

Martial Unity 1011

Chapter 1011: Inaccessible

"Nothing too extravagant," Rui shrugged. "The training resources entail basic training resources for the most common kinds techniques in all primary fields of Martial Art, specifically, maneuvering. As far as the information goes, we seek access to your library of scientific literature on esoteric material science. We also wish to access your labs to conduct and engage in some research."

This took the man by surprise. "Interesting, the former is no issue, it's actually the standard. However the latter..."

He made a difficult expression.

"Is there any issue?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Unfortunately, our libraries of scientific literature are only accessible by those with a journeyman degree in the sciences," The man smiled apologetically. "I'm afraid we cannot grant you access to the library."

"Even in exchange for Squire-level services?" Rui frowned. "As far as I can see, your town doesn't have the leeway to refuse extra Martial power, am I wrong?"

Rui glanced at the two Apprentice-level guards behind him.

That alone spoke to the state of its defense.

"You aren't," He sighed as he took off his glasses, laying them on the table. "But unfortunately, I cannot make an exception to this rule. I cannot dilute our standards under any circumstances."

Rui raised an eyebrow as he considered the man's words. "Are the standards of the institute more important than the survival of the institute and the town?"

"They are the reason the town exists in the first place," The man sighed, turning towards Rui. "That is why it cannot be forsaken, not even for the interests of the survival of the town."

"I do not understand," Rui frowned.

What did that even mean? All he asked was to access their scientific library, it shouldn't have been that big a deal.

The man stared at Rui with a conflicted expression. Rui could tell that he meant what he said, but at the same time, he did not want to let go of the two of them.

"I hope you understand..." He modestly remarked. "The standards of this town set the quality of what we offer. And the value of what we offer is what keeps this town afloat. People wouldn't strive to come to this town without it, and without the influx of those who aim to be a part of this ecosystem, it cannot be sustained."

Rui's eyebrows furrowed. "You mean, your one source of funding is those who invest in an education here?"

That sounded nonsensical.

"I... understand that it sounds absurd," The man sighed. "I do wish to establish some context."

Rui sighed irritably. "If you cannot give us what we need, then I do not feel the need to indulge in this meeting anymore."

"No wait!" The man cried. "Please, hear me out. I'm sure you'll understand!"

Rui wanted to slap the man out of his self-centered mindset, he hadn't even talked to the man for ten minutes, and he had already had enough.

The reason he didn't leave was because Kane was giving him a pointed look.

Apparently, he believed that there was still something that could be done in this place, an optimism that Rui did not share.

Though it smelled more like desperation at the moment, since this was the last place on their list.

"Speak. Fast." Rui snorted.

"Alright... I hope to convince you of the reason that I cannot give you what you seek, and to offer you other forms of recompense," The man sighed. "The reason I cannot break this rule is that the credibility of the rigorous meritocratic institutions of this town is the reason that people come here seeking high-quality education and research. The reason this town even exists in the first place is for two reasons. The first was to obtain a source of revenue for the wide-scale research resources that I needed, and the second was to get away from the controlling hands of those who sought to control my research in exchange for funding it."

Rui's eyebrows rose as he had an inkling of what the man was referring to.

Research, especially pure research, was in constant need of constant funding. Scientists usually weren't rich, and thus the expenses of research were not something they could incur personally.

Naturally, they would resort to external sources of funding, in exchange for access to the research and some directive over the research. Broadly speaking, there were four sources of funding that research got.

Private.

Commercial.

Governmental.

Militaristic.

Each of these four sources had its own interests in investing in research, and would naturally seek to control the direction of the research to suit those interests.

Rui had dealt with it many times in his previous life. In fact, his source of funding had always been commercial since his research was centered around combat sports in a commercial league.

"I... am one of the few people that had broken from this paradigm," He sighed. "I created this town with the personal fortune I had made from prior breakthroughs and created a scrupulously absolute meritocratic system of education and distribution of high-level knowledge. I moved all the way here in the middle of nowhere to escape the influence of powerful forces, and I fund all of this..."

He gestured around. "With people are willing to pay a lot in order to be here."

Rui was grudgingly impressed. He highly doubted that he would have been able to pull something like that off in his previous life even if he was healthy.

"So you wanted a source of income without selling agency to your research," Rui confirmed. "Why not just engage in research that more accessible sources of funding are interested in that also overlaps with your own interests?"

"Because there isn't an overlap!" The man banged the table. "Those power-hungry snakes do not care about peering into the metaphysical depths of the Martial Path because it does not immediately yield in any tangible increase in the power of Martial Art!"

Rui felt like he was getting a headache listening to this man.

Chapter 1012: Agreement

It wasn't that there was nothing about what he said that Rui didn't understand and empathize with. As a researcher, he could understand the sentiments of wanting to avoid the grubby hands that came with funding. He could even understand wanting to pursue research that didn't overlap with the interests of the sourcing of the funding for research. It was admirable that he went this far to keep his ambitions alive.

However, what he didn't understand was what all of this had to do with Kane and himself.

The two of them had come here to access the esoteric material science library of the Crexeet Town, and he had made amply clear that he could not forsake the rigid rules that were in place in so far as who was allowed access to the libraries of the Crexeet Institute. Then he launched a giant sob story about how his life as a researcher was so hard and the struggles that he had to go through in order to set up this town that was being sustained in part by those rigid rules.

Did he really think that he could guilt-trip the two of them or something like that?

If not for Kane wanting to stick around and hear what he had to say in hopes of somehow finding a way through despite his clear-cut rejection, Rui would have long left.

"I understand everything you say," Rui coldly stated. "But we are not interested in anything else you have to offer unless it gets us what we initially requested."

"I'm afraid... that it cannot be done. I'd like to ask you to reconsider your requests," The man helplessly replied.

