

THE WAY OF RESTRAINT

Chapter 71: Performance in the Crystal Orb

"I get it now! Even computers have sleep and hibernate modes," Zhang Manman suddenly said. "Sleep mode means the memory is still powered and data is still being transmitted. Hibernate mode is when everything is saved and the computer shuts down."

"That's a very fitting analogy," Master Ma said with approval.

"Our Tai Chi focuses a lot on this or that kind of force, but in the end, it's all physical movement. When it comes to the psychological aspect, we don't delve as deeply," Old Chen added, listening attentively.

"In short, the entry level of the Great Corpse State is turning rough thoughts into subtle thoughts—this is the first level. Most people who practice this art can't get past this stage. They can't get rid of their rough thoughts and are unable to maintain only the subtle ones." Master Ma gave Su Jie a curious look. "How long did it take you to pass this stage?"

Su Jie thought about it. It seemed like he had entered that state the first time he tried.

That was one of the reasons Odell had taken an interest in him.

Back then, he hadn't thought it was anything special. But now, he realized just how shocking it really was.

Still, he told the truth. "I got rid of the rough thoughts and entered the subtle state on my first try."

Master Ma's mouth fell open and stayed that way for a long while before he finally closed it. "Someone like you, in ancient times, would be considered born to cultivate the Way... but I still don't believe it. Kid, don't brag."

Su Jie shook his head. "Master Ma, please continue. Just take it as me bragging." He didn't want to get hung up on that point—he was more interested in the explanation.

"Alright then." Master Ma continued, "The second level of the Great Corpse State is 'seemingly dead, yet not dead.' As one's training deepens, even the subtle thoughts become so faint that even you can't tell whether they still exist. You might say they don't, but there are faint traces. Say they do, but you can't detect any clear form. In meditation, this is called 'neither perception nor non-perception.' It's the same idea—thoughts so subtle they defy precise explanation, existing somewhere between presence and absence. This state is extremely rare. If the first level, 'peace of heart and tranquility of spirit,' is already one-in-a-million, then this second level is truly the peak. In ancient times, only extremely accomplished Zen masters might reach it after a lifetime of practice. In today's world, it's even rarer."

"What about the third level?" Su Jie had already reached the second level and had even glimpsed the third.

"The third level is when even the last traces of subtle thought disappear completely. This is the realm of the Living Dead. I call it 'heart dead, spirit alive.' In Zen, it's said that when one reaches this state, their Buddha nature is born. With the death of the heart, the Buddha nature emerges. Confucianism calls this the Benevolent Heart; Daoism calls it the Heart of the Way," Master Ma explained. "At this level, a person's physical constitution undergoes incredible changes. In all my years, I've only seen a handful of people who might've reached this level."

"Master Ma, have you reached this state?" Su Jie asked.

"No. Like you, I'm still at the second level—seemingly dead, yet not dead. Of course, I don't practice the Great Corpse State. I follow a different meditation method. But the principle is the same. The end goal is still that state," said Master Ma.

"Kid, have you really reached that 'seemingly dead' state?" Old Chen was skeptical. "I've been practicing Tai Chi and nourishing Qi for so many years. At most, I sleep soundly without dreaming, eat well, and feel physically great. My senses—sight, hearing, taste, smell—are sharper than ever. Based on what Old Ma said, I'm just at the first level: peace of heart and tranquility of spirit."

"Uncle Chen, everyone knows how fit you are. Your favorite trick is biting through walnuts and dried beans," Zhang Manman chimed in.

Old Chen was over sixty, but he looked like he was in his early forties.

And his teeth were incredibly strong. He could crunch dried beans into powder with a single bite. Even hard walnuts could be cracked with his teeth. Of course, he could also crush them easily with his fingers.

"Old Chen, to be honest, I didn't believe it either. But the facts are right in front of me. My experience in psychology tells me this kid is the real deal. He might even break through to the living dead state," Master Ma said with a bitter smile. "That time I saw him in the park, his 'death' wasn't quite clean. But now, I can't even sense any trace of psychological activity from him."

"I don't buy it no matter what you say." Old Chen shook his head. "If someone his age really reached the living dead state, he'd be even more impressive than Ancestor Chongyang! Only the Sixth Patriarch Huineng achieved sudden enlightenment at a young age and reached that state. He read that line in the Diamond Sutra—'Let the mind arise without dwelling on anything'—and became a Buddha on the spot. A timeless legend."

"'Let the mind arise without dwelling on anything'?" Su Jie repeated thoughtfully.

"It means when a person has no attachments to worldly things or emotions, Buddha nature arises," Master Ma explained. "The word 'dwelling' means to stop or linger. It refers to attachment. But this attachment isn't just emotional—it refers to karmic ties. It's not telling you to abandon your humanity or disregard

your parents and loved ones. Some people misunderstand this, abandon everything, and end up on the demonic path. 'No dwelling' is not nihilism. Some people today train in methods of detachment that are completely misguided."

"This is really hard to understand," Su Jie shook his head.

"Martial arts are easier. This move, that move—there's always a pattern to follow," Old Chen said, shaking his head. "But the stuff you're talking about—it's too deep, too abstract. For someone who doesn't understand, it just sounds like you're selling snake oil."

"Actually, there are still a lot of these so-called 'masters' running so-called spiritual cultivation classes. They're all frauds—not only do they mess with people's mental health, but they also scam people out of money and take advantage of them sexually. They even threaten public safety. This kind of thing keeps happening despite crackdowns, and it's affecting people like us who are genuinely researching psychology." Master Ma sighed.

"So that's why you won't run your own class?" Old Chen asked. "I was hoping you'd come to my Hunyuan Tai Chi Martial Arts Hall and give the students a few lectures."

"Forget it." Master Ma waved his hand. "The true methods shouldn't be passed around lightly. It's not that I'm trying to keep them to myself—it's just that even when you lay the truth out in front of them, they still think you're a fraud. It's frustrating."

"Let's get back to our research then," Old Chen said. "You're trying to borrow ideas from my Taichi to develop methods to treat mental illness."

"My crystal ball therapy method is nearly complete. Since little Su Jie is here, why not let him see it in action? Maybe he can help me spot some flaws." Master Ma pulled out a crystal ball the size of an apple from a drawer.

As soon as he held it, the ball seemed to float weightlessly in the air. With a slight twist of his hand, it drifted as though defying gravity.

As his movements changed, the crystal ball became even lighter than a feather, rolling freely over his fingertips, palms, arms, and shoulders.

It looked like the ball had come to life—like a crystal bunny full of energy, hopping all over Master Ma's body.

Watching the crystal ball, Su Jie felt like he was seeing a newborn creature discovering the world for the first time, curious and amazed by everything it saw.

He couldn't help but feel joyful.

"Ah!"

Zhang Manman let out a surprised cry. The crystal ball had suddenly begun rolling faster and faster, as though the little bunny was being chased by a predator—maybe a hawk—and was frantically trying to escape.

Su Jie felt his heart tighten, worried for the bunny's fate.

Creak!

At the very last second, the crystal ball darted into Master Ma's sleeve, just like a bunny diving into its burrow at the critical moment to escape danger.

Su Jie finally relaxed, letting out a breath he didn't know he was holding.

Then, the crystal ball poked its way back out of the sleeve, looking playful and lively. It rolled around gently as if basking in the sun, and then gradually came to a stop—as though tired and ready for a deep sleep.

Su Jie's eyes and mind were fully captivated by the vivid little crystal ball. He couldn't look away, dancing along with its "life." When it seemed tired and ready to sleep, he too felt a calm drowsiness settle over him.

He glanced over at Zhang Manman—and was surprised to see her already asleep in her chair.

"This segment with the crystal ball was inspired by a moment I once witnessed—a bunny venturing out of its burrow, being chased by a hawk, and narrowly escaping. I expressed it through this technique and named it 'Life and Death.' I incorporated various forms of Taichi energy into it," said Master Ma. "I also added some hypnotic techniques to treat psychological issues and help people gain insight into the cycle of life and death in nature. What do you think?"

"Amazing," Su Jie was in awe. "This is truly a profound art. I've seen crystal ball acts on talent shows that were dazzling to the eye, but what you've done here—that's like the difference between a grade schooler and a PhD. Watching it made me feel the impermanence of life and death. I feel lucky to be alive, deeply calm and content. To use martial arts this way... it's a whole new world. Using martial arts just for fighting feels like such a waste now."

"Exactly. The ultimate purpose of martial arts is to create a better life. Using it just to fight and compare strength is too narrow-minded," Old Chen agreed.

"What happened to me?" Zhang Manman suddenly woke up. "Uncle Ma, did you hypnotize me just now? That nap felt amazing."

"You have a lot on your mind," Master Ma said. "Stay here with me for a while. I'll help you adjust your mental state."

Zhang Manman seemed to be waiting for those words. "Thank you, Uncle Ma. Your psychological training is rare. I heard Liu Long invited you to guide him for three months, and it helped him beat all his opponents and win the national championship at the Heshan Cup. His ranking score has been at the top ever since, far ahead of the second place."

"Liu Long?" Su Jie knew that name—he was currently the top fighter in the country. Zhou Chun had just made it into the top ten, but compared to Liu Long, he was way behind.

Zhou Chun's rating was a little over 300, while Liu Long's was more than 5,000—a tenfold difference.

A fighter's ranking score is calculated based on wins, match frequency, and the quality of performance, using a precise algorithm to assess strength.

Even though Zhou Chun made it into the top ten, if he ever faced Liu Long, he'd probably get beaten so badly he wouldn't recognize his own mother.

Chapter 72: Mental Suggestion The Dao Is Hard to Attain but Easy to Lose

“What a pity. Liu Long lost to Thailand’s Banjalong in the ‘Battle of the Gods’ in Las Vegas the day before yesterday. I watched that match—what a shame. If he had won, his world ranking would’ve broken into the top ten.”

Old Chen seemed very invested in combat sports, watching every match. Though he was getting on in years, his ambition still soared.

“Before the tournament, Banjalong secluded himself in a temple for three months to train in the Ten Impurities. His mindset after that was nearly unshakable. As soon as I saw Liu Long, I knew he was bound to lose,” Master Ma sighed.

“What are the Ten Impurities?” Su Jie asked.

“The Ten Impurities are a practice from ancient times, where cultivators would observe the various states of a decomposing corpse to develop aversion and detachment—thus realizing the impermanence of life and death,” Master Ma patiently explained. “It’s a form of meditation, essentially a psychological suggestion technique. The Ten Impurities refer to: the bloated phase, the livid phase, the festering phase, the dismembered phase, the eaten-away phase, the scattered phase, the hacked-and-scattered phase, the blood-smeared phase, the maggot-infested phase, and the skeletal phase. In ancient India, or Tianzhu as they called it, corpses were thrown into the Ganges after death. The bodies would bloat, ooze pus, grow maggots, get partially eaten by animals—it was horrifying. But after seeing it enough, people developed a mindset that life and death were just part of the cycle. Later practitioners refined this method, teaching people how to use psychological suggestion to face death without fear—because, sooner or later, everyone ends up like those corpses. No one escapes.”

“Psychological suggestion...” Su Jie nodded. “If someone truly comes to terms with life and death through training, their mentality in a competition would be terrifying. They could perform several times better than their actual strength.”

“Psychological suggestion training is extremely important for athletes,” Master Ma said, still shaking his head. “It’s a pity. If I had given Liu Long some psychological guidance, he definitely could’ve beaten Banjalong.”

Su Jie understood this well. Top fighters didn’t just have doctors on their team—they also had psychological counselors. Before major competitions, they’d receive mental coaching. Without it, even the strongest athlete could crack under pressure and lose.

There were plenty of cases where a physically weaker athlete, with a better mental state, performed above expectations and beat a much stronger opponent who ended up completely disoriented.

“All right, let’s change the topic.” Master Ma noticed Su Jie had grasped something. “Psychology is a deep field, and we’re all still feeling our way through it. The whole world is just beginning to explore it. As human material needs become increasingly satisfied, the mind is becoming more and more hollow. That’s why it needs more reinforcement and training.”

