though the video hasn't spread online, everyone in our S City circle knows about it. Many will come just to train with you. You've got real skills — you won't lose money."

"There are a lot of fitness and combat enthusiasts in our city," Su Jie mused.

"Actually, I'm not doing it for the money," Hua Xing said. "I just don't want to live a different kind of life. Martial arts and combat have been part of my life since I was a kid. I'm used to the daily routine of exchanging ideas, practicing, and coaching others. That's my ideal life. Even if you gave me wealth, luxury cruises, beautiful women, or a trip around the world, I still wouldn't be happy."

This statement made Su Jie see Hua Xing in a whole new light.

Hua Xing had found his favorite way of living. Every day, he was cheerful and happy, and he could even solve his financial problems through this lifestyle. That was definitely a kind of happiness.

Actually, during their exchanges over the past month, Su Jie could feel Hua Xing's relaxed and joyful state every day.

"Forget about the shares. After your club opens, I'll just visit every day like I do at Starshine Combat Fitness Club. You don't even need to pay me a salary," Su Jie said.

"That won't do," Hua Xing replied. "Little brother, you don't understand. Giving you shares is actually me benefiting from your fame. With you as a signboard, we can attract a lot of investors. Over this past month, your strength has earned the recognition of many business owners."

"Alright then. Just let me know when everything's ready," Su Jie thought for a moment and nodded. "I have something to take care of now."

He had already made a plan for himself — he was going to return the dark web login device and the card to Lu Shu and the others.

"Alright, I'll get things ready and contact you again," Hua Xing stood up. "But you still need to be careful of Zhou Chun. He's definitely not going to let this go. That guy is crafty, has decent skills, but his character is terrible. He was originally a disciple of Liu Guanglie from Minglun Martial Arts Academy. With Liu Guanglie's connections, he achieved decent results in various commercial competitions. But instead of being grateful, he secretly opened a fighting gym to poach students from the academy. He also has a gambling problem, and Liu Guanglie had to clean up his messes many times. People in the martial arts circle tend to stay away from him. I don't know why Haoyu Group would place so much trust in someone like him."

"Maybe Haoyu itself isn't exactly clean and needs someone to handle the dirty work," Su Jie said as he bid farewell to Hua Xing and headed towards the downtown villa area by subway.

Whoosh!

A van almost drifted to a stop right in front of Su Jie, startling him so much that he quickly dodged.

But the van stopped precisely at his feet.

Su Jie thought it was some reckless, rude driver and was about to step forward to scold them when the window rolled down, revealing Zhang Manman's face.

"Get in," Zhang Manman said, turning the steering wheel with a flick of her wrist.

"Zhang Manman? Why are you here?" Su Jie was even more surprised.

Because this was a very low-end van — a Wuling Hongguang. And it was filthy, clearly not washed in a long time.

Even when brand new, this van only cost about fifty thousand yuan. It was typically used by farmers in the countryside to transport goods or privately ferry passengers. Judging by its current dirty and beat-up condition, it probably wasn't even worth a few thousand now.

Su Jie could tell from their previous trip to "Heart-Cleansing Manor" that Zhang Manman came from a wealthy family.

If she showed up in a luxury sports car worth millions, Su Jie wouldn't have been surprised at all. But showing up in this beat-up van didn't match her status in the slightest.

"What? Looking down on this car?" Zhang Manman seemed to read Su Jie's mind. "I just came down from the mountain roads after racing with a bunch of rich second-generation kids from B City. I actually won two million from them — and had them leave behind their car emblems as trophies."

She pointed to the back seat.

Su Jie looked over and, sure enough, saw a bunch of freshly pulled-off car emblems — Ferrari, Lamborghini, Porsche, Mercedes-Benz, BMW, Bentley, and even a tiny golden Flying Lady from a Rolls-Royce.

"Impressive," Su Jie said. From the way she had just drifted the van, he could tell Zhang Manman's driving skills were almost on par with professional race car drivers.

"Don't underestimate this van. It sells very well in Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. Some factions in the Middle East and Africa even use it to transport troops. If you took a Mercedes, BMW, or Ferrari there, it would break down in no time. When I was doing bounty hunter missions in Africa, I relied entirely on this type of van," Zhang Manman said as Su Jie climbed aboard. Then she stomped the gas, sending the van flying forward, giving Su Jie a strong sense of being pressed into his seat.