Rui glanced at Kane.

His resolution to not give up was strong and hadn't yet broken. It was foolhardy optimism, but also admirable in a sense, even if foolish.

('He really wants that Fulminata technique bad,') Rui noted.

There were plenty of other places that possessed the information that they sought. However, they were excluded for the same reason that this town was not. They were subject to powers that would not offer them up without a costly price in return, they would be subjecting themselves to a transaction with a heavy power imbalance that was not in their favor.

Rui sighed, turning back to the Derr. "What was the requirement to gain access to your libraries again? Possessing a degree in general sciences?"

"Yes," The man nodded.

"How does one obtain that again?"

"By passing the General Science Exam, of course," The man replied with an odd expression.

"Is it possible to write that exam here?"

"Of course!"

"Is it possible to obtain the study materials needed for the exam here?"

"Most certainly, we offer some of the best studying resources," The man proudly replied.

"Hmmm..." Rui considered it a bizarre idea. "So if I pass the exam, will I then be able to gain the degree and gain access to the libraries?"

The man hesitated. "Yes, but surely you don't intend to... It's not possible for you to, given your field. No offense."

"I didn't ask for your judgment," Rui glared at him. "I asked you if it was possible."

"It is possible, yes, very much," The man nodded vigorously.

"When is the soonest I can write the exam?" Rui asked.

"You can schedule it at the earliest one week after the registration," The man replied with a confused expression.

"Then schedule the exam for one week for me," Rui sighed, tired. "Prepare the degree ahead of time, I do not wish to waste any time once I pass."

The man's eyes widened. "It takes years of studying the basic and foundation sciences to be able to cross the minimum threshold to earn the degree. I believe that this course of action is foolish and-

"Is there a problem?" Rui glared at him.

The man gulped. "One week might be too soon."

"Did you not, with your own words, confirm that one week was possible?" Rui was truly losing his patience with the man.

"Yours is a special case, you're a Martial Squire!" The man defended himself. "The credibility and the cheat-proof measures are going to take time to get in place. I cannot do it without this."

"Or you'll risk losing credibility if I pass under normal circumstances?" Rui huffed.

"Exactly," The man nodded.

"Then get it done as soon as possible," Rui narrowed his eyes. "And get me all the studying materials as well. As long as I succeed, I get what we came here for immediately without any fuss. In exchange, we'll sign a contract offering our Martial Art services in return."

"I-I understand..." The man wiped some sweat from his forehead.

Rui glanced at Kane, who had been grinning wildly for a few minutes now. Rui sighed helplessly as he turned back. If not for Kane, he would not be going through this little circus show.

It was truly an absurd set of circumstances that he had found himself. He had expected that this town would be less exotic than their previous two destinations, but apparently not. It was special in its own way.

Eventually, the two of them left the office and they headed out after ironing out all the details of the contract.

"Ten days," Rui sighed.

"Will you be able to pass it?" Kane asked, worried. He knew how smart and intelligent Rui was, and how powerful his mind was, but he wasn't sure that even Rui could reach professional standards in a field that he never touched before. That sounded inhumanely impressive and probably was something that even Rui would struggle within his eyes.

"We'll see," Rui replied in a non-committal manner.

"Seriously man..." Kane sighed, as he stopped walking. "Thank you for going this far for me."

Rui stopped, turning back. "Meh, don't worry about it. You put your life in my hands by joining me in the Shionel Dungeon. This is nothing compared to that."

The two of them left the institute as they talked with each other.

Chapter 1013: Correspondence

Rui didn't know how, but word quickly spread throughout the town of the Martial Squire attempting to take the general science exam. Apparently, that was revolutionary news for some reason.

Everywhere Rui went, he could feel the gazes on him from the people around him.

('Ugh, maybe this wasn't the best of ideas,') Rui groaned.

He disliked being the center of attention, it was annoying and at the end of the day he would rather be left alone, but he decided to stick with the course of action that he had chosen for Kane's sake.

He could understand where it came from, of course. It came from the idea that Martial Artists could not be adept at any intellectual field because it contradicted what it took to become a Martial Artist. And they were mostly right, Rui had dedicated most of his life exclusively to Martial Art and nothing else.

The whole town grew absorbed in the topic as various opinions flew across the entirety of the little society.

"I respect Martial Squires, but it is arrogant for him to believe that he could just take on an exam that we spent many years studying for and pass it with ten days of preparation."

"It's as insulting as if we scholars thought that we could fight and defeat a Martial Squire in combat after just ten days of Martial Art practice!"

"Do you think he'll cheat? Since he obviously cannot succeed? Martial Squires have extreme senses far beyond that of the human body."

"I heard that there will be Martial Squires inspecting the exam in addition to other measures. Cheating should be impossible, right?"

"Honestly, who cares why he wants to write the exam? He's willing to stay here and serve as protection from the surrounding states. As long as he is willing to do that, I don't mind entertaining his delusional intention of passing the exam."

Many opinions flew across the people who came across the news. Rui even heard what many were saying because they underestimated how far he could hear.

However, he didn't care. For one, he didn't fault them for feeling the way that they did. It was only natural, and he would have felt the same way.

If, in his previous life, a mixed martial artist tried to obtain a bachelor's degree in any major field despite a shallow educational background, with only ten days to write a general exam for the bachelor's level, he too would have a similar reaction.

He put aside what the people around him seemed to think while focusing on the hurdle at hand. He had gotten access to the study materials needed for the exam so that he could thoroughly understand what it was that he was getting himself into.

"Oh...?" Rui's eyebrow rose up when he skimmed through the material.

It was mostly high school-level sciences, which fit his suspicions due to the lacking theoretical science in this world.

('There is some esoteric material science through,') Rui noted as he skimmed through the study material.