“Manman, I’m guessing the reason you brought little Su Jie here isn’t just to visit me,” Master Ma asked again.

“Actually, my dad sent me back to China to start a business. I did some research and chose to develop in S City. I was hoping to tap into your connections, Uncle Ma,” Zhang Manman said bluntly.

“No problem. Old Ghost Li will be here soon. I’ll introduce you,” Master Ma replied.

“Master Ma, you mentioned seeing someone who reached the ‘Living Dead’ state. Who were they?” Su Jie asked.

“Manman’s dad is one of them,” Master Ma said casually.

“What?” Su Jie was stunned. He hadn’t expected Zhang Manman’s father to be such an expert.

“My dad’s that kind of expert?” Zhang Manman seemed unaware herself.

“There’s also a foreigner named Odell,” Master Ma mentioned with admiration. “That guy is incredibly formidable. He’s studied every classic from history to philosophy, and he’s mastered cultures from around the world. His mental level is exceptionally profound. He might even break through the psychological state of the ‘Living Dead’ and reach another realm entirely.”

“What kind of realm is that?” Su Jie perked up at the mention of Odell. He’d long suspected the foreign coach wasn’t ordinary—but he hadn’t expected him to be this powerful.

"It should be the level where one sees through the illusions of self, others, all living beings, and time and space—resonating spiritually with a certain truth," Master Ma said thoughtfully. "I've never actually seen anyone reach that mental and spiritual state. I've traveled the world in search of such people but found none. It's only recorded in ancient texts."

"Master Ma, do you think there's supernatural power in this world?" Su Jie had heard these words before—from Uncle Mang.

"Of course there is," Master Ma replied. "Our Earth is nothing more than a speck of dust in the vast universe. Even within Earth's own several billion years of history, human civilization only takes up a tiny slice of a few thousand years. What does that amount to? Pitifully small. Do you really think Earth holds the only civilization in the entire universe? What is the truth of the universe? No one can say for sure. What exists in the endless starry skies? It's still a mystery waiting to be uncovered."

"That's true," Su Jie nodded. He knew that was a matter far beyond their current reach.

"We're drifting off topic," Old Chen said. "Old Ma, you've been all over the world. What other masters have you seen?"

"There might be a few more, but I can't say for certain. Some are purely spiritual cultivators who've never practiced martial arts," Master Ma said.

Su Jie knew that mental cultivation and martial arts were two different things.

A skilled martial artist wasn't necessarily someone with a refined spiritual state, and someone with a high spiritual state wasn't necessarily good at martial arts.

However, for a martial arts expert to reach a higher level, they definitely needed to improve their mental resilience and spiritual cultivation.

On the other hand, someone with a high spiritual state might not train in combat but could still have excellent health. And if they did choose to train, their progress would skyrocket.

This idea was quite prominent in Confucian philosophy.

Lately, Su Jie had been reading a lot of Confucian texts, especially The Great Learning, the first chapter of the Four Books, which focused on cultivating mental resilience and spiritual depth.

"Only after one knows where to stop can one have stability. With stability, one can be calm. When calm, one can be at ease. When at ease, one can deliberate. Only through deliberation can one attain results. Everything has a root and a branch, a beginning and an end. To understand what comes first and what follows is to be near the Way."

He recited the passage aloud.

"This is the opening line from The Great Learning, laying out its core message. It teaches that one must first set a clear goal to firm up their resolve. With that resolve comes composure, and from composure comes inner peace. Only with inner peace can one think clearly, and only through clear thought can one achieve meaningful results. Everything has a true essence and an outward appearance; every matter has a start and an end. Once you understand both appearance and reality, beginning and end, you're close to discovering truth," Master Ma said, observing Su Jie's thoughtful expression. "Looks like you've come to understand something. Confucianism ruled China for two thousand years for a reason—it's powerful."

"To study true Confucianism, the Four Books and Five Classics are enough. Their sense of righteousness, hatred of evil, and emphasis on personal cultivation all follow a clear set of principles. If you live by them, your every action will align with the way of the sages—"the sage moves like a machine, unerring in every motion," Old Chen said. "I used to prefer Daoism, but the older I get, the more I realize that the essence of Confucian thought is invaluable. It's a shame things are so backwards nowadays. Society treats something like the Filial Piety in the Confucian Tradition as a classic. That thing was written by some scholar in the Qing dynasty to turn people into kowtowing bootlickers. Just thinking about it pisses me off. One time, some so-called 'master of traditional culture' wanted to partner with me, said he'd bring that stuff into my Tai Chi academy to help students better respect their teachers. I kicked him out after a verbal thrashing. Damn nonsense. What era do they think this is? Confucius would be turning in his grave."

Old Chen had always been an easygoing Tai Chi master, but in the middle of chatting, he suddenly launched into a tirade. Yet Su Jie found it kind of endearing.

The old man suddenly felt like one of those grandpas you see chatting in the park—down-to-earth and familiar.

He wasn't some lofty Tai Chi master anymore, just a regular old man complaining about the world, burdened by daily life, weighed down by worries and frustrations—someone who also had moments of helplessness.

But he still lived happily, with energy and passion.

All of a sudden, a warm current surged up from the depths of Su Jie's heart. He felt as if life had become brighter. Everyone and everything around him seemed kind and pleasant to the eye.

It was as though he had become a pure, innocent child, seeing only the good in the world. But he was not like a child—he could still clearly distinguish right from wrong, good from evil.

At every moment, he was joyful, filled with emotion for the world. A faint warmth rippled in his heart.

However, that feeling didn't last more than a few breaths before it began to fade, and Su Jie returned to normal.

“Hm?”

Master Ma seemed to sense something. He looked at Su Jie in surprise. “Kid, did you just have a breakthrough? No way. I felt a strong aura of affinity coming from you.”

He studied him more closely, then shook his head. “What a shame. You didn’t hold onto it. If you had, I’d have witnessed a miracle. That would’ve been of great benefit to my own cultivation too.”

“That feeling just now was really wonderful.” Su Jie shook his head, trying to recall that joy and emotion. He wanted to grasp it again, but unfortunately, it had slipped away—gone just like that, never to return.

Deep down, he felt empty, like a child who had lost his favorite toy and was so sad he could cry.

“You’ve already experienced it. It slipped away, yes, but you can find it again,” Master Ma said with a smile. “Next time it shows up, hold on to it—keep it. Then let us have a look.”

“Thank you all,” Su Jie said as he stood and gave a deep bow.

“Kid, make time to hang out more often,” Old Chen said, walking over to pat Su Jie’s shoulder. “Old Ma and I are your elder brothers now.”

“That’s right,” Master Ma agreed with a nod.

Zhang Manman wore a look of utter surprise on her face, but it was also tinged with joy. She knew that both Old Chen and Old Ma were extremely well connected, and it was rare for them to acknowledge someone—especially a young person.

“I wouldn’t dare,” Su Jie said, shaking his head repeatedly. “From now on, I’ll just have to keep learning from the two of you.”

As they spoke, the sound of a car came from outside.

More guests were arriving.

“Old Ghost Li is here,” said Master Ma.

“Xiao Mo, go greet him.”

“Yes, Teacher.” Xiao Mo quickly went down and opened the door to the courtyard. A few minutes later, another middle-aged man came in, accompanied by a young man.

“Hm?” Su Jie recognized the young man—it was one of the rich brats who hung around with Lu Shu and the others.

He remembered this guy from that day. The young man had kept his head down, playing with his phone, but was actually sneaking glances and observing everything. He was clearly very calculating.

Chapter 73: The Fire Marsh Transforms; Daily Renewal, Constant Change

“Greetings, Master Ma—oh? Master Chen, you're here too.”

The middle-aged man surnamed Li greeted Master Ma the moment he appeared, then politely acknowledged Old Chen. However, his demeanor made it clear he wasn't particularly close to either of them.

Su Jie had occasionally seen this man, Li Rihui, in news reports, though not frequently. He was one of those behind-the-scenes powerhouses. Some media outlets even referred to him as “Master Nine.”

He was clearly a man of considerable influence.

In several reports, he had been shown standing shoulder to shoulder with Feng Shoucheng, the true helm of the Haoyu Group.

In the business world, he was considered a godfather-like figure.

“Have a seat, Old Li,” Master Ma gestured without rising. “How have things been going for you lately? Any improvement in your health?”

“Thank you, Master Ma.” Li Rihui sat down but didn’t let his son do the same. His son stood respectfully beside him, fully aware that there was no seat for him here.

Even though his son was a widely recognized “young master” in the outside world, rules were rules in this place.

Su Jie remembered him clearly—he was effeminate in appearance, almost like a woman, and gave off an impression of deep, inscrutable scheming.

This “young master” was named Li Zhi.

Since their last encounter, Su Jie had looked up information on the four young masters and their companies. Of course, all he could find were the basic public details online.

Li Zhi had also noticed Su Jie and Zhang Manman. A trace of surprise crossed his handsome face, which he quickly suppressed.

He knew very well that anyone allowed into Master Ma's courtyard was someone of considerable status. And to be a guest of honor here—well, that meant you were either a business titan or a political heavyweight.

So why was Su Jie, of all people, sitting as a guest of honor?

Just a few days ago, when they'd met, the four of them hadn't even bothered to look at Su Jie properly. He was nothing but a disposable pawn to them.

And now, somehow, Su Jie was sitting here while he had to stand?

"Since Master Ma adjusted my feng shui layout and treated my body last time, everything has been going smoothly. The petty people who opposed me have all fallen one by one. I've also been practicing the health-preserving Qigong techniques you taught me and have started to feel the Qi sensations. That's why I've come to consult with you again. My son is also quite interested and hopes to learn as well. I wonder if he's worthy of your time?" Li Rihui said while glancing at Su Jie and Zhang Manman.

“They’re both outstanding young friends—one is the daughter of an old friend, and the other is a bright youth I recently met. You should get to know them,” Master Ma personally introduced. “She’s Zhang Hongqing’s daughter. I assume you’re familiar with that name, Old Li?”

“I’ve heard a lot about him,” Li Rihui’s body gave a slight jolt when he heard the name. He quickly stood up, pulled out business cards from his pocket, and handed them to both Zhang Manman and Su Jie. Then he turned to Zhang Manman and said, “I do a lot of business in Europe and America. I expect I’ll need to rely on your father quite a bit in the future.”

“You’re too kind, Uncle Li,” Zhang Manman stood up as well. “I’m planning to develop my business in S City. I’ll definitely need your help with my startup.”

“Oh? You’re starting a business?” A spark lit up in Li Rihui’s eyes. “Then I may really be of use. This is my son, Li Zhi. He’s not particularly accomplished, but he’s managed to stir up a bit of success. Young folks should stick together.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” he said as he handed his card to Su Jie. Though he kept his words brief, his attitude was far more respectful than those other so-called young masters. There wasn’t even a hint of arrogance—he came off as completely grounded.

‘A seasoned player is a seasoned player,’ Su Jie silently compared this ‘godfather’ to those other young masters. The difference in character was clear.

Li Rihui was curious himself. He had noticed that when Master Ma introduced Su Jie, he'd used the term "young friend."

Friend? That implied equality.

What had this barely-grown boy done to be treated as an equal by Master Ma?

He wasn't about to act careless.

"Xiao Mo, take Manman and Xiao Li to talk business. I need to treat Old Li," Master Ma said. At that, Xiao Mo stepped forward and nodded to Zhang Manman and Li Zhi.

Li Zhi understood right away—something important was about to happen, and it wasn't appropriate for him to stay and watch. But the question burning in his heart only grew: why was Su Jie allowed to stay?

Li Rihui was a bit stunned as well. He could understand Old Chen remaining—he was a Taiji master, highly skilled in health Qigong, traditional medicine, and more. He had spent his life teaching, with countless disciples both at home and abroad.