"This van feels like a supercar ride," Su Jie couldn't believe it. "Where are you taking me?"

"You're something else. You actually beat Zhou Chun just now. Your martial arts have improved way too fast — it's only been two months," Zhang Manman replied instead of answering.

"How did you know what just happened?" Su Jie felt like Zhang Manman had been monitoring him.

"There were so many people watching. News about it has been going wild in some rich kids' chat groups. I saw the news and rushed over to find you," Zhang Manman said casually. "I'm here in S City this time to meet an old friend of my dad's, planning to use his connections to settle down and start a business."

"What kind of business are you planning to start?" Su Jie asked while pulling up his phone and pointing at a map. "Drop me off here. I need to return something."

"No problem," Zhang Manman answered. Her driving skills were ridiculously good — weaving in and out of traffic at breakneck speed. Even with Su Jie's composure, he felt a bit anxious riding with her. Yet somehow, there were no accidents or even minor scrapes.

"Drive slower! Don't break any traffic laws. By the way, do you even have a driver's license? Don't tell me you're driving without one," Su Jie suddenly remembered to ask.

"Of course I have a license," Zhang Manman said without even turning her head. "As for what business to start, I'm still researching. What do you think about opening a fitness and wellness club?"

Chapter 69: The Tai Chi Master Doesn't Believe in Geniuses

"How big are you planning to go?" Su Jie asked. "Judging by your actions, it doesn't seem like it'll be small. But right now, the hotspots for startups are artificial intelligence, blockchain, big data, cloud computing, autonomous driving, and all kinds of high-tech fields. A step down from that would be film, gaming, animation, livestreaming, entertainment, and social networking. Basically, it all needs to be connected to the internet to truly take off. Other industries are either too deep in the water or already sunset industries with no real future."

"I didn't expect you to know so much about startups!" Zhang Manman was genuinely surprised. "I thought you only focused on martial arts."

"Life itself is martial arts," Su Jie said, sounding philosophical.

In fact, he had been thinking about this for a long time. If he wanted to go up against the Haoyu Group, he had to become strong, wealthy, and influential. So, while browsing information online, he also kept an eye on the news, especially on the hottest entrepreneurial trends in the market.

If he wanted to stand out quickly and gain social status, this was one way.

Of course, he also knew that starting a business wasn't easy. Connections and funding were major hurdles. His older sister and her classmates had tried starting a business together and failed. Now, they had no choice but to work for the Haoyu Group.

"So what's your suggestion for me?" Zhang Manman asked, curious about Su Jie's opinion.

"I honestly haven't thought of anything good yet," Su Jie said after a long moment of consideration. "These days, it's all about technology. A few years ago, livestreaming, gaming, and filmmaking were great ways to make money and even go public. But now, those industries have been monopolized by big players. Unless there's a technological breakthrough, it's hard to stand out among the giants."

"Technology, huh?" Zhang Manman smiled meaningfully but didn't say anything more.

Before long, the car arrived at the wealthy neighborhood. Su Jie didn't go inside. Instead, he explained the situation to the security guard and left the mobile login device and card there. After the guard recorded everything and left evidence, Su

Jie departed.

“By the way, you still haven’t told me where we’re going,” Su Jie said as he got into the Wuling Hongguang minivan, once again feeling uneasy. Zhang Manman’s driving speed made him seriously reconsider getting in again.

He knew very well that no matter how good his martial arts were, in a car crash, he might as well be a ragdoll.

“I’m taking you to meet a friend of my dad’s. His martial arts skills are incredible, and he’s also an expert in psychology,” Zhang Manman said. “Buckle up! I’m about to speed up!”

Su Jie quickly steadied his energy and spirit.

The minivan sped out of the city and into the suburbs, where it was much less crowded. This only made Zhang Manman drive faster, constantly overtaking other cars.

Su Jie even started wondering if Zhang Manman was treating the minivan like an airplane.

“Slow down, slow down! The car’s practically flying!” At a sharp turn, the minivan drifted, all four wheels lifting off the ground before slamming back onto the road

with a loud thud. The seats creaked like they were about to fall apart, and the car door banged so loudly it seemed like it might fall off.

Startled, Su Jie grabbed the handle next to him to steady himself. “Are you trying to drift?”

“That’s nothing. A piece of cake,” Zhang Manman said, clearly enjoying the sight of Su Jie panicking. Ever since she had met him, he had always been calm and steady, like an immovable rock—never showing the impulsiveness or recklessness typical of teenagers. Even many middle-aged men couldn’t match his composure.