This was the one area that he did need to study since his previous life's knowledge and background were entirely irrelevant and unhelpful.

This meant that this was the one area that he needed to start from scratch.

In ten days.

This would normally be impossible, although cramming worked, it only worked when one had a foundation to support them.

Rui did not.

He had studied some esoteric material science, but these were hype niche research avenues that he had looked into when researching for the Riemannian Echo technique.

He also had other considerations in mind in regard to his exam. He was a little worried about doing too well. That was problematic because he didn't want to do anything that obtained a grave amount of attention.

After all, he was technically in disguise and hiding. Although the probability that Chairman Deacon finding them through his success in this exam was extremely low, he wasn't keen on tempting fate.

On the other hand, he discovered an annoying rule.

"The score you get dictates your access clearance to the scientific literature," The mayor stated. "Thus a lower score means less scientific literature."

Rui wanted to strangle the man.

He understood the doctrine, of course. It was just an extreme push in the interests of a meritocratic system. But it meant that in the interests of Kane, and anything that he wanted to pursue, he needed to do well in this exam.

Furthermore, this was a good opportunity to build a small and initial foundation in the avenue of esoteric material science as well. The Riemannian Echo technique was proof that esoteric substances were filled with potential.

Of course, he didn't intend to turn into a fiend that relied on stuffing his body with esoteric substances, not at all. But Riemannian Echo as well as Kane's Fulminata technique were proof that it was worth having such knowledge at hand.

('Especially when I won't have access to knowledge as easily from now onwards,') Rui's eyes narrowed.

There was a reason that there were only three places that offered such information within the limit of the direction that they were traveling in. Due to this fact, it meant that knowledge was a lot harder to come by.

Regardless, he quickly acquired the study materials that he needed before diving deep into the subjects.

The theoretical science was not developed well enough to have distinct categories at the level that he was studying at, thus they were simply divided into different topics that fell under general sciences as opposed to the various fields within science.

Out of all the topics at hand, he found that thirty percent of the exam would be centered around esoteric science. Given that he had only ten days to go, he immediately began working at full pace. He had already decided to go all out and get the maximum possible marks he could, and gain access to as much information so that Kane could regain his Fulminata technique.

Chapter 1014: Esoteric

The field of esoteric material sciences was quite interesting as he began going through the foundational premise.

The basic premise of the field relied on the distinction between normal and esoteric materials. Normal substances and compounds were those compounds whose properties were understood by science. These included things like water, iron etc.

Although not everything about these substances was entirely understood on a fundamental level, this was the case with all substances including esoteric substances as well.

Esoteric substances were substances and compounds whose fundamental properties were not only entirely not understood but also seemed to defy the framework of theoretical sciences that existed so far.

Rui was aware of this, but there was more that he wasn't aware of. There were multiple scientific theories that tried to explain the existence of esoteric substances and why they were the way they were, and how they ought to be categorized.

The Esoteric Singularity Theory stated that there was one single phenomenon that was responsible for the esoteric and often reality-defying properties of all esoteric substances. That a single phenomenon in nature gave rise to all these strange substances in nature.

This was not merely a hypothesis, there were vague patterns between all esoteric substances that indicated a common cause.

One such pattern was that esoteric substances and compounds became more prevalent as one went deeper into the continent, suggesting a common cause. For it would be one hell of a coincidence if each substance was more prevalent in the center of the continent for entirely different reasons.

This was a reasonably viable hypothesis. Rui couldn't help but think about the origin of all the esoteric substances as a result. If there was a common origin of all these substances, then he couldn't help but wonder what it was.

A multitude of random hypothesis flew through his mind. Unfortunately, he had no idea what the reason could possibly be. However, he couldn't help but think that perhaps there was some global phenomenon that affected the planet a long time ago, producing all these fantastical phenomena.

He recalled a thought he had once had when he was traveling to Vilun Island. The Panama continent was surrounded by an archipelago ring of islands in all directions outside it. Rui recalled thinking how these islands were likely pieces of the continent at one point in time in the past.

He remembered speculating that there likely was some continent wide phenomenon that caused the outer layer of the continent to break away into small little pieces.

Now, he couldn't help but wonder if the two events were somehow connected, assuming that they had actually happened. As of right now, they were merely hypotheses.

Still, it was quite interesting.

There were other theories that tried explaining esoteric substances, the Divergent Theory stated the exact opposite of the Esoteric Singularity Theory. Stating that the origin and mechanism of the esoteric substances were mutually independent and were not tied to a single cause.

The few handful mainstream theories each had their own pros and cons, and were subject to wide debate across esoteric scientific community. Learning the ins and outs of each of the theories was one of the things that he needed to do as the exam would most certainly test his knowledge on that.

The following sections of the esoteric material science study materials began to actually dive into the esoteric substances. It mainly began diving into many of the most common and widely used esoteric substances across human civilization, of which there were plenty of people.

He knew that there were several ways that they could be organized and categorized. By the nature of their esoteric properties, and what ways they defied current understanding of reality. They could also be categorized by their applications in esoteric technology, and the ways that humans find them useful.

A good chunk of his study material was dedicated to exploring the theories and categorizations and organizations of esoteric substances.

It was followed by the books and books filled with esoteric substances, their profiles, and properties, and the vast empirical data on them that he needed to memorize.

Rui quickly understood that the hardest part about esoteric material science was the sheer amount of data that one needed to be familiar with. The concepts, and the methods employed were not all that difficult.

That's why he was confident that he would do extremely well. With his Mind Palace, all this data was forever something that he could access at any given point.

In fact, it wasn't even an exaggeration to say that he was probably the most knowledgeable person on these study materials in the entirety of Crexeet town.

That meant he would ace the parts of the test that tested pure knowledge, but the Mind Palace couldn't help him with questions that required greater logical deduction and induction. It couldn't help him with questions that required genuine thought.