With him and Master Ma treating his condition together, Li Rihui felt more at ease.

This was equivalent to having two top-tier experts consulting on his health—of course he wouldn't refuse.

But what was Su Jie doing here as well?

'Could it be that Master Ma is training a disciple? I know for a fact that his last disciple is that young Mo kid. He treats him like a son—raised him as an orphan, passed on everything to him: feng shui, divination, fate analysis, medicine, martial arts, and spiritual cultivation. And publicly, he's said he no longer takes on students—he only teaches.'

This time, Li Rihui had brought along his son, Li Zhi, with the hope that Master Ma would make an exception. If he could take Li Zhi in as a disciple, not only would he learn valuable skills, but he could also benefit from the master's network.

“Old Li, I know what you're thinking,” said Master Ma. As a psychology expert, he could see right through Li Rihui's intentions. He chuckled. “This young man's abilities are no weaker than mine. Given time, he will certainly surpass me.”

“Master Ma, you're giving me too much credit,” Su Jie replied, breaking into a cold sweat. Whether in martial arts or academics, he never considered himself

exceptional. From beginning to end, he saw himself as a student, doing everything he could to absorb all kinds of knowledge.

Besides, it had only been four months since he started learning martial arts. Just this meeting with Master Ma and hearing his explanation of the three levels of the “Great Corpse State” had already benefited him immensely.

“Alright, let’s begin,” Master Ma said, stepping in front of Li Rihui. He instructed him to take off his clothes and put on a loose robe. Then he began tapping various points on Li Rihui’s body, much like the acupoint-pressing scenes seen in TV dramas.

But Su Jie could tell—each point carried subtle force, targeting key acupuncture points to relax the muscles and tendons. The technique was completely different from Uncle Mang’s.

Uncle Mang’s methods were fierce and explosive—far beyond what most people could handle. Even professional, state-level fighters didn’t dare try it. Only someone like Su Jie, a true oddball, had endured it and pushed his hard-body martial arts to an advanced level.

Master Ma’s massage techniques, on the other hand, were gentle like a spring breeze—subtly improving the body. It was clear from Li Rihui’s expression that both his body and mind were completely relaxed.

“You’ve had too much on your mind lately, which has caused disruptions in your blood flow. How many times have I told you? When the mind is burdened, doubts arise. When doubts fester, the spirit is wounded. When the spirit is damaged, your essence dries up, and your life is shortened. Even a wise man like Zhuge Wolong couldn’t escape such a fate,” Master Ma said. “I can open your meridians and provide psychological counseling, but that’s just treating the symptoms, not the root cause. Ultimately, it’s up to you to let go.”

“In the world of business, we’re often not in control. Wise men die young,” Li Rihui sighed. “I wouldn’t call myself wise, but I do have too much to consider. Every step is calculated. Business is war—make one mistake, and you’re crushed. Letting go isn’t that simple. All I want is for my son to take over, shoulder some of the burden, and let me live out the rest of my life in peace.”

“You’ve probably been struggling to make a big decision lately, haven’t you?” Master Ma asked. “One that could shift your entire company’s direction—you’re weighing it in your mind.”

“I ask for your guidance, Master,” said Li Rihui. Though he had a reputation in the business world as a cunning strategist, he knew he couldn’t hide anything from Master Ma.

That was why he respected him so much.

“Last time, I helped adjust the feng shui of your home. We used red tiles at the bottom of the central koi pond, and added aquatic plants, deadwood, and mud, didn’t we?” Master Ma asked.

“Yes, yes, that’s right...” Li Rihui nodded quickly.

“Red tiles at the bottom represent fire, while the aquatic plants, deadwood, and mud represent a marsh. Fire below and marsh above—this forms the Ge hexagram in the Book of Changes,” Master Ma explained. “Before, your pond water was too clear. But water that’s too clear has no fish—lacking vitality. It may have seemed refreshing at first glance, but over time, it became dull and affected your emotional judgment. After adding those elements, it teemed with life. Being surrounded by that life energy for a long time lifted your mood. Add to that the psychological cues I gave you—you developed a sense of direction and support deep inside, so your decision-making became sharp.

“I don’t use mystical superstitions to deceive you. With your intellect, superstition is useless. Only truth can convince you.”

“My house and office feel much better after your feng shui adjustments—even the air feels cleaner,” Li Rihui nodded in growing agreement.

“That’s just basic architectural technique—craftsmanship of Lu Ban,” said Master Ma. “But what you must understand is what the Ge hexagram implies: when a nobleman undergoes a transformation, it’s like a leopard changing its spots; when a petty man changes, he merely alters his face. A country that doesn’t reform rots, a company that doesn’t reform declines, and a person that doesn’t change completely will fall into ruin. *If one can renew oneself for a day, let one do so every day, and keep doing so daily.* That’s the principle of a true scholar. You’re a Confucian businessman—how could you not understand that?”

“If one can renew oneself for a day, let one do so every day, and keep doing so daily...” Li Rihui murmured. “Fire below, marsh above—Ge. The nobleman changes like a leopard, the petty man merely changes his face...”

“Honestly, Old Li, what’s so hard about this decision? It’s just a company. Think about the bold reforms our nation has made for the sake of the people’s future,” Old Chen interjected. “If you were in that position, I bet your legs would be shaking.”

“Destiny demands change—there’s no other way,” Li Rihui said, suddenly standing up. “Master Ma, Master Chen, I’ve learned much today.”

“Sit down, sit down. I’m not done with your treatment yet. First, take a look at this crystal ball,” said Master Ma, pulling one out.

Chapter 74: The Mountain Eroded by Wind Breeds Venomous Insects

In the downstairs room, Zhang Manman was chatting with Li Zhi.

"Young Master Zhi, I’ve been thinking about starting a business. What do you think would be a good venture? I heard you, Lu Shu, and a few others started a

company, secured significant investments, and even took a stake in an autonomous driving enterprise," Zhang Manman observed the androgynous-looking rich second-generation heir.

"Just small-scale experiments," Li Zhi replied, already aware that this young woman had substantial influence behind her. "Business ventures can be big or small—it depends on your initial capital. How much are you planning to invest?"

"Not too much," Zhang Manman smiled.

"How about we exchange contacts and discuss the details later?" Li Zhi suddenly asked, "Do you know Su Jie? I noticed Master Ma holds him in extremely high regard. Does he have some exceptional talent?"

"Of course I know him," Zhang Manman nodded. "We're classmates. As for his talents, Master Ma must have his reasons for valuing him so much. In fact, I've invited him to be my business partner. We'll have plenty of chances to meet in the future."

The two engaged in casual conversation, neither revealing their true intentions, but to an outsider, they appeared to be getting along splendidly.

About an hour later, Li Rihui's voice came from upstairs: "Master Ma, I truly appreciate your help. This is just a small token of my gratitude—please do accept it."

Li Zhi stood up, realizing his father's treatment session had concluded.

After shaking hands with Zhang Manman, he saw Li Rihui descend the stairs and shoot him a meaningful glance.

"Niece, when is your father returning to the country? I'd love to host him properly," Li Rihui spoke to Zhang Manman with utmost courtesy, exchanging pleasantries before finally leaving the courtyard and driving off.

Inside the car, Li Zhi studied his father's complexion. "Dad, you look much better. Is Master Ma really that miraculous? You seem ten years younger."

"He's the real deal—no charlatan. He's the psychological trainer for national combat champion Liu Long," Li Rihui said abruptly. "Once we get back, immediately sell off all our real estate and hotel projects, along with the factories, mines, and other assets. Liquidate everything for cash."

"Dad! What's going on?" Li Zhi was stunned. "Did Master Ma say something to make you sell everything? What are we supposed to do after that? Other industries aren't doing well either. If we pour in a huge amount of cash now, we'll just be easy prey. It's fine to observe these so-called masters, but they don't understand business. You can't take their words too seriously!"

"I have my reasons," Li Rihui said. "You're still young and don't grasp the deeper principles. Old Li from HK consults a master before every major decision. That's how he's remained steady through every storm. Small fortunes come from hard work, but great wealth depends on fate and luck. Read more history—you'll find

plenty of examples. Don't spend too much time with Lu Shu and his crowd, thinking you're invincible. You'll regret it later."

"Understood," Li Zhi said. "I'll start preparing as soon as we get back. Oh, and about Su Jie—there's something I should mention."

He then recounted the entire incident to Li Rihui.

"So, Su Jie has no significant background?" Li Rihui fell into thought. "In that case, Master Ma must genuinely value his abilities. Even Zhang Hongqing's daughter wants him as a partner. That young man shouldn't be underestimated."

"Who's Zhang Hongqing?" Li Zhi asked.

"The true godfather of overseas syndicates," Li Rihui explained. "A formidable figure, though he's getting old now and plans to retire. He gave his daughter some seed money to explore opportunities in China. Master Ma owes him a favor, as does Fu Tongshan—Zhang Hongqing saved his life once. His connections here run deep."

"The domestic market is very different from overseas. I doubt a young girl like her will find it easy to navigate," Li Zhi said dismissively. "Honestly, most profitable internet ventures are already monopolized by Haoyu. Feng Shoucheng's vision is razor-sharp. I heard he also has a master advising him. Do you know who it is, Dad? How does he compare to Master Ma?"

"I've only heard rumors," Li Rihui said. "Everyone's been trying to uncover the identity of Feng Shoucheng's advisor. Master Ma isn't really involved in business—he's more academic. But Feng's advisor is different. Every piece of guidance has allowed Haoyu Group to time the market perfectly, staying one step ahead. Master Ma probably knows who it is, but he won't say. I've tried hinting, but he sees right through me. You really shouldn't underestimate these masters. I suspect some of them can read minds."

"Mind-reading? I don't buy it," Li Zhi shook his head. "It's just psychological trickery."

"Exactly—it's advanced psychology. A wise man can discern people's thoughts, and I believe that. Once you've lived long enough, you realize nothing in this world is truly new," Li Rihui said. "I originally wanted you to learn qigong and psychology from Master Ma. In business, the most important skill is judging character. Recognizing talent is more valuable than anything else. Master Ma's physiognomy can truly predict fortunes and destinies. It's ancient wisdom—you'll understand when you're older. Also, try to get closer to Su Jie and Zhang Manman. Master Ma's judgment is never wrong, especially regarding Su Jie. From what you've said, his sister Su Muchen is a key figure. If possible, recruit her team. As for Lu Shu, don't worry about him. Your little alliance might counterbalance Haoyu, but be careful—they might sell you out. Feng Shoucheng's sons are no saints either."

"I get it, Dad," Li Zhi said after a pause. "Honestly, as long as you stay healthy, you'll keep everything under control."

"That's the key—health is everything," Li Rihui said. "You need to start paying attention now. Feng's sons are all martial arts experts."

"I'll start training harder as soon as I get back," Li Zhi promised.

Upstairs in the farmhouse.

"Su Jie, why don't you stay here for a few days?" Master Ma invited after finishing Li Rihui's treatment. "Old Chen and I are researching how to integrate Taijiquan's techniques and principles into psychotherapy. Since you're skilled in martial arts, why not help us?"

"Sure!" Su Jie agreed immediately. Though he had studies to attend to, learning from Master Ma was an opportunity he couldn't pass up. "But I'm no expert—I've only trained for four months. There's still so much to learn. Oh, if you're conducting research, I can introduce you to Uncle Mang. He's also interested in this field."

"That blind man from Minglun Martial Arts Academy?" Master Ma recognized him instantly. "He and I don't see eye to eye. Besides, Haoyu has invested in Minglun now, so his research belongs to Liu Guanglie and Feng Shoucheng. I'm not particularly fond of either, though Liu is tolerable. Feng, on the other hand, is a wicked man with the bearing of a calamitous dragon—stirring storms and blotting out the sky. He has ten more years of great fortune, but after that, his end won't be peaceful. His three sons are equally vicious, embodying greed, gluttony, and

vengeance. He's trying to alter his fate, but without virtue, retribution is inevitable. If the universe seems indifferent, justice will still find its way."