Seeing him flustered for once, she couldn’t help but speed up even more, deliberately drifting around sharp corners. Sometimes, it looked like they were about to fly off the road before she would slam on the brakes and jerk the steering wheel, causing smoke to rise from the tires.

“This van’s performance is insane. Are you sure it’s just a regular minivan?” Su Jie gradually stabilized himself and regained his composure. He even realized that high-speed drifting was great for training his balance. His breathing sank deeper, his feet stuck to the floor like suction cups, becoming one with the vehicle no matter how much it rocked.

“Amazing!” Zhang Manman spun the steering wheel with one hand and gave him a thumbs-up with the other.

Three hours later, they drove into a rural area.

Although it was called the countryside, this place was actually quite prosperous. It had already been developed, with lots of tourist attractions, homestays, and beautiful scenery. Some of the courtyards were even nicer than houses in the city.

The minivan finally stopped in front of a large farmhouse.

The farmhouse had tall red walls and yellow-tiled roofs, built very much like a traditional courtyard house, with a locked front gate.

As soon as the car stopped, barking came from inside.

Zhang Manman knocked on the door. After a while, it opened, and two large yellow dogs rushed out—not barking aggressively, but wagging their tails and leading the way, which surprised Su Jie. These dogs were clearly well-trained and intelligent.

Outside the farmhouse was a huge drying yard where several luxury cars were parked—Land Rovers, the latest Maybach Mercedes vans, and even a large RV.

Compared to these, Zhang Manman’s minivan looked completely out of place.

“Living in the countryside is actually really nice. A big open yard like this, wide open skies, you can park wherever you want. In the city, people sometimes even fight over parking spots,” Su Jie said, feeling nostalgic. After all, back when he was training at the Minglun Martial Arts Academy, it was in a farmhouse next door that Uncle Ma had trained him every morning at three a.m., building the solid foundation he had today.

"Uncle Ma, I came to see you!" Zhang Manman called out.

The door was opened by a boy about eleven or twelve years old, dressed in linen clothing. He quickly shushed her, "Keep your voice down, my master is discussing business with a client."

Inside the courtyard, the eaves were painted with gold and red, looking very luxurious, like the residence of a noble family in ancient times.

Odell's little courtyard had been simple and elegant, resembling a Japanese-style Zen garden, ideal for self-cultivation. But this farmhouse courtyard was a display of wealth.

In the center of the courtyard, there was a pomegranate tree.

Pomegranates symbolize fertility and blessings in ancient traditions, so planting one in the yard carried that meaning.

The courtyard was huge, with multiple sections leading inward. There was a main house, east and west wings, an inverted house opposite the gate, and even a screen wall at the entrance. All the buildings were two stories tall, and the enclosing walls were very high, as if wrapping the entire property tightly.

There was a certain "mountain within the earth" feeling from the *I Ching* about it.

It seemed that someone was discussing matters upstairs in the main house.

The linen-clad boy led Zhang Manman and Su Jie into one of the side rooms and served them tea. Looking at the bright red carpet and red lanterns, Su Jie felt like he had stepped back into ancient times.

"Manman's here?" A short while later, two middle-aged men came downstairs.

Su Jie was slightly stunned because one of them, dressed in linen clothes, was the very same "Master Ma" he had met at the park. This man had given him a business card and warned that he and his family might face "bloody disasters." At the time, Su Jie thought he was a fraud. But later, the man had casually pointed out that Su Jie was practicing the "Great Corpse State" and even quoted the ancient saying, "A true man dwells among the dead and moves like a machine."

Clearly, he was an expert who knew his stuff.

'Could it be that this Master Ma is an old friend of Zhang Manman's father? Wait, didn't she say earlier that he was a psychology expert?' Su Jie recalled Zhang Manman's introduction during their walk over.

"Little Friend, we meet again. You didn't come looking for me that day," Master Ma said, as if he wasn't surprised to see Su Jie. "I knew we would cross paths again."

"Uncle Ma, you two know each other?" Zhang Manman asked in surprise.

"We met while practicing in the park," Master Ma explained to the middle-aged man beside him. "Old Chen, your Hunyuan Tai Chi Martial Arts Hall is right next to the park. You lead your students there to practice every day. How come you didn't notice such a talented young man?"