Of course, he wasn't too worried. Sacrificing false modesty, he knew what he was doing even if he discounted his intellect. A lifetime of dealing with trickier exams had honed his theoretical problem solving abilities into a sharp knife.

Still, Rui found the study material to be quite insightful. He wasn't arrogant enough to believe that he was suddenly on par with the top researchers and scholars of esoteric material science who had

dedicated their entire lives to the field while also having made many contributions, he did think he could match up to the average graduate most likely.

When he considered the sheer depth of his knowledge on general sciences not pertaining to esoteric phenomena, he was probably heads and shoulders above anything in this world, most likely. Given how huge the continent was, it was possible that there was someone somewhere out there who knew just as much, or even more, but Rui had a hard time believing that.

Regardless, he deftly mastered the study materials within a short amount of time, and ten days later, the time for the exam had finally arrived.

Chapter 1015: Result

The entire town was in a bustle today, but Rui didn't mind them as he made his way over to the exam center.

"Please follow us this way, sir," One of the staff members guided him to a seemingly special room.

Rui could instantly sense that his regular senses were quite halted when he directed them toward the room.

He wasn't surprised, he had already predicted this when he had applied for the exam. Martial Squires could gain information from their sense from great distances away from the source of that information.

He was no exception. Thus it made sense to inhabit these senses in order to prevent him from cheating.

What they didn't know was that these measures were ineffective at stopping Rui. While his regular senses were highly restricted, his Reimannian Echo was unperturbed. He didn't expect the institute to succeed in doing what not even the Shionel Dungeon as a whole could not achieve.

"This will be the exam center, sir," The staff bowed as she gestured inwards. "Special measures have been put in place to ensure that the test can be conducted beyond any reasonable doubts of the violations of the rules, we hope you don't mind."

"It is of no consequence," Rui replied as he nonchalantly entered, sitting at the sole table in the room.

He hadn't been informed of these measures even if he had predicted them. He could already figure that the reason this was the case was to test his reactions and see if he intended to cheat or not.

Soon enough, the exam began.

And soon enough, it ended.

Rui felt quite nostalgic as he wrote the exam. It had truly been a long time since he had ever experienced this feeling. He recalled the younger days of his previous life where he would spend quite a lot of time studying. Back then, he was determined to get into a good university for college.

And more than a lifetime later, he was back in the same position. It was a profound feeling that made him look back on the journey that he had undergone thus far.

It was a shame that he couldn't write down all the answers in superspeed, but unfortunately, the cognitive boosts provided by the Martial Path were only applicable in tasks that were centered around combat, or close to elements of it.

However, his evolved brain from the Squire evolution breakthrough allowed him to accomplish some truly mind-blowing stuff. Thus, the timeframe of the exam was adjusted to accommodate that.

Furthermore, his pen and paper were also non-standard, thus they were able to withstand his writing as fast as he could.

He was quickly done, even by Martial Squire standards.

He left the exam hall and headed towards the cafeteria, ignoring the eying gazes of the various students and professors at the college.

"How did it go?" Kane asked once Rui returned.

"Easy," Rui murmured. "I'll gain access to those libraries for sure, and I'll gain access to as much as possible.

Rui could hear waves of murmurs from the students in the cafeteria. He hadn't bothered lowering his voice, so those that were able to understand that international dialect could understand what he said.

There was an immense amount of skepticism from all the students, once more. This time, they were a lot more vitriolic.

He couldn't care less.

Days passed, and soon enough the result was out.

All results were publically displayed as per the day of the exam, ranked in ascending order of marks.

At the top? Squire Falken with two hundred and forty-nine marks out of two hundred and fifty marks.

The entire town broke in controversy to the news.

A Martial Squire had scored almost a full score after just studying for ten days!

"Congratulations!" Kane laughed as he patted on the shoulder. "I knew I could count on you."

Rui, on the other hand, was displeased. For some reason, his score really bothered him even though he had already accomplished everything that he wanted to accomplish.

('Where did I lose that one mark,') His eyes narrowed as he flashed through his Mind Palace to look at his answer sheet.

He wasn't able to find a single mistake he made. Which was really bizarre to him. If he did expect to lose marks, and then did lose them, he wouldn't be too surprised. But he could see not a single avenue where even a single answer would not yield him full marks.

Even though the exam was genuinely unimportant to him, he still felt a little challenged at anything less than perfection with his current capabilities and gifts.

"Oh cheer up!" Kane slapped him on his back, you utterly dominated the entirety of all other contests in the entire institute.

Rui glanced at the names below him. The second highest was behind by more than a hundred marks!

He had truly outshined every single participant whose results had been published. Furthermore, because he and the others had gone to the main notice board the second that the results were announced, he was actually standing among them.

He could feel their skepticism. How could a Martial Artist like him possibly be able to beat them in a field that they had spent years studying?

In fact, they weren't the only ones that had gathered to take a look at his score. A whole crowd had formed behind him, murmuring loudly as word of his score began spreading like wildfire. Furthermore, given that he had just appeared before them, they could not help but talk to him.

"Squire Falken! How did you get such a high score? Are you really a Martial Artist?!"

"If anything, where did you lose that one mark?"

"Did you obtain this score by using unsavory means? Do you have a powerful sensory technique that allowed you to bypass the sensory jamming features?"

He did, but he had no intention of revealing that.

"Shut up and move," Rui narrowed his eyes as he released a bit of hostility into his aura.

The crowd obliged.

Chapter 1016: Contract

Now that his little exam was over, he was actually a lot more enthusiastic. He had already made sure that he would receive his degree almost immediately.

"Congratulations on becoming a journeyman scholar," The mayor personally delivered Rui's degree to him with a strained smile.