"Old Ma, your true expertise lies in your family's secret art—physiognomy. Your predictions are godlike!" Old Chen praised. "Why not analyze Su Jie's fate? Give him a free reading."

"Appearance reflects the heart, and temperament shifts with time," Master Ma said. "Physiognomy can only assess the present, not the future. Even the worst fate can be changed through effort. All forms of divination boil down to two principles from the Book of Changes: 'Heaven moves with vigor; the nobleman strives unceasingly. Earth is vast and receptive; the nobleman embraces virtue.' Adhere to these, and no adversity can break you. Even in the deepest hell, enlightenment is possible. When I first saw Su Jie in the park, he was indeed plagued by misfortune, destined for calamity. But his inner spirit was dignified, suggesting he could overcome it. Now, he seems to be breaking free, though caution is still necessary. He must remain vigilant, think deeply, and constantly improve—accumulating resources and alliances."

"Accumulating resources and alliances..." Su Jie found the words striking.

"After all this, give us a summary. I want to hear your final assessment. I know you're harsh in your judgments. According to physiognomy, how much 'weight' does Su Jie's fate carry?" Old Chen asked.

In the art of fate-reading, a person's destiny is measured in "jin, liang, and qian" (a traditional Chinese weight system)—the greater the figure, the more significant their life. The lesser, the more insignificant.

"Originally, his fate was average—studious and hardworking, destined for a stable, peaceful life," Master Ma slipped into his "mystic" tone. "But familial ties dragged him into misfortune. This year, he should've faced severe injury. Yet somehow, a noble intervened. Now, his resolve is firm, his mind calm, his actions swift yet humble—a sign of rising fortune. But dragons ascend amidst storms. You've cultivated the beginnings of a mountain's virtue, yet mountains fear erosion. The Book of Changes speaks of wind beneath the mountain—the hexagram Gu, symbolizing venomous insects and ill omens. Your future calamities will come like the wind. But there's another hexagram—mountain beneath wind, Jian, representing steady growth. If you remain grounded, the wind won't erode you. Instead, it will bring rain and nourishment. It all depends on how solid your foundation is."

Chapter 75: Extreme Softness Begets Strength, Forging Unyielding Power

"I understand." Su Jie grasped it immediately and asked no further questions.

"His destiny now carries immense weight, and he has already developed the bearing of a rooster," Master Ma remarked to Old Chen. "In ancient times, the rooster symbolized the sun in the heavens—like the mythical Star Official Angri, whose true form was a great rooster. So, Su Jie, remember this: act with the blazing righteousness of the sun, and no evil can touch you."

Su Jie nodded again.

"Truth be told, physiognomy, feng shui—these are just superficial arts. At their core, they serve to cultivate virtue in people. If one's virtue cannot match their station, calamity will surely follow," Master Ma said. "But enough about destiny—no need for cryptic words between those who understand. Old Chen, demonstrate your Tai Chi set for me again."

Old Chen stood up and began performing the Tai Chi forms, one move after another.

Su Jie watched intently. Old Chen's Tai Chi was graceful and expansive—movements like "Grasp the Sparrow's Tail," "Embrace the Tiger and Return to the Mountain," and "Green Dragon Emerges from the Water" were vividly alive. Whether they were practical for combat was another matter, but from an aesthetic standpoint, it was pure artistry.

When Old Chen reached "White Crane Spreads Its Wings," the imagery was so vivid it was as if a crane stood atop a pine tree on a cliff's edge, poised to take flight. The ambition to soar into the heavens was palpable.

Just this single movement, if mastered with such essence, could undoubtedly prolong one's life.

Pines and cranes symbolize longevity.

"Stop."

Master Ma picked up a crystal ball and mirrored the "White Crane Spreads Its Wings" posture.

The crystal ball in his hand seemed to float, carried aloft by the motion.

"This imagery—the ambition to rise—is excellent. Blended with the crystal ball, it can invigorate the spirit," Master Ma mused as he adjusted his stance.

"Actually, 'White Crane Spreads Its Wings' can also be performed with a more relaxed variation," Old Chen said. "What I demonstrated earlier embodied the aspiration to pierce the heavens. Now, I'll perform it with a sense of serene elegance and natural harmony.

'Train the body to move like a crane,

Under a thousand pines, two scrolls of scripture lie.

I came seeking the Dao—no need for words,

Clouds in the sky, water in the vase.'"

He performed the movement again, this time with subtle adjustments.

Immediately, the atmosphere shifted—no longer the fervor of flight, but the tranquility of drifting clouds and flowing water. It was untethered, free, like a recluse in the mountains or an immortal on Penglai Isle, exuding the lofty grace of the Wei-Jin era.

‘This is martial arts as art. To reduce it to mere combat would be vulgar,’ Su Jie thought in awe. *‘When practiced at this level, it truly belongs among the refined arts.’*

For high society, boxing, sanda, Muay Thai, and MMA were often seen as crude—shirtless men brawling until bloodied hardly made for dignified entertainment.

The three of them continued their research in the farmhouse’s upper room.

Su Jie remained in the role of an apprentice, yet his insights were often so perceptive that Master Ma and Old Chen found them refreshing.

Su Jie had taken a month’s leave from school to immerse himself in this study.

He sought Old Chen's guidance on the essence of Tai Chi and Master Ma's wisdom on psychology, synthesizing it all into his own practice.

Each day, he adhered to his strict routine—rising at 3 a.m., sleeping at 9 p.m., training relentlessly. Beyond that, he practiced with the crystal ball, applying the techniques learned from Master Ma, rolling it across his body using the interplay of muscles, tendons, and bones.

His foundation was already solid, and his flexibility and agility had reached an extraordinary level. The crystal ball seemed to cling to him as if magnetized, darting across his skin like a playful rabbit.

Had he performed this on the streets, crowds would have gathered in awe, tossing coins his way.

With this skill alone, even if he went bankrupt, he'd never starve.

In ancient times, street performers would press a bowl against their stomachs and, through focused exertion, make it glide across their bodies.

But while the bowl relied on air pressure, the crystal ball was far more challenging—its movement depended entirely on the body's subtle control.

As Su Jie delved deeper into systematic study and practice, his mind cleared of distractions. Gradually, while working with the crystal ball, he entered a state where his entire body felt as soft as water.

He imagined himself as liquid, his skin rippling like waves, effortlessly buoying the crystal ball in a seamless, weightless dance. It was euphoric.

One morning, as he trained in the courtyard with the crystal ball as usual, he realized something profound.

The ball rolled across his skin, and suddenly, he sensed an extreme softness beneath—so supple that it concealed an immense, coiled force.

A phrase flashed in his mind:

"Extreme softness begets strength!"

Hummm!

His muscles flexed, launching the crystal ball into the air.

Then, with a swift Hoe Strike, he slashed and grabbed—crack!—the crystal ball shattered in his palm, yet his hand remained completely unharmed.

"Your Iron Body training has reached mastery," Master Ma walked over, his face filled with astonishment. "Your resistance to strikes is now astonishing. If you competed in a world-class fighting tournament, you'd have a huge advantage. Of course, if you don't use the full tearing and gouging power of the Hoe Strike technique, your chances of ranking would drop significantly."

The true lethality of the Hoe Strike technique lay in its ruthless execution—pouncing, grabbing, gouging, and tearing, ripping out an opponent's eyes or even their entire face.

If it were just a simple digging motion, it might work against weaker opponents, but against a true master, it would fall short.

The core of this technique was closing the distance and shredding the enemy apart. That was why Iron Body training was so crucial—it allowed one to endure hits and execute the move flawlessly.

Now that Su Jie's Iron Body training had reached perfection, he was like a human-shaped beast, exuding an aura of terror with every move.

"Modern MMA mostly relies on clinching and ground techniques to decide the winner," Su Jie pondered. "It's a shame many of the most lethal techniques are

banned. If they were allowed, the tearing power of Hoe Strike would shine. But that's impossible."

"It's been a month, and you've made tremendous progress," Old Chen remarked. "I've never seen anyone learn as fast as you."

"We've pretty much perfected the crystal ball techniques this month," Master Ma patted Su Jie's shoulder. "Kid, you've mastered a skill that'll feed you anywhere."

Mastering crystal ball manipulation meant he could even perform street shows.

Zhang Manman had come and gone during the month, busy with her own affairs, while Su Jie focused entirely on training.

"I need to return to school now. I took a month off, and if I don't rank first in the monthly exam, my homeroom teacher and the school administration will be on my case." Su Jie had finally filled in the gaps in his knowledge—things he hadn't learned from Odell.

Under Master Ma's guidance—a psychology expert—he had gained deep insights into the "Great Corpse State" and various meditation practices, solidifying his foundation.

The physical Iron Body training was almost secondary.

"Thank you both for your guidance. If you ever need anything, just call, and I'll be there." Su Jie felt immense gratitude toward Master Ma and Old Chen.

"Don't mention it. Come visit whenever you have time," Master Ma waved him off.

The two watched as Su Jie left the courtyard, then exchanged a glance.

"Old Ma, have you figured out this kid's background?" Old Chen couldn't help but ask.

"It's the Typhon Training Camp's style. If I'm not mistaken, his foundation was laid by the 'God Maker' Odell—it's unique," Master Ma said. "After observing him closely these past days, I've recognized many of Typhon's distinctive training methods. I've actually learned a lot from him."

"Do you think he'll actually break through to that 'Living Dead' mental state?" Old Chen asked. "Even you haven't reached that realm. I doubt he'll achieve it before thirty."

"Not necessarily," Master Ma shook his head. "I've studied his mindset, morals, and character—he's pure, with a solid core. Look, after a month here, he never

once asked me about feng shui or fortune-telling, only psychology. Most people would try to learn everything. But he knows exactly where he's going."

"In this month, he's absorbed all of my Tai Chi skills," Old Chen sighed. "If only he were my disciple—someone like him could carry my legacy."

"His character is beyond reproach. Even if he's not formally your disciple, he's as good as one," Master Ma said before heading back upstairs.

Su Jie returned to school just in time for the third monthly exam.

His classmates were shocked—taking a month off during the critical final year of high school was practically heresy. Yet the teachers had allowed it. They could only sigh in envy: Top students really can do whatever they want.

What was worse (for them) was that Su Jie aced the exam, once again crushing Qian Zheng's hopes for first place.

Qian Zheng was furious but helpless. He had already heard about Su Jie leaving Starshine Combat Fitness Club a month ago—and defeating Zhou Chun in combat.

In fighting, he knew he stood no chance against Su Jie. Now, even in academics, he was utterly defeated.

Seeing that Su Jie's grades hadn't slipped, homeroom teacher Chen Juan didn't press him about his absence. She had already discussed it with his parents, who seemed perfectly fine with letting him do as he pleased.

Meanwhile, Hua Xing had set up a martial arts gym near Su Jie's home. Ironically, it was right across from the Hunyuan Tai Chi Martial Arts Hall. Within a month, the place was fully renovated, and Hua Xing had attracted many students—most of them there because of Su Jie.

Everything was moving in a positive direction.

His older sister, Su Muchen, was still buried in research at Haoyu Group, seemingly at a critical stage—she was never around these days.

Yet, despite all this, Su Jie couldn't shake a lingering sense of unease.

Chapter 76: Heaven and Earth in Unison Fate Turns, Heroes Bound

Despite his unease, Su Jie never stopped studying.

Ever since he had mastered external hard-style martial arts, the intensity of his training had doubled, yet he no longer felt tired.

He still hadn't moved on to practicing other techniques—just relentlessly repeated the move known as the "Hoe Strike." He had trained it to the point where its extension and contraction were dragon-like, its rise and fall stirred wind and clouds. It howled like a tiger descending a mountain, cried like a crane soaring across the skies, slithered like a snake through the grass, squatted like a bear uprooting trees, leapt like a monkey scaling cliffs, and called like a rooster announcing dawn across the world.

He had pushed this single move's form to the peak of perfection.

