

The Beginning After The End, Chapter 6: Up The Mountain

I didn't know if his goal was to beat some sense into the kid he assumed had gotten an inflated ego since he heard I was some sort of genius or if he was genuinely trying to gauge my strength, but by the smug grin he had on his face while looking down at me (even if it was only natural for him to physically look down at me, it still irked me), I assumed it might've been for the former reason.

Retrieving the wooden sword I received as a present from my parents, I walked to the edge of the camp where Adam was waiting near a small clearing.

"You know how to reinforce your weapon right, genius?" he asked, emphasizing the last word.

By this time, my father already sensed that Adam was just trying to put on a show of dominance into his little boy, but he just watched, knowing he wouldn't hurt me too much.

Many thanks dear father.

My mother looked a bit more anxious as she kept glancing back and forth between me, Adam and my father, keeping a firm hold onto her husband's sleeve.

Well at least mother was here to heal me if I got hurt, right?

I focused my gaze on Adam, who was just around 5 meters away from me. Images of my past life, dueling other kings with my country and loved ones at stake, popped up into my head. My eyes narrowed, restricting my vision to only the man in front of me. He was the opponent now.

I willed mana into my legs and dashed forward with both my hands gripping the wooden sword to my right...

His smug look still present, Adam prepared to block my horizontal swing when I feinted and used a special footwork I developed in my old world that I used for dueling. Almost instantly, I blinked a foot diagonally to his right. Curse this body! I couldn't perfectly execute the skill because of the height and weight difference compared to my old body. I wasn't used to this 40 pound, 110cm. body. While I didn't reach the area I was aiming for, unfortunately for Adam, he already prepared his wooden stick to block my swing from the other direction so his right side was unprotected.

His smug look all but vanished and was replaced by a look of surprise, with his eyes opening wide, as he realized what was about to happen.

Swinging my wooden sword to his open ribcage, I reinforced my wooden sword with mana at the last moment to conserve my mana, because I knew I was definitely at a disadvantage against a veteran like him.

The look of surprise on Adam lasted all but lasted a split second before he pivoted his right foot with almost inhuman speed. I squatted in time to dodge his upward swing and switched my stance from a thrust to a spinning swipe and landed a blow on his left ankle using all my momentum. His ankle gave out at that moment, throwing Adam off balance.

Or so I thought.

He actually did a full on split, followed by a roundhouse sweep with his legs as soon as he was on the ground.

This body won't be able to take a hit like that, so I jumped up to dodge his legs when, from my peripheral view, I saw the flash of brown from his wooden stick.

With no time to use the blade to block the swing, I thrust the pommel of my sword, timing it so Adam's wooden stick and the end of my handle would clash.

Newton's Third Law of Motion suddenly came into mind.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction

And boy was the opposite reaction painful. While I did block the blow successfully, my 4-year-old body couldn't withstand the force of the blow and I flew before gracefully skidding on the ground like a flat rock on a lake.

Thankfully, I reinforced my whole body before I took the blow or I would've seriously gotten hurt.

Groaning, I sat myself up and rubbed my throbbing head. I looked up, only to see seven stupefied faces staring at me.

My mother recovered first, shaking her head. She rushed towards me and immediately mumbled a healing spell around my body.

Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted Durden thumping Adam's head with enough force to make him stumble forward. Heh~

"Art honey, are you okay? How do you feel?"

"I'm fine Mom, don't worry."

Adam's voice cuts in, "Haven't taught him how to fight my a*s! How the hell did you train this little monster?" he groaned, still rubbing his head.

"I didn't teach him that," my father managed to mutter.

He shook himself out of the stupor and came next to me to ask if I was okay. I just nodded my head.

My father picked me up and gently lowered me back down where I was sitting before and squatted down in front of me so he was eye level.

"Art, where did you learn to fight like that?"

Deciding to feign ignorance, I said, putting on a nonchalant face, "I learned by reading books and watching you dad."

I don't think saying, "Hey dad, I was the King Duelist representative of my country from a world where diplomatic and international issues are settled by battles. I just happened to be reincarnated as your son... Surprise," would get a hearty reaction from him.

"Sorry for roughing you up there little buddy. I didn't expect I would need to use that much strength to get you off me."

Seeing Adam apologize gave me just a bit of a better impression of him. I guess he wasn't a total jerk.

I heard a faint voice from my side. "Your fighting style is... unique. How did you do that step after the feint?"

Wow! Two complete sentences! That was the longest string of words Jasmine said this entire trip by far.

I feel so honored.

"Thank you?" I responded.

I reorganized my thoughts before trying to explain in steps what I did.

"It's a simple technique really. Since I was feinting to Mr. Krensh's right side, I placed my right foot forward as the last step before the feint. There I instantly focused my mana into the right foot, pushing myself back, and at the same time I bring my left leg behind right, aimed at an angle towards where I wanted to go, focusing mana into my left foot this time, but with more power than when I used mana on my right so that I don't propel myself backwards instead of the direction I want to actually go to."

That was a mouthful.