"I really didn't notice," said Old Chen, who was wearing a loose robe and cloth shoes, looking relaxed and full of vitality. His face was rosy, and his eyes were sharp as he looked Su Jie up and down. "Little Friend, Old Ma says you're skilled. What style do you practice?"

"Just a rough country style..." Su Jie hurriedly waved his hand. "I'm not a master, not at all. I'm just a student who recently learned some skills at Minglun Martial Arts Academy."

"I can vouch for that," Zhang Manman quickly chimed in. "We joined the same training class, studied under Gu Yang together. He's only been learning for two months. When he started, he didn't even know how to dig or hoe the ground, but he's improved incredibly fast. Uncle Ma, weren't you looking for a genius? I've brought you one!"

"Gu Yang is the real deal when it comes to practical combat. His style has genuinely been used to kill, unlike me, who just practices for health in the park," Old Chen said while still scrutinizing Su Jie.

"Just earlier, Su Jie knocked down Zhou Chun!" Zhang Manman eagerly recommended him to the two men.

"Zhou Chun? Ranked tenth now? The fighter expelled from Liu Guanglie's school?" Old Chen clearly kept up with the fighting scene. "Impossible. Even a mediocre pro is still a pro. An amateur can't possibly go up against a professional. Especially someone who made it into the top ten."

"I got a secretly filmed video just now," Zhang Manman said, pulling out her phone.

Old Chen took it and watched the five-second clip—Zhou Chun launched an attack, Su Jie took it head-on, charged forward, and slapped Zhou Chun unconscious.

The move was lightning-fast, so much so that the footage needed to be slowed down significantly to catch the details. And there was nothing flashy about it; to the untrained eye, it would look utterly ordinary.

It was a lot like how wrestlers handle sanda fighters—taking hits and then grappling them into submission.

Su Jie, however, simply took the blow and countered with a direct slap to the face.

"Impressive," said Old Chen, who clearly understood what he was seeing. His expression changed as he looked at Su Jie. "Your external conditioning has reached this level? How did you train? How did you manage to forge such a solid foundation?"

"You, young man, have already glimpsed that threshold? You're almost a 'Living Dead'?" Master Ma was also stunned at this moment.

He seemed to have seen through Su Jie's mental state.

"You're almost a Living Dead."

To an outsider, that would sound like a curse, and even Zhang Manman didn't understand and thought he was insulting Su Jie. But Su Jie knew exactly what he meant.

That night lying on his bed, he had indeed touched the threshold of becoming a "Living Dead."

"Only when the mind dies can the true form be born," Master Ma said to Old Chen. "Old Chen, I was just about to tell you that I met a genius, but you didn't believe me. Now do you believe it?"

"I still don't believe it. That's impossible. If he's really reached that state, that's the realm of Patriarch Chongyang," Old Chen shook his head. "Little Friend, how about some push-hands with me?"

Chapter 70: Think Carefully for the Big Picture

Su Jie could tell that Old Chen was a grandmaster who had practiced Tai Chi for many years.

He had once looked down on Tai Chi, thinking it was just a form of dance or aesthetics. But after learning Odell's joint exercises, he realized it was a true martial art. With this set of movements as a foundation and warm-up, it adjusted both body and mind, allowing anyone to quickly get into the right state for any kind of training.

It was like the "Nine Yang Scripture" from martial arts novels—once practiced, it greatly accelerated the learning of any other martial arts.

In fact, the text of the "Nine Yang Scripture" in those novels was directly taken from ancient Tai Chi manuals, such as the line: "His force barely brushes my skin, but my intent has already reached his bones."

This line referred to the essence of Tai Chi's "pushing hands." The moment two people made contact, one could sense the other's strength and weaknesses, determine where the attack would land, and respond in advance.

These were all ancient insights, later borrowed by martial arts novelists.

Last time, when Su Jie brought lunch to his mother at the university, he had run into Instructor Yu Jiang. They had tried pushing hands as well.

But clearly, Old Chen's Tai Chi was far superior to Yu Jiang's.

Su Jie reached out and made contact with him.

Old Chen's eyes lit up. To outsiders, it seemed like he hadn't even moved, but Su Jie immediately felt a powerful force pushing him backward.

This technique was simply godlike.

Su Jie bent his body, rooted his feet to the ground, and suddenly slid forward. Without even thinking, his arm lashed out.