Now, his focus had shifted to cultivating his intent and mind.

Aside from physical training each day, he placed greater emphasis on his cultural and intellectual development.

At school, during his spare time, Su Jie practiced calligraphy in the calligraphy and painting room.

He attended one of the top high schools in the nation—well-staffed and well-equipped. The school boasted not only gyms, computer labs, music rooms, and rooms for calligraphy, painting, and chess (both Go and Chinese chess), but even a swimming pool.

At the calligraphy table, Su Jie wielded his brush like a dragon in flight, producing a neat and orderly script.

“The Way has no root and no stem, no leaves and no bloom, yet all things are born of it, and all things are completed through it.”

This line came from Guanzi: Chapter on Inner Work.

This passage explored cultivation of the mind, health, and breath training.

After writing this, he added two large characters: "Rootless."

Then, he copied down a verse:

"A rootless tree, its blossoms faint—

Who'd truly quit this lust for fame?

Life adrift, a boat on pain—

Tossed by waves, no freedom gained.

No shore, no port, no rope to bind,

Swimming in peril, beasts entwined.

Should you turn back—look ahead!

Lest storm and tide sink what you tread." (G: I enjoyed that)

The author of this poem was Zhang Sanfeng!

Last time, Uncle Mang had urged him to read more of the writings of sages like Wang Chongyang and Zhang Sanfeng, to find guidance in mental cultivation. Su Jie had been gathering materials ever since, carefully reading and digesting them. However, his foundation was still shallow, and he hadn't made much progress.

But after staying for a month at Master Ma's rural estate and consulting him on many matters, his knowledge had begun to deepen. Now, he was starting to grasp these ancient cultivation texts on a much more meaningful level.

Zhang Sanfeng, the legendary Daoist, had been mythologized—rumored to be the founder of Taijiquan. He's been portrayed in countless TV dramas, movies, novels, and even recorded in The History of the Ming Dynasty. Whether those tales are true or not didn't concern Su Jie. What mattered was extracting the essence of the ancients' thinking.

A thousand years of cultural heritage—regardless of how these people were buried by the dust of history, their ideas could transcend time and engage in dialogue with modern minds.

Each time he read the works of these sages, Su Jie felt that although ancient people lacked advanced technology, some true sages had a level of inner cultivation that modern people could hardly reach. Precisely because they lived in a world of material scarcity—devoid of today's flashy distractions—they were able to focus inward and uncover deeper truths for self-cultivation.

Of course, Su Jie didn't believe that modern science and technology were bad or that the ancients were always right. But when it came to personal development and inner cultivation, the ancients definitely had the edge—an edge worth learning from.

When it came to physical training, modern technology offered undeniable advantages.

Drawing from both traditions was the path chosen by many modern masters.

People like the “God Maker” Odell, Uncle Mang, and Master Ma.

All of them were highly educated—not those so-called “masters” of the back-alley, fringe variety.

Old Chen, on the other hand, didn’t have much formal education. His Taijiquan had been passed down through generations. Yet he only taught the physical techniques—never embellishing or exaggerating them. That, in itself, spoke volumes about his character.

As Su Jie continued writing the Rootless Verse with his brush, he felt a radiant clarity settle into his spirit. All stray thoughts and mental clutter seemed to flow out through the tip of his brush.

Every stroke, every hook, every horizontal or vertical line was a form of mental refinement, a forging of spirit—and also a kind of martial training.

Suddenly, Su Jie realized how profoundly similar calligraphy was to martial arts. The strokes of the brush followed the flow of intention throughout the body, then spilled forth from the tip with graceful power. This not only trained his essence, energy, and spirit—it was a full-body workout.

The brush was a weapon. The brushstrokes, combat techniques.

With deep enough mastery, every line and curve carried its own spirit.

Master Ma had judged that his mental state had already reached the peak of the second level of the Great Corpse State—"Seems dead but not truly dead"—a state akin to neither thought nor no-thought. When still, Su Jie couldn't even tell whether he had thoughts or not.

Very few people in the world are able to cultivate their practice to this level.

But Su Jie knew that without a breakthrough, his martial arts would stagnate here.

To reach the third level of mental state—"Living Dead", which means "the heart is dead, but the spirit lives"—was essential for a tremendous leap in his skills.

Everything he was doing now, every move and action, was in preparation for this goal—like squatting deeply before a jump.

He had found his core objective, and he could occasionally sense the wonder of that mental state.

Once he crossed that threshold, untold treasures and wealth would be within reach.

And this treasure was more important than mountains of gold and silver in the real world—because it represented spiritual fulfillment.

He felt that if he reached this state, even if he had nothing, was plagued by illness, old and feeble, and living at the very bottom of society—he would still be the richest person in the world.

"Life and death mean nothing to me, fame and fortune are but passing clouds."

Before he realized it, Su Jie had written these two lines—they were born of his feelings in that moment.

Only after finishing did he notice what he had written. He crumpled the paper and threw it into the bin, then left the study.

Every day of training brought fresh insight.

Compared to his current state, his previous life felt like that of a walking corpse—only now did he truly feel “alive.”

Meanwhile, in S City.

The headquarters of the Haoyu Group towered sky-high, long since one of the city’s landmark buildings.

The structure was built entirely from modern, eco-friendly, high-tech materials. From the outside, it was a sweeping curve of glass—distorted, flamboyant—a futuristic, sci-fi aesthetic that marked it as a tech company.

At the top of the building was a private residence reserved for the chairman. Without his permission, no one could enter. It was the absolute command center and a closely guarded secret of the Haoyu Group.

Even Feng Yuxuan couldn’t get in without clearance.

Because this was the office of Haoyu Group's supreme leader—Feng Shoucheng.

Outside, the building screamed sci-fi. But inside the office, it was classic Chinese style—simple, understated. On the ceiling was a Taiji yin-yang symbol.

Beneath the Taiji symbol stood a massive three-dimensional globe used as a feng shui orb. Oceans, continents, countries—all were raised in relief and clearly visible.

The globe stood taller than a person, dominating the center of the office and drawing all attention.

At this moment, there were two people in the room.

One was none other than Feng Shoucheng, chairman of Haoyu Group. Though already over sixty, he looked like a man in his early forties—exceptionally well-maintained, with not a single gray hair.

The other was an elderly man in his eighties or nineties, wearing traditional Tang-style clothing. In his hand was a bamboo tube filled with divination sticks, which he was shaking rhythmically, producing a constant clatter.

“Draw a stick,” the old man said, holding out the bamboo tube. “No peeking, no choosing. If you do, it’s useless. The moment must align, inspiration must flash—only then can we glimpse the future.”

Without hesitation, Feng Shoucheng drew a stick.

It was engraved with symbols most people wouldn’t understand.

The old man pulled out an aged book, compared the symbols, and found two lines of poetry:

“When fortune smiles, heaven and earth lend their aid;

When luck departs, even heroes are shackled.”

Feng Shoucheng leaned in to see his fortune. Upon reading the lines, his face darkened. He knew their meaning well: when luck is on your side, even ghosts and gods help you, and miraculous opportunities seem to fall from the sky. But once luck fades, even unmatched heroes like Xiang Yu or Zhuge Liang meet tragic ends.

“Indeed. This points to your future—and that of the Haoyu Group,” the old man said. “Your fate is formidable but volatile. You're prone to meteoric rise and sudden fall. You were born with wealth and power in your destiny, but only for ten years. After that, misfortune—perhaps even prison—was to follow. What comes fast also goes fast. But you sensed this on your own, sought help from wise men, and by sheer luck found me. You helped me in a great time of need and promised to support my family for generations. That bound our fates together. So I risked it all to help you—changed your fate, your feng shui, recalculated your destiny. I broke the ten-year catastrophe and gave you twenty years of good fortune. Haoyu Group's success today is already pushing the limit. Going further will be extremely difficult.”

“I know that every ten years brings a challenge. But look at Haoyu now—booming, massive cash flow. I have many capable sons, and even my daughter is starting to shine. With this wealth, this power, this concentration of people's energy, can we not overcome a downturn?” Feng Shoucheng asked.

“No.” The old man shook his head. “When luck leaves, even heroes are helpless. If they can't resist it—what chance do we have?”

“I see no signs of Haoyu declining—on the contrary, we're like oil on a blazing fire. But one must be cautious in prosperity. The more peaceful the times, the more we must walk on thin ice. I understand that,” Feng Shoucheng said.

“That's why I've been fasting these seven days, praying with sincerity, and

now drawing another fortune—**Chapter 77: Remove Strength, and Calamity Follows**

“How could this fortune slip be changed now? What's its hidden meaning?” Feng Shoucheng asked again.

“The Haoyu Group has grown lush and deep-rooted. It's a towering tree, always riding the waves at the forefront. Bringing it down isn't something that can be done easily. But no matter how big the group gets, it's not really yours. If calamity is destined for you, Haoyu will remain Haoyu—it just won't be your Feng family's Haoyu anymore. Since ancient times, the world has always remained the world, and dynasties are still dynasties, but who holds the reins—that's a different story.” The old man replied.

“Seems like my trouble isn't small,” Feng Shoucheng sneered coldly. “There must be some clues to foresee this—natural disaster or man-made catastrophe?”

“Whether it's natural or man-made, I can't say. But within those two lines of verse, there is a crucial character. Follow that key word, and you might find a way to break through. If you can, then smooth sailing awaits you, and you'll enjoy another ten prosperous years,” the old man said again.

“And after those ten years? What then?” Feng Shoucheng asked. “Is there no way to make it permanent?”

“Permanent? That's wishful thinking. All things in the world go through formation, stasis, decline, and emptiness—even immortals face the Five Decays of Heaven. Dynasties change every three hundred years. And you? You think you're an exception? The way of the heavens is full of calamities. It's like rowing against the current—if you don't advance, you fall behind. But ten years from now, it won't be your concern anymore. It'll depend on whether your son can maintain the legacy and carry it forward.” The old man smirked. “Your three sons all have extremely potent destinies. Your eldest, Feng Yuxuan, embodies the sign of the Taotie—greedy and insatiable. Your second, Feng Qianzang, is of the Pixiu—

gathering wealth, never letting it go. Your third, Feng Hengyi, is of the Yazi—ferocious and vengeful. All are ancient fierce beasts, powerful and greedy for treasure. They'll grow your family's fortune and fortune energy, but among such beasts, there's bound to be bloodshed, feuds, and karmic consequences. It's up to you to keep it all in check."

"I understand," Feng Shoucheng said. "Then explain the verse on the fortune slip."

The old man pondered a long while before speaking. "It goes: When fortune rises, heaven and earth lend strength; when luck departs, heroes lose their freedom. Two characters here are key. The first line is 'strength'—with it, you can rise with the tide. Without it, you can only hibernate and wait."

Feng Shoucheng nodded upon hearing this.

"As for the second line—'when luck departs, heroes lose their freedom'—the key is the word depart. Why do heroes lose their freedom? Because the strength that once raised them is now gone," the old man said. "Now, combine the character for depart (去) with strength (力)—what do you get?"

'Calamity!' Feng Shoucheng suddenly exclaimed. "The character for calamity!"

"Exactly. Remove strength, and you have calamity. As long as you eliminate that calamity, the good fortune remains yours," said the old man. "Remember—those two lines revolve around the word calamity. Neutralize it, and all will be well."

“Neutralize this calamity...” Feng Shoucheng fell into thought. “Where is it? Is it a person, an event, or something else? Any further clues?”

“Heaven’s secrets are hard to glimpse. Not even sages can know it all. This divination has already reached its limit. Anything more depends on your own wisdom. Without it—well, then your calamity is unavoidable,” the old man said. “But I’ll help you as best I can. After all, your family’s rise or fall is tied to mine now.”

“That’s good to hear.” Feng Shoucheng thought for a moment, then suddenly said, “They say revealing too much of heaven’s secrets brings retribution. Yet here you are—doing just fine, surrounded by children and grandchildren. Not a care in the world.”