Rui could tell that he didn't like this one bit. The reason for that was obvious. It was clear to him that Rui was cheating somehow, and that the man had obviously not qualified to earn this certificate.

In fear of this, they had put into place many measures to prevent cheating. Not only was the best anti-sensory technology in place to prevent cheating but also multiple Martial Squires with sharp senses were temporarily deployed in the exam sight to see if there was any way to use Squire-level senses to gain information for the exam.

Yet, Rui still did extraordinarily well, so much so that mayor had been forced to sabotage him by deducting a mark so that he didn't become part of the few scholars that managed to score all two hundred and fifty marks. He couldn't allow such a thing to happen, it would irrefutably tarnish his reputation.

Regardless, it wasn't all bad. It meant that Rui could obtain what he came for, and thus two Martial Squires could stay at Crexet Town and offer their Martial Squire services to the town of Crexet.

"We can now sign an agreement as per your initial terms and conditions," The mayor explained privately. "You gain access to basic necessities, training resources, and access to our scientific libraries. In exchange for your power."

"What exactly is it that you need our services for anyway?" Rui asked with a little bit of interest. He hadn't forgotten the words of the Martial Squire that led them into the city. Just based on that alone he had concluded that there likely were tensions in the city that the professors and students were unaware about.

The man hesitated for a moment before relenting. "It's related to the fact that the surrounding kingdoms are interested in some of the outcomes in the research that we've conducted. I had chosen a region with underdeveloped Martial Art and technology, however, the surrounding nations in this region were not content with not taking advantage of Crexeet town and were especially unwilling to allow their competitors to gain control over our town. Thus there has been some... conflict."

"These are Squire-level states, correct?" Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Yes, their strongest warriors are Martial Squires. I chose this region because of that," The man nodded.

"It's why you were so desperate to rope us in by any means possible, even after we made demands that you were unwilling to fulfill," Rui remarked.

"...Yes, we need Martial Squires, the more the better. Only then can we match the hold off against the attempts to take control of the town by the surrounding states," The man helplessly replied.

Rui could understand his sentiment quite well. Given that the states surrounding them were Squire-level states, it made sense that these states were interested in the rich research that the town of Crexeet had engaged in.

"Sp specifically, you want us to incoming Martial Squires and make sure they never get anywhere near the town?" Rui asked.

"Yes," He nodded. "Most of the people within the town aren't aware of the extent to which we feel pressure, but I do want to avoid them learning about it at any costs," He explained.

"Ok," Rui nodded. "I'm assuming we're naturally outnumbered, right?"

"Of course," he nodded. "The extent to which, you can get the details from the head of defense Squire Ferilwal. She is much more intimately familiar with the state of the defense of our town. May I inquire about how long the two of you intend to stay here?"

"A few months, most likely," Rui revealed as he considered the matter. "Alright, Let's do the deal."

Considering that the town had survived for this long, it meant that they had enough defenses to last quite some time. It meant that the surrounding nations most likely couldn't overcome the defenses of this town without dedicating significant portions of their military.

Of course, this was not something that most of them were willing to do when they were currently in hostilities with each other. Meaning they couldn't throw everything they had at this town, otherwise, they would be leaving themselves vulnerable to each other.

"I suspect that you won't be able to complete what you are here for in a matter of months," The man replied.

"Why not?" Rui's eyes furrowed.

He did not want to be bogged down in this place for more than that. They were here for one very specific desire, and he wanted to get that over as soon as possible.

"Because you will be preoccupied with attacks, you'll only have half the time to do what you wish," The man sighed.

"Are the attacks that frequent?" Rui frowned.

"They are," He nodded. "We intercept them quite some distance away from town, hence why they're relatively unknown to the town. You'll be more officially briefed once you sign the contract."

Rui considered this new bit of information. He appreciated the man's honesty, but it was annoying. It meant that their rate of progress was half.

"I'd like to negotiate a new term," Rui added. "If I kill a Martial Squire, I get a free week with no deployment time, deal?"

The man considered the matter, stroking his chin. "...Deal. But you have to do it by yourself without enlisting the help of other Martial Squires. I cannot have you facing a hostile Martial Squire with another friendly Martial Squire just because you want to get the kill credit. It has to be solely your own work."

Rui smiled. "Deal."

The two of them proceeded to iron out the remaining terms and conditions, before the deal was finally sealed.

From this day forth, they would be fighting for Crexeet Town.

Chapter 1017: Test

"So you're the new Martial Squire that the entire town has been abuzz of, hm?" A sharp-eyed woman remarked with a detached tone. "One of the few Martial Artists to have ever passed the general science exam to become a journeyman scholar, that too only after ten days of preparation. Perhaps you chose the wrong field."

Soon after they signed the contract with the town of Crexeet, they were quickly led to the Department of Defense, where they met with the head of defense Squire Ferilwal.

"Pleasure to meet you, Squire Ferilwal," Rui greeted her, ignoring her remark.

"Come along, there are some things that need to be done," She told them as she led the two of them into a large facility.

"Erh, what exactly do we need to do?" Kane asked, breaking the silence.

"Why, I thought that should be obvious, surely," She remarked as she turned towards them.

"Uh, no?"

"You'll be proving your worth," She said as she led them deep beneath the facility, into a large facility.
"Proving your worth as Martial Artists."

"A Martial Artist who can crack scholarly exams is worthless as a Martial Artist," She narrowed her eyes.
"The fact that you possess a foundation to be able to pass that exam, and not just pass it, but get almost a full score makes me doubt your abilities as a Martial Squire. Your presence as a Martial Artist is scarce, too."

She raised her arm, gesturing with her index finger. "Prove to me you're worth something."

Rui wasn't even mad at her words. In truth, there was validity to what she was saying.