No matter how you tried to throw me, hit me, kill me, push me, confuse me, or distract me—I would still strike with this move.

His palm was already aimed at Old Chen's face.

All of Old Chen's Tai Chi skills—borrowing force, redirecting power, techniques like peng, lu, ji, an, cai, lie, zhou, kao—were rendered useless. Like Zhou Chun before him, he could only watch helplessly as Su Jie's palm came crashing down.

In that split second, Old Chen suddenly bent at the waist, folding his chest and waist together, almost flattening himself to the ground. He darted to the left and barely avoided the blow.

But before he could stand up, Su Jie's punch came flying at his face again.

It stuck to him like a shadow.

Like a maggot clinging to the bone.

It would not stop unless it drew the enemy's blood.

Bang!

At that moment, Su Jie's punch was caught.

It was Master Ma who intervened, finally stopping Su Jie's onslaught.

"Stop," Master Ma said.

Su Jie paused and immediately apologized. "Sorry, that was an instinctive reaction. I lost." He sounded very sincere, because by the rules of Tai Chi pushing hands, he had indeed lost.

Of course, under no-holds-barred combat rules, if he had kept going, it could've ended in a bloody mess.

But those last two strikes had been purely instinctual. He didn't even have to think—they bypassed conscious thought entirely.

In such lightning-fast exchanges, there was no time to think. It all came down to muscle memory forged through relentless training.

“As they say, fists fear the young. I really can't deny that anymore,” Old Chen took a deep breath. Though he hadn't been hit, he was clearly shaken. “There's a saying in the martial world: ‘The most vicious and deadly is the Xingyi strike.’ It's not just empty talk.”

“Of course,” Master Ma said, still staring at Su Jie. “The farmer's Hoe Strike Technique isn't simple. Since ancient times, farmers were usually the most honest people. But once pushed too far, they could turn the world upside down—overthrow emperors and dynasties. Old Chen, now that you've experienced this strike for yourself, what do you think?”

“To train a move to such a level... I've seen very few like it. It's pure. Extremely pure. Right—my student once told me he encountered a master who was just a kid. One explosive strike could burst a basketball. That must've been you.” Old Chen looked at Su Jie as if he had found a treasure, examining him up and down.

“Instructor Yu Jiang is your student?” The mention of the exploded basketball told Su Jie everything. No wonder Yu Jiang’s power was somewhat similar to Old Chen’s.

“He’s my youngest student. He’s an officer now. After that match with you, he couldn’t stop thinking about it. He’s been looking for you, hoping to become friends,” Old Chen said.

“Uncle Chen, what do you think of Su Jie? If you’re satisfied, why not take him as your disciple? I think he’s the best fighter among all your students,” Zhang Manman suggested, throwing Su Jie a meaningful look.

From that look, Su Jie could tell that Old Chen was well-connected, and becoming his student might bring considerable benefits.

"Not at all, not at all," Old Chen quickly waved his hands. "Even though I'd love to have a disciple like him, I really don't have anything to teach Little Brother Su when it comes to martial arts. I can't shamelessly take the title of master. But we can definitely exchange insights on cultivation. I heard from Brother Ma that your fist techniques aren't even your strongest area—what's truly impressive is your mastery of Zen. They say the Great Corpse State is practically dead now? I really can't believe that. In martial arts, it's harder to temper the mind than the body. Shaping the form is easy—training the intent is hard. As the saying goes, 'the mind is like a monkey, the will like a wild horse.' The mind is the all-powerful Sun Wukong, and the will is the White Dragon Horse. Only the likes of the Buddha or Guanyin can subdue them."

"Old Li will be here soon. He wants me to help him calm his mind. Let's talk upstairs," said Master Ma.

The four of them went upstairs. The space was spacious and antique in style, with a writing desk and ceramic vases filled with calligraphy and paintings.

After they sat down, the little boy brought over tea again.

"So thoughtful." Su Jie patted the boy's head.

"Don't underestimate him. He's been training since he was little. He's Uncle Ma's final disciple," said Zhang Manman. "Xiao Mo, do you still remember me?"

The boy called Xiao Mo nodded.

"Xiao Mo started training young. When he was six and began losing his baby teeth, I used a bone-strengthening method to build up his physique. By now, his body is already far beyond that of others his age," Master Ma explained. "However, he'll need to go through another phase of physical structuring between ages fourteen and seventeen before he can truly transcend the ordinary."