“My children were born overseas, and they’re all living abroad now,” the old man said with a strange expression. “There’s no karma or retribution abroad.”

Feng Shoucheng frowned. “Is that really a thing?”

“One land, one way. One soil, one god,” the old man replied.

At home.

Su Jie was fiddling with the brick-thick tablet his older sister, Su Muchen, had given him, launching the combat simulation module.

The startup screen immediately displayed two figures—himself, and Liu Long, the current national champion and top-ranked fighter in the country.

“Start match.” Su Jie tapped the screen.

The two characters entered the ring and began their bout.

Su Jie launched an attack on Liu Long, using a technique resembling a hoe pick—diving forward repeatedly in a flurry of strikes.

Liu Long dodged continuously, using leg techniques to counter Su Jie’s offensive.

The two tangled for about thirty seconds before Liu Long suddenly turned the tables. He unleashed his signature Liu-style rapid kicks. His legs crisscrossed, the kicks not high but lightning-fast—like galloping hooves—targeting areas below the knees. His upper body, meanwhile, was full of feints to throw his opponent off.

Wham!

Su Jie was struck and hit the ground.

“This simulation doesn’t reflect my full ability,” Su Jie muttered. “I’d say it’s no more than 60% accurate—definitely not 80.”

He uploaded a large amount of his own training videos into the tablet, which also downloaded tons of Liu Long’s footage from the internet. Using this data, it built character modules and simulated fights. The more video he uploaded, the richer the data, and the more realistic the simulation became.

Over the past few days, Su Jie had been studying the AI module in the tablet. He found its function somewhat limited—it mainly helped analyze an opponent’s style and offered training feedback. For example, if you uploaded a video of your own training, the AI would analyze whether your posture was correct, identify errors, and then display an avatar that mimicked you doing the same movements.

But Su Jie’s techniques were always spot-on.

Still, the tablet had its advantages. It allowed him to build a personal fighting module and simulate matches against various martial artists to better understand their fighting styles.

For example, Su Jie had just faced off against Liu Long in a simulation and lost to his signature “Liu-style fast kicks.” If that had been a real match, he wouldn’t have been a match for Liu Long either.

Although Su Jie had defeated Zhou Chun and his external hardening technique was now at a high level, his experience was still shallow. There was a significant gap between him and the top fighters in the country—one that could only be closed with time, even with training from the "God Maker" Odell.

Odell had once spent three years turning an ordinary young man into a world champion in mixed martial arts. That young man was now the fighting king, “Ryan.”

In contrast, Su Jie had only received a month of training from Odell.

“This AI training tool my sister gave me is just okay—maybe it's a hardware issue, or maybe the technology hasn’t broken through yet.” Su Jie set the tablet down, knowing it wasn’t going to be much more help to him.

He wondered just how powerful the AI training systems at the Typhon Training Camp might be.

Either way, the AI module in his hands was far inferior to Odell’s.

And if Odell—renowned as the “God Maker”—were actually worse than this janky AI module, the title would be meaningless.

Clang!

Just as Su Jie was thinking about how he’d handle a real fight with Liu Long, his father, Su Shilin, came home.

“Your homeroom teacher Chen Juan called yesterday. Said you took a month off and still got first place on the monthly exam. Not bad, kid. Last time you went off to the martial arts school, you were gone for two months. This time you disappear for a month without saying a word—what the hell were you doing?” Su Shilin flopped onto the couch, about to light a cigarette, but changed his mind and put it back.

“I was studying psychology with someone called Master Ma. Stayed at his house for a month. Also trained a bit with Master Chen from the Hunyuan Tai Chi Hall near the park,” Su Jie replied. “Dad, how come you still can’t quit smoking? Didn’t you promise Mom you would?”

“Didn’t I ‘not’ light up just now? You brat, are you lecturing your old man?” Su Shilin raised his voice, then suddenly seemed to remember something. “Ma? Ma Nianfeng? That guy’s no joke. Most people can’t even get a glimpse of him, and you stayed at his house for a month?”

“You know Master Ma?” Su Jie was surprised.

“Our company’s boss had a groundbreaking ceremony for a real estate project. We begged and pleaded, and he finally showed up—just walked around the foundation once. I was in charge of security that day,” Su Shilin said. “The setup was insane. But he’s the real deal. In the circles of big-time entrepreneurs, he’s treated like a god. A lot of powerful people follow his every word. Even celebrities can't get close to him.”

“By the way, Dad—do you know Zhang Hongqing?” Su Jie suddenly asked.

“Zhang Hongqing? How do you know that name?” At the mention of it, Su Shilin frowned deeply.

These past few days, Zhang Manman had repeatedly invited Su Jie to join her startup company, but he hadn’t given her an answer yet—he was still thinking it over.

Zhang Hongqing was Zhang Manman's father. It was obvious that both Master Ma and Uncle Mang from Heart-Cleansing Manor showed her great respect because of her father. That alone proved he was no ordinary man. But that wasn’t all—Master Ma had said that this man's cultivation had reached the level of a “Living Dead,” putting him on par with someone like Odell.

Naturally, Su Jie was intrigued.

“You know him, Dad?” Su Jie suspected his father had a complicated past.

“Heard of him, never met him. Supposedly a big shot in some overseas syndicate. I remember hearing his name back when I was working in a Chinese restaurant in Chinatown overseas,” Su Shilin waved it off. “I don’t care who you socialize with, just make sure you know right from wrong. Don’t get yourself into trouble.”

“Dad, how’s your martial arts? Want to spar a bit?” Su Jie suddenly had an idea and smiled.

“You little punk,” Su Shilin snapped. “Grew some wings, huh? Learned a few moves and now you think you’re hot stuff? Want to go toe-to-toe with your old man? I oughta knock some sense into you.”

As he cursed, Su Shilin pulled out the stun baton he always carried as a security guard.

“Whoa, Dad—why are you still using that thing?” Su Jie quickly backed off.

“You think street fights follow rules?” Su Shilin activated the baton, and it crackled with intimidating sparks.

Although Su Jie had been electrocuted plenty of times by Uncle Mang during his training, those were low-voltage currents designed to stimulate cell recovery—precisely controlled by a medical-grade AI system for accuracy and safety.

This stun baton, on the other hand, was purely a tool for subduing criminals.

Su Jie wasn’t actually afraid, but he stood up anyway: “Alright, Dad, you do your thing. I’m heading out for a bit.”

Chapter 78: All Five Organs Present Setting Up Shop in a Snail Shell

"Get lost already."

Father Su muttered curses under his breath. Only after watching Su Jie close the door did he pull out a cigarette, light it, and take a deep, satisfied drag.

Su Jie stepped outside with a smile, slinging his large backpack over his shoulder and heading to the "Grand Ascent Combat Fitness Club" across from the park.

The club had recently opened, and Hua Xing was the sole proprietor. Su Jie held a 30% stake, even though he hadn't invested a single penny.

The space wasn't large—about 400 to 500 square meters—and couldn't compare to "Starshine." Still, initial investment had already exceeded two to three million yuan. Rent was high, and the fitness equipment was top-tier and costly.

Small gyms like this were everywhere—most opened only to shut down shortly after. The market was extremely limited.

People who could afford gym memberships usually had high expectations and preferred upscale facilities.

Even worse, small gyms had earned themselves a terrible reputation—people would sign up, and just a few days later the place would shut down, making refunds impossible.

By all logic, this gym should've been doomed. But once Su Jie stepped inside, he found it surprisingly busy. The crowd was made up entirely of combat sports enthusiasts, not your average fitness-seeking public. The storefront wasn't open to walk-ins, either.

In other words, this was a high-level combat training facility catering to a private circle, with no service to outsiders.

When Hua Xing first pitched this business model, Su Jie immediately understood—it was a niche play. Traditional gyms were a dead end. Better to go the boutique, specialized, high-end route.

And the “high-end” here didn’t mean hardware—it meant software.

First of all, Hua Xing was a big name, a national-level fighter who had coached at "Starshine" for years and had deep connections.

Secondly, Su Jie had defeated Zhou Chun, one of the top ten ranked fighters. Word had already spread within the inner circle. A lot of people had witnessed it, and those who hadn’t were drawn by curiosity. Even skeptics wanted a peek.

In fact, this kind of elite, closed-door model was once hugely popular in Japan’s martial arts scene.

Hua Xing had told Su Jie that the once-trending "Aikido" was, at its inception, a closed-door research society founded by Morihei Ueshiba under the patronage of Imperial Navy Admiral Isamu Takeshita. Only high-ranking elites could join.

That kind of exclusivity created an instant air of prestige.

Because of this, Hua Xing's gym had exploded in popularity within just a few days. Everyone wanted in.

Hua Xing was still vetting people.

"Brother, you're finally here! So many people heard you beat Zhou Chun and have been dying to see you in action. I sent you a bunch of messages—didn't you see any of them?" Hua Xing lit up the moment he saw Su Jie arrive.

"I've been in seclusion training. My phone's been off," Su Jie said as he looked around. Though the place wasn't big, it had a refined, tasteful decor.

"I've set up a daily event—three challenge matches a day. You're the reigning champ. Any student can pay to participate. One-on-one, or even two-on-one, three-on-one—it's all fair game," said Hua Xing. "Come check out the ring."

He led Su Jie to the center of the gym, where a boxing ring stood—complete with a couplet hanging from the sides.

"Martial arts cultivate virtue and body; fists and feet tame tigers and subdue dragons. Banner: Young Grandmaster."

Su Jie read it aloud, feeling a cold sweat trickle down his spine. "'Young Grandmaster'? That's a bit much. Maybe change the banner."

"Haha! Come on, you're young—showing off a little doesn't hurt. I was actually thinking of hyping you up. But if you're not into it, then pick your own," Hua Xing said, quick to yield.

"How about 'Touch the Dao, Then Stop'?" Su Jie thought for a moment.

"Touch the Dao? That sounds too mellow, don't you think?" Hua Xing mused. "Then again, it fits with traditional culture. We're doing martial arts here, but it should be harmonious. Brute aggression never leads anywhere."

"It's not 'dao' as in 'arrive.' It's 'dao' as in 'the Way,'" Su Jie clarified.

"The Way? 'Touch the Dao, Then Stop'—what's that mean?" Hua Xing asked, puzzled.

"'Touch' means to reach for or make contact. The 'Dao' is the ultimate pursuit for us Chinese. The phrase means: unless we touch the supreme Dao, we won't rest."

Su Jie explained fluently.

“Perfect! Then that’s the new banner,” Hua Xing said, slapping the ring post. “Not stopping until the Dao is touched—now that’s poetic.”

Then he leapt up onto the ring, clapped his hands, picked up a megaphone, and projected his voice across the gym: “Ladies and gents! Didn’t you all want to see the man who beat Zhou Chun? Well, here he is—right on this ring!”

Whoosh, whoosh—

Everyone training in the gym instantly crowded around.

“I’m really that famous now?” Su Jie asked.

"Of course. Do you remember that fight between a martial arts coach and a Tai Chi enthusiast that went viral online? Your match with Zhou Chun didn’t hit the internet, but it made you a local legend. With the reputation you’ve got now, running a profitable gym is easy. If I do a little PR and push you into the spotlight, we could make serious money," Hua Xing said excitedly. He’d been in this industry for a long time and had no shortage of insight, business savvy, or connections.

"Let’s just take things one step at a time," Su Jie nodded. "As long as no one grabs any dirt on us, we’ll be fine. After all, you jumped ship from Starshine and took some clients with you. Qian Youguo’s keeping quiet because of your friendship, but

Haoyu won't let it slide so easily. They've got money and power—if they start playing dirty, we could be in serious trouble."

"I know. I've got all the paperwork in order—permits, fire safety, everything. The fights are officially registered, everything's above board. I don't believe Haoyu can just trample the law like that," Hua Xing said with a cold laugh.

"Still, better safe than sorry," Su Jie replied.