He was a young Martial Squire, and although he didn't disclose his identity, his youth was not something that could be hidden. The fact that he was able to perform well in a scholarly field would normally mean an immense amount of effort in that field that wasn't put into Martial Art.

It was a reasonable conclusion that someone would come to. He would have concluded that as well.

"We're in a Squire-level training space, you can go all out and not worry about damage," She continued.
"Before we begin, what is your Martial Path?"

"I am an all-rounder," Rui replied. "I do not wish to divulge my actual Martial Path."

Rui was no fool. If he revealed his Martial Path, then it was possible for Chairman Deacon to somehow get word of a Martial Artist with 'adaptive evolution' which is what Rui was known to have. Even if the probability of this happening was low from Rui's perspective because the communication across the continent was too little, it was best not to tempt fate any further.

Both he and Kane had already ensured that they did not need to disclose any personal information that they did not want to, and this most certainly included Martial Paths.

"Hmph," She snorted as she glared at both of them. "I'll squeeze it out of you real quick."

The tension in the air spiked for just a second.

And then it began.

She shot forward at incredible speeds, staring straight at Rui. Kane stepped away, clearly recognizing that she was beginning with him.

Rui narrowed his eyes as he made a split-second decision.

He chose to run away.

The reason was simple. Her arms were positioned at her hips, and there was no torque build-up to launch a strike.

It meant that she wasn't a striker. Given the position of both arms coiled and ready to lash out, he was quite certain that she was a grappler. Rui did not want to face a grappler in her element, thus he made sure to maintain some distance between them.

('That's why she chose this place instead of an open field,') Rui mused.

The closed space, no matter how wide, gave her the advantage, it meant that simply retreating to constantly maintain a large gap between them was not possible, at some point, he would need to switch strategies and do something else.

Rui's grappling had not kept up with his striking or his long-range techniques, something he was now regretting in hindsight. He would definitely need to rectify this error in the future, but for now, he could not engage her in this field.

Thankfully, he didn't need to.

THWOOM!

A powerful Mighty Roar Flash Blast technique shot forward toward his opponent.

BAM!

She grimaced as the sound projectile slammed into her. She had barely recognized his mouthing position to be a projectile attack, immediately bringing her guard up. The sound was very difficult to directly sense, which was what made the attack tricky to deal with.

However, it was most effective at longer ranges. At short ranges, the sharp sense of a Martial Squire could sense the powerful breathing technique being activated, as well as the distinct movements usually performed at the launch of the projectile.

Rui launched four more projectiles rapidly one after the other.

Yet this time, she was more prepared.

She swiftly evaded them one by one, before racing forward.

STEP

Rui paused as he tutted with them all behind him. He had reached the limit of the battle room, he could no longer avoid her. Furthermore, the predictive model that he had long begun collecting on her was only partially incomplete. He could try running to either side, but he quickly abstained from doing.

She had revealed to be faster than him in travel speed, which he wasn't too surprised about. Being able to close the distance was extremely crucial to full-contact Martial Artists like herself when dealing with long-range Martial Artists. Running away on either side would most likely just prolong the inevitable and make him less equipped to deal with her when she did get in range.

STEP

He rushed forward as he decided to not only abandon evading but also actively approach her head-on.

Squire Ferilwal's eyebrows rose as a savage grin sprung up on her face. Veins on her arms popped as she prepared for a swift takedown.

Chapter 1018: Respect

Rui, on the other hand, pulled his right arm back as he twisted his core, generating more power. He was practically telegraphing his attacks with such loud and predictable wind-up movements.

When the two of them reached other, his palm shot forward, aiming for her face. Her arms shot upward looking to intercept his attack and get a firm of his arm.

Yet when she reached for it, her hands just passed through, dispelling the image of it in her head. Rui's hand, instead was still sitting back, not having moved forward.

('A feint!')

His Phantom Step technique had been quite successful. It was a technique that he had learned as an Apprentice, and while it had grown less potent when he mastered it in the Squire Realm due to the fact that Martial Squires had sharper senses, it was still quite a useful technique when used in the right circumstances.

Rui used it not to fool senses, but to fool expectations.

Her futile clasping attack had failed, leaving her momentarily open.

BAM!

His right leg crashed into her chest.

She had already braced for an impact, yet to her surprise there was none. Instead, she felt as though a powerful mysterious force spread across her entire body, universally propelling her backwards like gravity.

WHOOSH

She flew backward at tremendous speed, leaving behind a few shockwaves. Rui had used the Reverberating Catapult technique to fling her backward, a technique that he had come to hone in the Umiana Trench. It was useful in circumstances like this where he could open up distances between himself and his opponent.

SSSSSKKKK!

She finally managed to come to a stop before she finally got up, facing Rui.

But it was too late.

A tremendously powerful impact struck her in her gut!

CRACK!

She grimaced as a powerful sound projectile crashed into her ribs. What shocked her was the sheer power of the attack!

It was something that far exceeded the limits of what a normal Martial Squires could possibly dish out.

She had been hit with tier-four Transverse Resonance. An attack that was four times as powerful as his otherwise strongest long-range technique. The power of the attack firmly reached the upper limits of what Martial Squires could generally achieve, it was approaching grade-ten-level power.

As much as she would have loved to take a moment to assess how many ribs she had broken from being ambushed by such a devastating attack, Rui ruthlessly spammed a barrage of long-range attacks.

She gritted her teeth as she bore the pain in her chest, doing her best to avoid the attacks, yet to her surprise, the difficulty had risen!

Not just because she was injured, but it was as though the projectiles were magically finding a way to hit her!

The ODA System became increasingly viable the more Rui's predictive model on her grew. The more data and information he had, the more he could use it to figure out exactly what the trajectory of the sonic projectiles ought to be.