I looked around to see Adam, Helen, and even my father head towards the clearing, trying to test out what I just explained.

When I turned back to face Jasmine, I only saw her back as she rushed towards the clearing as well.

Mother sat down next to me, patting my head with a gentle smile on her face that seemed to say, "you did well." Angela came up to me too, burying my face, or rather my whole head, in her bosom, cheerfully exclaiming, "Cute AND talented aren't you? Why couldn't you have been born earlier so that this sister could s****h you up herself!"

Blushing, I willed myself away from those b*****s that I suspected to have their own gravitational pull. Those...weapons were dangerous.

My guardian angel, Durden, was a lot calmer about all of this and just gave me a thumbs up. He's so cool.

The night passed as the four idiots spent most of the time trying to master the feint step while I slept in the tent with Mother.

A couple of days passed as we finally managed to make it to the foot of the Grand Mountains, which, by the way, sure lived up to its name.

Along the way, only Helen managed to lay down her pride and ask me for some clarification on the feint step. I went over it slowly, explaining what the timing of the interval between the last right foot and the left foot should be and how to properly balance the output of mana into both feet so you could go the way you're aiming. The whole time, I could almost see the ears of the other three idiots getting bigger as they tried to s**k in the information that I gave her, nodding while taking mental notes.

The first one to succeed was Jasmine. She seemed like the cold, genius type. I guess it was true.

She pulled me aside one day, nearly blushing, while I was taking reading and writing lessons on the back of the carriage with mother and asked me to watch.

We had to take a small stop so the carriages wouldn't leave us behind. After successfully demonstrating the feint step to me, I applauded saying "Amazing! You learned it so quickly!"

It's one of the most basic techniques I developed, but I wasn't going to tell her that.

She responded curtly saying, "It was nothing", but the upward curvature of her lips and the slight, proud twitch of her nose showed otherwise.

Haha, she's happy.

By the time we had arrived at the foot of the Grand Mountains, all four of the idiots managed to learn the technique, changing it slightly to fit their own fighting style.

The next step of the journey was ascending up the mountains. Luckily, there was a path around two carriages wide that circled around the mountain, eventually leading to the teleportation gate at the top.

The front carriage included Durden, holding the reins in the front, with father besides him to keep him company. This carriage held most of our luggage. Helen was currently seated on the top of the second carriage, the one I was riding in, scouting for any abnormalities. Angela sat in the back carriage with my mom and me, while Adam walked behind us, keeping guard. While Jasmine steered the carriage, I kept noticing how she turned her head back and stared at me, almost making *jiii* sounds. Is she expecting me to show her other techniques or something? Every time I met her gaze, she quickly turned her head back to the front.

Is she five?

Speaking of age, I turned 4 on the first leg of our journey to the foot of the Grand Mountains. I don't know when Mother prepared a cake, or where she even put it (or if it's even edible!), but I didn't complain, put on a big smile, and thanked her and everyone else. While everyone gave me a hug or a pat on the back, Jasmine surprised me then when she handed me a short knife, simply declaring, "Present."

Aww she cares! I'm tearing up.

Fortunately, our journey up the mountain was rather uneventful. I spent a lot of my time reading my book on mana manipulation, trying to find more discrepancies between mana and ki. So far, it seemed pretty similar except that, in rare cases, an augments' mana usage could take on the property of elements. Reading on, I noticed that for beginners who were able to dabble in this, it wasn't as distinct as what you might see when conjurers casted spells, but more like the quality of each distinct element.

For example, an augments, assuming he has an innate compatibility with fire, would have mana that showed an explosive quality when used. Water would naturally have a smooth, flexible quality. Earth would have a firm and rigid quality. Finally, Wind would have the quality of a sharp blade.

That's strange. Back in my old world, these kinds of qualities in ki had nothing to do with elements, but rather depended on how you utilized your ki. Shaping the ki into points and edges would give it the so called "wind element," while storing up your mana into a single point and bursting it at the last moment would give it the "fire element" and so on. Sure, practitioners had preferences and were naturally better at practicing one style

more than the other, but I wouldn't go as far as to say it was rare. Only the most basic use of ki involved reinforcing the body and weapons.

I would have to test this with mana in the future. Being stuck in a 4 year old body with constant supervision by suspicious adults made practicing really hard.

I kept reading on when suddenly, Helen's alarmed voice rang in my ears.

"BANDITS! PREPARE TO ENGAGE!" she shouted, as a rumble of footsteps came from our right and rear.

"Submit, O' wind and follow my will. I command and gather you around in protection. Wind Barrier!" Instantly I feel a gust of wind forming a tornado around Mother, Angela, and I. Then the gust bent into a sphere around us.

Angela was holding out her wand, concentrating on keeping the barrier active while arrows constantly bombarded the barrier, only to get redirected to a different direction.

My mother pulled me in close, trying to shield me using her body from whatever might get through. Thankfully, her efforts didn't seem to be necessary as the barrier held strong.

In a matter of seconds, the tarp covering the carriage was torn to shreds and I get a better view of the situation at hand.

We were completely surrounded.

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