"I came here because of your reputation," a burly man walked up. "You're the high school kid who beat Zhou Chun? I wasn't there that day, but I saw the clips in the group chat. Didn't look that impressive to me. How about I see for myself?"

"I knew you wouldn't let it go, Old Liu. You've been grumbling about it for days. Now that you've seen him in person, you can challenge him however you like. My little brother here will take you on," Hua Xing said. "You're the first to step up, so I'll give you a free match." Judging by the way he spoke, Hua Xing and this guy were old friends. He turned to Su Jie and added, "Go easy on him. Old Liu's my bro—he used to be a paramilitary police officer and now runs a building materials business. Total fitness nut."

"Hua Xing, I don't like what I'm hearing," Old Liu grumbled. "Telling him to go easy on me? Don't look down on me like that."

"Haarr!"

With a tiger-like roar, Old Liu climbed into the ring. “I’m ex-armed police, trained in real combat. Let’s fight without gloves. If you can really convince me, I’ll sign up to train every day—no matter the cost.”

"Fine by me." Su Jie smiled and nodded.

The moment he spoke, Old Liu lunged forward like lightning—ducking low for a double-leg takedown, wrapping Su Jie’s legs in an attempt to lift him clean off the ground.

It was fast, sudden, and reckless. It had the flavor of a sneak attack, totally ignoring the rules of the ring—more street brawler than martial artist.

But that’s how paramilitary cops fight—anything goes when facing dangerous criminals.

The onlookers hadn’t expected Old Liu to move so suddenly. Some even cried out in surprise.

Swish!

Su Jie squatted in place and drove his knee upward!

Old Liu had just opened his arms when his face nearly slammed into Su Jie's rising knee. One inch closer and he'd be bleeding all over the mat.

At the last second, Old Liu managed to stop himself—breaking into a cold sweat. He hadn't expected Su Jie to react so quickly.

In fact, his face was less than a centimeter from Su Jie's knee. With just the slightest push, Su Jie could've knocked him flat. But instead, Su Jie pulled back, dropped his foot to the floor, and lunged forward, shoulder slamming into Old Liu's chest like a charging bull.

Old Liu was lifted off the ground and hurled into the ring ropes.

Before he could recover, Su Jie's palm came flashing in, covering Old Liu's eyes with a light smack before he retreated back to his original spot.

The match was over.

Old Liu had opened with a sneak takedown.

Su Jie countered with a squat and knee strike!

Then a bull-like shoulder charge!

And finally, a palm slap—the finishing move.

In truth, the squat-knee combo flowing into a lunge and shoulder slam was just the opening sequence of a technique called the "Hoe Strike." So overall, Su Jie hadn't used anything new—just relied on that classic move.

"Damn, that's freaky," Old Liu muttered, still not willing to admit defeat. "You've got the skills, fine. But let's arm wrestle. See if you're stronger than I am."

"Sure," Su Jie agreed without hesitation.

"Alright!" The crowd roared.

The earlier match had ended too quickly—no one had seen enough to be satisfied. Except for one person, whose eyes were gleaming with interest.

The two men sat down at a table. Old Liu stretched out his arm—his wrist, forearm, and biceps thick as tree trunks. They looked like they could crush a thug with a single flex. Veins bulged like earthworms beneath the skin, muscles ready to burst.

Su Jie reached out and grasped Old Liu's hand.

Old Liu gave a sudden jerk—but nothing happened.

Then Su Jie gently twisted his wrist, and Old Liu felt like his whole body was about to be flipped. His hand was slammed flat on the table.

"Haarr!"

Old Liu's face turned red. "Again! I'll use both hands against your one!" As he spoke, he put both hands into play.

It made no difference.

Su Jie flipped him over again—just as easily, like turning a page in a book. Old Liu’s two hands were pinned just as fast.

“I give up. How the hell are you so strong?” Old Liu gasped. “Fighting is all about technique, sure. But arm wrestling is pure strength. And you’re way stronger than I am.”

“Old Liu, if you’re convinced, sign up for classes,” Hua Xing said with a snap of his fingers. “If we weren’t old friends, I wouldn’t even let you in. This place is about to get so popular the membership cards will be resold at sky-high prices.”

Chapter 79: Struggling to Stay Afloat, A Seed Planted in the Soil

After Old Liu, two more martial arts enthusiasts stepped up to spar with Su Jie.

Predictably, they were easily overwhelmed, toyed with as if caught in the palm of his hand.

Anyone who hasn’t personally experienced Su Jie’s “Hoe Strike” technique might find it unimpressive in video form—less flashy than backflips or tornado kicks. But only those who’ve faced him and been knocked down by it truly understand its power.

No matter how one dodges or counters, they always seem to run straight into an overwhelming palm that crashes into their face.

When that palm covers your face, it's like being Monkey King caught under Buddha's divine hand.

Su Jie used just that one move in every fight—no variations.

Though he had learned the Eighteen Freehand Techniques from Gu Yang—such as “Long-armed Ape Reach,” “Tiger's Roar and Crane's Cal,” and “Mandarin Duck Chain Kick”—he rarely used them. Sometimes, for fun, he'd throw in a hooking kick from the Mandarin Duck style, but even that was blended into his core “Hoe Strike” move.

That move, with its knee kick at the moment of lift, carried the digging and flipping strength of turning soil—hooking and overturning with the tip of the foot.

“I'll wire the 10,000 yuan for this teaching and sparring session to your account,” Hua Xing said quietly during the break after the match.

“10,000 yuan?” Su Jie was shocked. “Old Liu didn't even charge them. And the other two, five grand each? Isn't that a bit much?”

“Not at all.” Hua Xing waved dismissively. “You're still thinking too small. Do you know that after that MMA coach went viral for beating a Tai Chi enthusiast, even

the guy who got beat started charging appearance fees—10,000 yuan per fight. Lots of fighters lined up just to pay for a chance to knock him down. He made a killing off of it.”

“What? 10,000 yuan?” Su Jie shook his head. This world made no sense.

“Zhou Chun also does coaching bouts. Each session is 50,000 to 100,000. Three rounds, ten minutes total,” Hua Xing said. “International star Liu Zihao runs a gym in the U.S.—his autographed photos go for \$100,000. My own coaching rate is 10,000 per hour.”

“There are that many rich people out there?” Su Jie thought about it. His mom, dad, and sister together barely made 50,000 to 60,000 a month. The fitness industry was way deeper than he thought.

“The economy’s booming. Cities like ours are full of rich people,” Hua Xing explained. “As long as you have a bit of a reputation, your value multiplies tenfold. These days, companies making only a million a year dare to claim billion-yuan valuations—and investors actually buy it. Some lose money year after year and are still worth fortunes. That’s the market. And you—what you’ve got is real skill. Your value’s still underestimated. But we’re going for scarcity marketing. Three coaching matches per day. Must book in advance. I’ll promote you in the right circles—S City is crawling with wealthy white-collar types. The fitness and combat scene is huge.”

While talking, Hua Xing laid out four or five phones in a row on the table. All of them were buzzing with activity, chat notifications popping non-stop.

“See? These martial arts groups I’ve joined—even some experts from other provinces want to book matches with you,” Hua Xing said. “Your schedule could be filled until next year. Of course, that’s partly because Haoyu Group has been heavily promoting Zhou Chun lately.”

Zhou Chun had joined Haoyu Group, gaining access to major publicity. After breaking into the national top ten rankings, his popularity skyrocketed. But getting knocked out cold by a single slap from Su Jie turned the spotlight onto Su Jie instead.

“Even though that match with Zhou Chun had a no-recording rule, people still snuck videos. I’ve seen them floating around in groups. But why haven’t I seen anything online?” Su Jie asked. “Did Haoyu spend a fortune scrubbing the internet?”

“Exactly. Haoyu has investments in tons of news, social media, and video platforms. All it takes is a word and your video can’t be uploaded,” Hua Xing waved it off. “But that’s actually good for you. I want your image to spread in small, exclusive circles—as a mysterious expert.”

As they spoke, Hua Xing uploaded a short video of Su Jie and Old Liu arm wrestling to a few private social groups.

Immediately, the groups exploded with messages.

“Amazing, amazing...” Su Jie could tell these were some of Hua Xing’s tactics. The guy clearly had a sharp business mind—it was just that he hadn’t had the right “treasure” to work with before.

And Su Jie knew he did have value.

Back at the beginning, Nie Shuang had tried to sign him to *Minglun Martial Arts Academy*. Later, Liu Zihao wanted him to work as his stunt double. Then Feng Hengyi tried to recruit him as a sparring dummy.

And then there was Tang Jin, whom he’d met at the Xixin Villa, wanting to train him into a prizefighter for profit.

All of it traced back to one person—the “Godmaker,” Odell—who had turned this lump of rock into gold.

And so, the days rolled by. Su Jie’s life settled into a simple routine: home, school, Hua Xing’s fighting gym.

The small gym, under Hua Xing’s management, was booming. It still wasn’t open to the public, operating only within niche circles. But thanks to Hua Xing’s networking, word of Su Jie began spreading to combat circles across the country.

If Su Jie had no wins under his belt, no one would pay him any attention. The problem was, he had defeated Zhou Chun. On top of that, videos of his daily sparring sessions—whether deliberately released or not—had been making the rounds, drawing the curiosity of top fighters from all over the country who wanted to see this “rare specimen” for themselves.

The combat sports community in China is a small one, mostly made up of enthusiasts. But even a tiny ripple in such a niche circle could be a windfall for a small gym like Hua Xing Martial Arts. Even a ten-thousandth of the population showing interest would be enough to rake in serious cash.

Su Jie hosted three guided matches a day, ten minutes each, charging 5,000 yuan per session. That gave him a daily income of 15,000 yuan.

At first, he thought people would only fork out that kind of “sucker money” in the early days, and that the hype would die off quickly, leaving him with empty slots. But to his surprise, the demand didn’t fade—in fact, his schedule was fully booked for a month straight.

He couldn’t figure out where Hua Xing had found so many rich folks.

It even made him start to wonder: had he been living in a slum all this time? Was he just too green, too sheltered?

Of course, in addition to the ten-minute sparring sessions, he also ran a 45-minute fitness training class, which was included in the 5,000 yuan fee.

Su Jie took his job seriously. Determined to make sure his clients got their money's worth, he began to develop a teaching methodology. He studied a lot of fitness and martial arts training materials on his own. After all, he was a complete rookie when it came to coaching.

Besides, Odell and Uncle Mang's training methods were completely unsuitable for regular people.

The training volume Odell had once assigned to him would leave anyone else collapsed after an hour, and pissing blood with kidney failure after two.

Back when Su Jie was training Qian Zheng at "Stellar Radiance," it was the same story. Qian Zheng couldn't even complete a third of the training load each day—even after Su Jie had cut it in half.

So, no—Su Jie wasn't exactly a great coach.

But he had learned from experience. While he studied on his own, he also leaned on the smart training module his older sister had loaded into a chunky tablet for

him. With it as a reference, he trained his students more effectively—and it paid off.

Under his guidance, their progress was fast and obvious.

That smart module didn't do much for Su Jie himself, but for hobbyists, it was practically a holy grail.

Once, he showed the module to Hua Xing, who was utterly blown away. Hua Xing immediately told him to keep it under wraps and use it quietly.

Thanks to Su Jie's growing name in the community, the training results that were both fast and fun, and a bit of calculated media hype on Hua Xing's part, the little martial arts gym suddenly exploded in popularity.

Hua Xing didn't let the success go to his head, though. On the contrary, he began carefully screening who could join.

As for the gym's operations, Su Jie stayed out of it entirely—he didn't want the distraction. He believed everyone had their strengths, and dividing the workload made sense.

Hua Xing had a real knack for managing fitness and combat sports, building networks, stirring up buzz in just the right corners, and using scarcity and emotional hype to drive interest. These were all things Su Jie had no intention of learning. One person's energy is limited—better to focus on what you're good at.

As long as the gym was booming, and money was rolling in without breaking the law, Su Jie was happy.