In short, she could not avoid him.

Rui calmly, and ruthlessly buried her under an avalanche of sonic projectiles each hard to evade than the last.

Not every battle was climactic in its ending.

BAM!

"Rgh!" She grimaced as she fell flat on the ground. "Cough!"

She vomited blood, as she struggled to push herself up. But Rui targeting her broken ribs had caused a lot of internal bleeding that, while her healing factor did its best to fix, was continuously being inflicted far faster than she could recuperate with such injuries.

STEP

She glanced up with a weak eye as Rui arrived before her with a detached expression, before kneeling and taking out healing potions. He quickly fed her one, waiting for the potion to course through her body and do its job.

"Cough..." She got up weakly after half a minute, grimacing. "You... are strong."

It would be disgraceful for her to maintain airs after Rui soundly defeated her but also nursed her back to health with a potion. Furthermore, she knew how strong he was without a doubt. Their battle had been decisive, it wasn't close. She had never been in a position where she felt like she had an advantage. From the very start, he quickly took control and created an opening that he then systematically exploited to suppress her with unquestionable dominance.

The outcome was crystal clear.

He won, and she could even tell that he had won while holding back considerably. Not once any time had she gotten the sense that he was going all out with his power, or straining himself in any way whatsoever.

The most embarrassing part was that she still wasn't sure what his Martial Path was. That was humiliating because it was easy to tell what a person's Martial Path was when fighting them because they would be forced to use that Martial Path to win.

However, the fact that she couldn't even hazard a guess as to what his Martial Path was meant that Rui had likely used a very small portion of his Martial Art and had only displayed a small amount of all the capabilities that he had.

The fact that he was still able to dominate her so definitively despite not having gone anywhere near all out was absurd to her. It defied every expectation that she had held towards him.

"Just... who are you?" She couldn't help but murmur.

"Good fight," Rui replied, stretching out a hand as he ignored her question, pulling her up.

"It seems I underestimated you severely," She replied as she regained her composure. "To think that you excelled at Martial Art more than you excelled at being a scholar, that was outside of my expectation. You are truly strong."

She was not someone who was distastefully egotistical. Even if she was the head of defense and someone that possessed a degree of authority over Rui in so far as how he was deployed, she still had to show him the respect he deserved by virtue of being stronger.

Chapter 1019: Limited

"There's no doubt about you," She sighed, before turning to Kane. "But it's your turn now."

She needed first-hand knowledge of both of them, and that meant fighting Kane as well. Kane nodded, acquiescing, and the two of them quickly stood some distance apart from each other, before taking their stances.

Kane, as always, took his light-footed stance, while Squire Ferilwal took her shoot stance.

Rui watched with interest as he analyzed the battle.

('Their win conditions is straightforward,') Rui mused. ('If Kane gets caught, he loses, if he can keep away for long enough, he'll be able to win.')

Rui suddenly recalled something as he narrowed his eyes exerting some pressure on Kane to draw his attention. Kane glanced at Rui with a raised eyebrow.

Rui simply shook his head once.

Kane stared at his him, nodding once, before turning back.

Soon enough, the battle began.

DASH!

She shot forward, as was predictable aiming for Kane with her arms. Much to Rui's relief, he casually evaded with visible ease.

Rui sighed in relief. He wasn't worried that Kane wouldn't be able to evade her initial glance, he was just happy that Kane didn't go all out.

He didn't use Void Step.

He wasn't sure how good Squire Ferilwal's senses were. He wasn't sure that she would be able to recognize the sheer potency of the grade-ten technique. Regardless, if Kane used it here, he would be expected to use it on the battlefield against the surrounding nations. It would expose his technique on a wide scale and thus, it would increase the likelihood that their identities would be discovered.

All in all, it was just not worth it even if it would grant him the victory in this case most likely.

Thankfully, Kane was smart enough to understand what Rui was referring to at that moment with that gesture, and also mature enough to agree. He wasn't driven by colossal pride or a strong battle-lust.

His thoughts were interrupted as she lashed out against Kane again, lashing out at his lower half, looking for a lower takedown.

Yet she wasn't quick enough.

WHOOSH

Kane evaded by leaping into the air.

POW!

A swift kick landed on her gut, allowing him to push himself away from her.

"Tsk," She tutted with irritation, annoyed by his speed. However, Kane could see that his attack had essentially done nothing against her.

It was to be expected, he was only just barely grade two as far as striking power went. Unlike Rui, he did not possess the ability to inflict major damage on her with every attack. The best he could do was what he always did.

Unlike Rui, he didn't need to maintain a huge amount of distance between himself and Rui in order to avoid her shoots, he could be much closer, and avoid her much more narrowly than Rui could hope to without Forestep.

However, he was still dealing with a decently powerful Martial Artist, Squire Ferilwal abandoned her aggressive shooting strategy the second she saw that it wasn't as effective as she had hoped it would be. The way forward was not through recurring aggression.

('Not bad, she's clever,') Rui nodded.

She didn't stubbornly stick to a losing strategy that would only drain her stamina faster than Kane drained his.

WHOOSH

Instead. She stood her ground this time, making slower progress as she slowly covered the gap between herself and Kane. Rather than aggressively shooting in his direction, she chose to systematically close off the space he had in all three directions to make it harder for him to escape.

('Not the best approach with her toolset, but it is an effective strategy,') Rui mused. ('Her maneuvering is greater than mine as a way to close the distance between herself and her opponent. She's not going to be as easy to avoid as I am, Kane.')

Kane's expression grew more strained as he too realized that. He was faster than her, but not to the degree where he could run circles around her. Furthermore, with her remarkably large wingspan, she was able to cover a lot of area at any given point in time.

The fight turned into what appeared to be a strange game of tag, as Kane quickly realized that he was slowly but steadily getting cornered.