Su Jie was stirred upon hearing that.

The reason he was so skilled now was all thanks to meeting Odell and Uncle Mang during the prime phase of his growth. They used the most scientific methods to strengthen his muscles and bones.

But this boy, Xiao Mo, had started developing strength when he was just six—right at the time of tooth replacement. That was on another level altogether.

In traditional martial arts and Chinese medicine, there's a belief that teeth reflect bone health—strong bones make for strong teeth, while weak bones result in dental issues.

'Feng Hengyi is probably so powerful for the same reason—his body was strengthened with scientific methods from a young age. While I didn't miss the ideal period for growth, I did miss the foundation-building stage during the tooth replacement years,' Su Jie reflected. He knew he still wasn't a match for Feng Hengyi.

Back then, he had been taken down with two punches. Now, it probably wouldn't take more than four or five.

"Su Jie, I can tell your body must've recently undergone some transformation thanks to help from an expert. But even with that, it shouldn't be this powerful," said Master Ma with curiosity. "The only possible explanation is that your mental state triggered a physical metamorphosis."

"Master Ma, as far as I know, the world is just beginning to explore psychological training. In some countries, athletes are starting to incorporate elements of psychological conditioning alongside their regular physical training, but it's still far from complete. I heard from Zhang Manman that you're an expert in psychology. May I ask you a few things about the Great Corpse State?"

Su Jie didn't believe in things like feng shui, divination, or fortune-telling, but he did believe in psychology—because it was a science. While some parts resembled metaphysics, they were nonetheless grounded in reality.

He had initially learned the Great Corpse State from Odell, but their time together had been too short for him to grasp its deeper essence. Though he had continued studying on his own, many doubts remained unresolved.

The last time Master Ma casually mentioned the technique in the park, Su Jie had wanted to ask more, but the man had already left. Even so, after pondering it carefully, he still found himself gaining a lot.

Now that he had the chance to meet Master Ma again, he wouldn't let it slip by.

"I was looking for Old Chen last time when I happened to see you practicing in the park. I saw quite a bit just from that," said Master Ma, his eyes gleaming with insight. "But you getting up at 3 a.m. every day to train until six? No wonder Old Chen hasn't seen you. You're literally training at the crack of dawn."

"You've got spirit, young man." Old Chen nodded. "My disciple Lao Huang mentioned it too—said he ran into a young guy in the park who would train all day long. When it comes to dedication, you're a rare breed."

"Lao Huang?" Su Jie recalled—it was probably that old tai chi master he had met during his first visit. Every move and posture had shown real skill, which convinced him that the Hunyuan Tai Chi School had depth.

"The Great Corpse State is actually the easiest to practice. You just lie down, and it stretches the muscles and relaxes the body. But the hardest part is getting started. Honestly, ninety-nine percent of people who try it are just sleeping. Very few ever reach the first state—'peace of mind and serenity of spirit.' That state is what's referred to as deep hibernation. Not sleep—hibernation."

Master Ma, as a psychology expert, began breaking it down for Su Jie.

"What's the difference between sleep and hibernation?" Zhang Manman couldn't help asking.

"During sleep, the brain still shows wave activity. That's how dreams are formed. People with poor sleep quality might sleep a lot but still feel exhausted. More and more people around the world are struggling with poor sleep quality. I once gave a lecture at the Royal Hypnosis Society in Europe and used a set of data to show that if everyone could sleep well, human life expectancy could increase by at least thirty percent—possibly more."

Though Master Ma was technically a feng shui practitioner, here he was discussing statistics and science. Outsiders might find it absurd, but Su Jie knew that ancient Chinese metaphysics contained a lot of profound psychological insight.

That's what Odell had been searching for.

Su Jie stayed quiet and listened carefully.

"The brainwave activity during sleep is what the Zen schools call 'gross thought.' When gross thought is present, the body doesn't get full rest. The first level of the Great Corpse State, which I call 'peace of mind and serenity of spirit,' is what others refer to as 'subtle thought.' That's hibernation. In that state, the brain still has activity, but the large wave movements are gone—gross thought stops entirely. Only subtle thought remains. In this state, the quality of rest is incredibly high. Even just a few hours of rest can leave a person feeling completely refreshed. Over time, the body's functions and hormone production are enhanced far more effectively than any medicine or supplement."

Master Ma was, essentially, giving a lecture.