Things were going great for both Su Jie and Hua Xing. But not everyone was thrilled about it.

Thailand. Inside a large, rural fighting gym.

Smash!

Zhou Chun hurled his phone to the ground, shattering it to pieces.

During a break at the training gym, he had opened a group chat for fighters—only to find yet another clip posted of himself getting slapped into unconsciousness by Su Jie and needing a doctor's checkup. He finally snapped.

“I'm going to kill that b*stard. And Hua Xing too! A couple of d*mn rats!” Zhou Chun roared, shaking with fury.

He had become the laughingstock of the entire industry.

Professional fighters, whether they believed the hype or not, were all giving him strange looks now.

“Didn’t expect that little nobody to actually have some skills,” said a voice from behind him.

Zhou Chun shuddered. He turned and saw Feng Hengyi.

Originally, he’d looked down on this seventeen or eighteen-year-old “punk,” but after being turned into his punching bag, Zhou Chun had learned just how terrifying Feng Hengyi really was. In front of him, Zhou Chun was no more powerful than an ant.

And Feng Hengyi was brutal. Zhou Chun had witnessed him kill several underground fighters with his bare hands—every death gruesome beyond words.

This was real, actual killing.

Zhou Chun, for all his viciousness and cunning, had never killed anyone.

But Feng Hengyi killed like he was brushing his teeth—routine and effortless. Zhou Chun knew better than to mess around in front of someone like that.

“Boss,” he stood up and greeted him respectfully, barely daring to breathe.

“I know about Su Jie,” Feng Hengyi said. “I was going to use him as my human sandbag, but he had the nerve to refuse. I had Grey Wolf follow him, but even Grey Wolf wasn’t a match.”

He paused, then added, “But someone like that isn’t worth my time. You’re heading to the underground fighting circuit tomorrow. Kill someone in the ring first. When you come back, we’ll find a way to kill him too.”

Chapter 80: A World-Shaking Ambition to Devour Heaven and Earth

“I’m going to the underground fight tomorrow...” Zhou Chun’s heart suddenly tightened with anxiety.

He had recently arrived in Thailand, brought there by Feng Hengyi to witness the underground fights. The brutal bloodshed he saw made his heart race with terror. It was practically a savage coliseum. The unarmed combat was tolerable, but the weaponed matches were especially gruesome—fighters hacked to pieces were a common sight.

“Martial Arts is a killing art. No matter how many people try to pretty it up with talk of martial virtue, it doesn’t change the facts.” A cruel smile appeared on Feng Hengyi’s face. “I guarantee your skills will improve dramatically after you kill someone. If you’re too scared, I’ll kill you myself.”

“Yes, sir!” Zhou Chun didn’t even dare breathe heavily.

“Get out. Get your mindset straight. Technically, those underground fighters are no match for you. They’re just more vicious. Once you overcome your fear, killing them will be easy.” Feng Hengyi waved him off.

Zhou Chun hurried out. Every time he was around Feng Hengyi, he felt like he was walking on a razor’s edge.

After Zhou Chun left, a foreigner entered—it was Josh.

“Boss,” Josh greeted Feng Hengyi respectfully. Physically, he looked thinner than before, but the aura around him had undergone a complete transformation—like raw iron forged into a sharp blade.

“How is it? After these few months with me, feeling a huge improvement?” Feng Hengyi was all smiles with Josh, a sharp contrast to how he treated Zhou Chun.

“Yes, boss. I never imagined your training methods would be so advanced. My past seven or eight years of training were practically worthless in comparison.” Josh, still bald, wasn’t dressed like a Shaolin monk anymore but rather resembled a Thai ascetic.

“Do you feel confident about entering the underground fight tomorrow? I’ve arranged a weaponed match for you,” Feng Hengyi said.

“No problem, boss,” Josh replied without blinking. “These underground fights are bloody and brutal, sure, but their skill level is nowhere near professional. It’s far from what I imagined.”

“Oh? And how did you imagine underground fights would be?” Feng Hengyi asked.

“I thought the underground circuit would have the highest level fighters—people capable of dominating the pro leagues. I’ve heard that several top-tier fighters in the world have been through these illegal fights. But after visiting some in Europe, I found they were mostly staged and exaggerated in their bloodiness—no real life-or-death stakes. Here in Southeast Asia, they do fight for real, but the skill level isn’t all that impressive,” Josh explained.

“Exactly. Nobody chooses underground fights unless they’ve got no other options,” Feng Hengyi said. “If someone has real ability, why would they risk their life for such pitiful earnings? A single pro fight internationally pays thousands. Here, an

underground match might earn a few hundred bucks. Child fighters in these circuits get a few bucks per match. Sure, the elite fighters may show up to these black-market bouts to experience real-life combat and push past their psychological limits—only then can their skills advance rapidly. Underground fighters may not have the same technical or physical prowess as professionals, but their viciousness and disregard for life far surpass them. Combine the two, and you're unbeatable. Now do you understand why I brought you here?"

"I do," Josh nodded.

"I have high hopes for you. You're not like Zhou Chun," Feng Hengyi said. "He's just a mad dog I'll use for dirty work—take the fall when needed, or get disposed of if he fails. You're different. I want you as my right-hand man—my true partner."

"Boss, aside from martial arts, I'm not good at much else," Josh said, clearly uneasy.

"I know your family's background is decent. You've got some influence in the UK, but you chose Martial Arts over inheriting the family business." Feng Hengyi seemed to know everything about Josh. "Take a look at this file."

He snapped his fingers.

A man resembling a Grey Wolf warrior walked in and handed a thick file to Josh.

As Josh flipped through it, his expression gradually changed. “Boss, how do you know so much? This isn’t just information about my family—it includes secrets about my rivals’ families too.”

“You thought I was just some rich kid from Haoyu Group?” Feng Hengyi clasped his hands behind his back. “Josh, Haoyu Group doesn’t even rank in the global top ten. It’s nothing. The real power behind me—my organization—is something beyond your imagination. Do you know what the D@rk Web is?”

“Yes. It’s that vast network outside the reach of search engines, often used by criminal groups for illicit transactions. Most of the deals are done in Bitcoin or other cryptocurrencies. Because of blockchain, the supply of these currencies is fixed—no one can tamper with it or issue new ones. That’s what keeps their value so high,” Josh replied, clearly not naive about such matters.

“Every country in the world has the power to print money. They print as much as they want—it’s entirely at human discretion,” Feng Hengyi said. “But with blockchain-based cryptocurrencies, the entire global financial system has been shaken.”

“But crypto is just numbers—it’s worthless,” Josh countered. “Government-issued currencies are backed by national power and gold reserves. Crypto is just another speculative bubble, like the tulip mania of old. A Ponzi scheme passing the risk to the next sucker.”

“You’re right. Cryptos are worthless—unless someone backs them.” A fanatical glint flickered in Feng Hengyi’s eyes. “Now, through the D@rk Web, these cryptos can buy real things—stuff you can’t find in the regular market. That gives them real currency power. In truth, B!tcoin was just a test product created by my organization. And most of the D@rk Web? That’s our trading platform. Join us—we already have the power to change the world. In the near future, we will overturn the existing global order.”

“Boss...” Joss fell silent.

“Give it some thought,” said Feng Hengyi. “The power behind me is beyond your imagination. Look at me—I’m not even eighteen, and yet the strength I possess is extraordinary. This isn’t something that can be achieved through martial arts training alone. To the organization behind me, your world is like the medieval era. Back then, could anyone have imagined that humans would one day soar into the sky, reach the moon, travel to Mars, or communicate across the globe?”

“Is it really that powerful?” Joss still looked skeptical.

“This is a login device, along with the website URL, account, and password,” Feng Hengyi said, pulling out a phone-like device. “It contains one Typhon Coin. On the D@rk Web, one Typhon Coin is worth ten Bitcoins. You can use it to buy all sorts of things, and those things will be delivered to your designated location one day. Of course, some major countries crack down hard on this sort of thing, so customs can be tricky. But in Southeast Asia, Africa, and even here in Europe, you can get delivery within seven days.”

“Go ahead, explore it for yourself,” Feng Hengyi said.

Joss took the login device and credentials and left.

Watching his retreating figure, Feng Hengyi muttered to himself, “Typhon Coins are amazing, but I don’t have many either. The person who probably has the most in the organization is Odell... But of all people, he had to leave the training camp to go on some so-called spiritual journey. What good is spiritual cultivation? Were the ancients so enlightened that they managed to fly into the sky?”

Shssss!

At home, Su Jie poured a little oil into a pan.

Suddenly, the flames shot up, but he remained calm, tossing in the prepared ingredients from a bowl. With a few swift motions of the spatula, the food flipped through the air and sizzled in the heat, each slice thoroughly exposed to the flame.

It was as if his spirit was immersed in the fire along with the ingredients, feeling the heat together.

Then, in a flash of instinct, the dish was ready. He plated it swiftly—the steam rising, the aroma rich and mouthwatering.

It was just a simple stir-fry of cabbage and pork, but it had everything—color, fragrance, and flavor. Each piece of food was perfectly cooked and vibrant.

“You brat, you’ve picked up my essence. From now on, you’re doing all the cooking at home. Your old man can finally take it easy,” said Su Shilin, grabbing a piece with his fingers and chewing happily. “Not bad at all. The key to stir-frying is controlling the heat. The food must be cooked evenly. And with the right heat, all the seasonings spread evenly over every piece. That’s the secret to divine cooking. That’s why the head chef in a hotel is the highest-level position. Stir-frying, deep-frying, roasting—it’s all about mastering fire. A chef who can wield fire to perfection—that’s a true god of the kitchen.”

“Dad, you’re using your hands again. That’s gross. I’m telling Mom,” Su Jie frowned in disgust.

“No, no, no!” Su Shilin jumped, instinctively glancing around. “You little devil, don’t scare me like that. I’ll eat this one—you make another plate for your mom.”

Su Jie had no choice but to watch his dad walk off with the dish, shaking his head and preparing another.

Life was leisurely for him now. Several months had passed, and school was on winter break.

Unknowingly, he had already completed the first semester of his final year of high school. He had calmed down, spending his days reading, training, and earning money by competing in guidance matches at the small Grand Ascent Combat Fitness Club. He aced every exam and had made a decent sum of money.

By now, his scattered accounts held around a million yuan.

It should've been more. From guidance matches alone, he earned 15,000 yuan a day—that's 450,000 a month. A staggering amount. Maybe not quite at the level of top internet writers or streamers, but for a teenager, it was already a fortune. But he also spent heavily—buying premium fitness and health products from the Minglun Martial Arts Academy's website, which didn't come cheap.

Some specialty items he sourced through Uncle Mang.

Like the Nie Family's secret medicinal salve—just a couple of ounces cost tens of thousands, and even if you had money, you couldn't necessarily buy it.

As for the inner-strength tonic, Su Jie had tried several times to get it from Uncle Mang, but came up empty.

He had some stock left once, but one day it mysteriously vanished. He was sure his dad had drunk it all in secret, but his dad would never admit it. There was nothing Su Jie could do.

Since reaching peak proficiency in external training, his martial arts had hit a bottleneck. Despite daily intensive practice, aside from becoming more proficient and experienced, he hadn't made any real breakthroughs.

It had been seven months since he first joined the Minglun Martial Arts Academy on July 1st.

With no real progress in martial arts—especially mentally—Su Jie wasn't in a rush. He had woven his training into everyday life, beginning with learning to cook from his dad.

He could ignore everything else, but cooking was a must. Because in this world, the first thing a person must do... is eat.

Food comes first.

In this learning process, he gradually discovered that cooking, too, held unfathomable depths of mastery...

seek insight. Who would've thought I'd get lines like these? Is fate truly unchangeable? Am I to sit and await disaster?"

"Of course fate can be changed—otherwise, how would you be where you are now?" the old man said. "Your ability to remain vigilant in comfort—that alone shifts destiny. If fate were fixed, we might as well lie around waiting to die."