Much to Rui's approval, he eventually stopped running away and faced her head-on, preparing his palm for his jabbing technique.

He rushed in, and in an instant, his jab shot forward to her solar plexus in just a moment.

('Tsk,') Rui tutted.

She bent backward just as his jab came into contact with her body, the strike landed, but it wasn't the only thing that did.

CLASP!

She managed to grab his waist with her long arms. Kane's eyes widened, but it was too late. The very world shifted as she flung him over her while she fell to the ground.

BOOM!!

A resounding impact reverberated across the entire tire facility and beyond as Kane grimaced in pain.

She immediately mounted over him, completely incapacitating him.

Thankfully, she stopped there. The fight was already over.

"You're not bad, but your offense sucks," She told him as she stood up. "That's why I was able to ignore your offense as I grabbed you for a throw."

Kane wasn't bothered by the loss at all. He knew that he was stronger than her by virtue of his Void Step technique. Although he sometimes forgot how overpowered the technique was because Rui was able to deal with ease. The way in which he would go about things was rather simple with this technique. He would be able to guarantee to land vital attacks with it.

"The two of you are definitely going to be very positive additions to Crexeet army," She replied. "Come, I'll explain how things work, and what exactly your duties entail."

She led them back out of the training facility and into a large room filled with people and documents of all kinds.

Chapter 1020: Library

"This is a map of the entire region." She pointed to a large map inscribed on a table. Surprisingly, most of the region was empty into a no man's land and forest, while there were several small states littered here and there.

In the center of the region was a small dot representing Crexeet town.

('That's unfortunate,') Rui noted the fact that the town at the center in a region with several states littered across it.

"We have a surveillance division comprised of Martial Artists and long-surveillance scopes operating throughout the day, all days," She said. "They inform us of any attacks ahead of time, we deploy Martial Artists and potion users to combat them ahead of time, to ensure that the conflict occurs well away from the town so that the townfolks aren't any the wiser. If you possess the necessary sensory prowess, you can serve on the surveillance division if you wish to."

Rui probably had better senses than anybody in the town, and he was sure that he did not want to be part of the division. He had no interest in being perched in some hidden trench only to spend his day keeping an eye out. He would rather fight.

Kane, on the other hand, wouldn't mind joining the surveillance division, but he didn't have Rui's sensory prowess.

"I'll take the front lines," Rui immediately replied.

"As will I,"

"Alright then," She nodded. "You don't have to worry about hierarchy or position or anything of the sort. You will simply be given a set of orders and a few guidelines, and that's that."

This was probably to reduce mistakes due to lack of coordination. Since the military by design included external warriors, thus they could not have an overly sophisticated system. It needed to be simple and straightforward enough so that the temporary foreigners would be able to integrate well enough.

"You'll be part of a squad, however, there are no squad protocols or anything like that barring basic guidelines, you'll be moving independently, but the other members of the squad may also receive the same order simultaneously. You will be expected not to get in each other's way, at the very least."

She handed Rui and Kane small booklets containing some things that they needed to abide by.

Rui skimmed through the guidelines. He had to admit that they were quite liberal and basic. The department of defense had made sure not to go overboard in this regard.

"This is acceptable," Rui nodded.

"Did you read all of it that quickly?" She raised an eyebrow. "Then again given your scholarly feats, it's not that hard to believe."

"Is there anything else?" Rui asked.

"Here," She tossed them two devices. "You'll receive your instructions through that."

Soon enough, their meeting ended and the two of them left the department, heading back to their quarters in the institute.

"Finally," Kane heaved a sigh. "We can get started on training now."

Rui nodded. "You head back to your room, I intend to finally visit the libraries of the institute."

"Gotcha," Kane nodded. "Good luck."

The two of them split ways as Rui headed towards the library wing, quickly making his way through security with his newly administered high-clearance library pass.

The second he walked in, the multiple students inside stared at him with intense stares. He sighed inwardly before checking out the library.

It was extremely well-organized and neat, not to mention incredibly vast. Rui couldn't even imagine the sheer amount of information that was stored inside. He felt a strange curiosity as to whether he would be able to store all this information inside his Mind Palace in the first place. It was a seemingly impossible task, after all.

He shook his head as he headed towards the applied esoteric material science section. Most of the literature in the institute was contextualized in regard to Martial Art since that was what the institute's research was centered around.

That was preferable to Rui, it meant that he didn't need to spend extra effort into pruning out data that wasn't relevant to Martial Art.

His goal was quite simple, he was looking for a substance that could generate electricity that could also be integrated into the Martial Body.

For now, his work simply entailed going over the literature bit by bit. He knew that this wasn't going to take a short amount of time. He recalled how much time it took to research esoteric substances for his Riemannian Echo. It took more than half a year to create that technique.

The esoteric material science was thankfully only a portion of the entirety of the library. However, he still needed to go through an immense amount of literature to find what he was looking for.

As for whether it existed or not, he didn't have any doubts about that. The reason for that was simple. The sheer variety of esoteric substances that he had seen, and what they were capable of made him think that there was far too high a chance for there to be an esoteric substance that could generate electricity.

Much to his convenience, the esoteric material science section of the library was further divided into a variety of categories across different kinds of categorization. This was something that he had learned while studying for the exam, and it allowed him to skim through exactly what he wanted.

[Esoteric Phenomena and Lightning]

A simple low-level book that allowed him to get started on the subject and topic. From this, he could branch out in certain directions that seemed more promising than others, and systematically explore every topic that he came across.

Because esoteric material science was a largely data-driven and empirical field of science, it meant that it wasn't something he could fly by just by thinking about it really hard, most of the work was going to be centered around pouring over data scrupulously while compiling and organizing each time he filtered away at it.

('This is going to take a while.')