

## Martial Unity 121

Chapter 121: Replaced with uncertainty

BAM

Rajak smacked Rui away with a swift kick. But he was immediately rushed by Fae and Kane. One launched an immensely powerful palm attack, the other riddled him with incredibly speedy strikes.

He turtled up, crouching with his arms in front of him as he retreated trying to put some space between them.

POW

"Argh!" He grimaced as Rui landed a kick straight on his head. Just as he turned to swing at Rui;

BAM

THWACK

Fae and Kane resumed their offense forcing him to just barely defend against them. The three of them bombarded him with attacks from three directions, giving him no time or space to consolidate his defense.

All three of them were menaces for three different reasons.

Fae had the greatest firepower among three of them, surpassing even his own. Every attack chipped away at his defense, inflicting some amount of damage. She was a relentless canon, who fired with the intention of taking him down with every strike. As far as game-ending attacks went, she was the strongest of the three. He paid an immense of attention to her, because he knew that of the three of his opponents, she was the likeliest to actually take him down if he made a mistake.

However, the one who truly irritated him was Kane. The boy's speed and agility were a level above his, furthermore, he was far more nimble, smaller, and mobile than Rajak himself was. He danced around, squiggling his way through narrow spaces and landing a flurry of attacks from everywhere. Landing an attack was practically impossible, especially with the other two. He frustrated Rajak the most.

However, the one that unsettled Rajak the most was the third one. As far as only Martial Art techniques went, he was the weakest of the three. Rajak could tell he had only barely formed the foundation of his Martial Art.

Yet for some reason, there was something about the kid that was eerie. As the fight went on, the kid fought better and better, and grew harder and harder fight against. The boy stared at him with pitch-black eyes, and Rajak felt naked in front of his gaze. He felt transparent, as though the boy could see thought everything. Every thought, action, decision.

There were moments where he fought incredibly smoothly against Rajak, almost as though he knew what Rajak would do before he even did it, and even knew exactly what needed to be done in order to punish Rajak the most.

In the beginning, the boy struck him as an all-rounder, but his fighting style kept changing and altering growing strangely more and more difficult to deal with.

WHOOSH

BAM

Rui flipped out of the way of a low sweeping kick from Rajak, landing a bicycle kick on his head. Rajak grimaced, stunned. At that moment, Rui had begun the jump even before Rajak began the kick!

Fae and Kane appeared on the opposite sides of him, sandwiching him in a storm of attacks; swift and numerous on one side and powerful and devastating on the other.

Rajak back away, grimacing in pain. His condition was bad, the addition of Fae had contributed to the deterioration of his condition significantly. He was at the stage where he was coughing blood. His

mental faculties had taken a hit from the damage and fatigue from combating the constant bombardment from three of them.

His chances of escape were becoming more and more remote.

('I still have a chance. If I sacrifice defense to some extent, I'll be able to use some offensive techniques open up some distance between all of us, I'll be in a bad condition but I will have a clean chance to escape.') He began planning. ('Once I hide even for a brief few seconds, I should be able to partially consume a healing potion, escape will become much more feasible.')

Just then, a large sound broke him out of his reverie.

BAM

"ARGH" Han grimaced as collapsed to the ground.

Rajak's cursed when he saw Han's leg broken in a horrible manner. The Martial Artists of the Lowminer Industries had managed to cleanly break it.

Everyone knew in that moment, that he was as good as dead. He would never be able to escape from this scenario alive.

The only bandits left fighting were Rajak and Feilin.

Rajak glanced at his second-in-command with hopelessness. She was bloody, and battered with wounds all over her body. She had even lost her left eye.

It was over for them, Feilin had already collapsed to a knee, she would last one exchange and would die immediately after.

The battle had gone from eight-on-four to now effectively eight-on-one.

Rajak was strong, but against eight Martial Apprentices, he stood no chance in hell whatsoever. Only the pinnacle of Martial Apprentices had a chance of surviving this predicament.

BOOM

Fae managed to cleanly land a palm attack into his solar plexus. He leapt back, grimacing in pain. He looked around, the Martial Apprentices circled around him like wolves ready to make the final strike.

He glanced at Han and Feilin, they were already dead.

They attacked, aiming to end this in one go.

Just as eight Apprentice-level attacks were about to mangle him alive.

BOOM

An impact far greater than any on the battlefield blew them away, forcing them to leap back. The impact reverberated through the land, shaking the earth.

"Hahaha!" A voice pierced through the dust. "What a disgrace, you've really fallen."

As the dust cleared, an unknown masked man, supporting the golden-haired man appeared.

Rajak coughed blood. "Took you... cough cough... long enough."

The Martial Artists had no idea who this intruder was, but they all leaped at him with determination.

WHOOSH

Just as their attacks were about to strike the duo, they cleanly passed through them, as though they were just an illusion.

The bandits had disappeared into thin air.

The Martial Apprentices were shocked. The fact that the man managed to insert himself in the middle of eight hostile Martial Apprentices and evacuate with a comrade, unharmed, was an unbelievable notion.

The atmosphere, which was previously filled with assurance and confidence, had been replaced with that of uncertainty.

#### Chapter 122: Aftermath

A strange silence spread through the air, as none of the Martial Apprentices were able to muster up anything to say.

And they very well couldn't be blamed for that. They had the final bandit exactly where they wanted him. And just as they were about to finish the job, a fifth bandit came in stopped the, grabbed the man and jumped out of there.

What could they even say? What were they supposed to say?

Rui sighed. "Well, atleast the mission succeeded." He said, turning around to inspect the inner section of the travelling convoy. Thankfully, the carriages and the horses hadn't suffered much damage and the loss of life to the non-combat personnel was minimal. Milliana and Dalen staying back to ensure that their primary mission would be fulfilled was a life-saver.

The outer section was now almost entirely non-existent, however. The battle with the bandit troops and later the battle between eleven Martial Apprentices had wrecked all that battle chariots that carried the security personnel.

Their primary mission was well fulfilled. All the goods were safe, and the Martial Quint fought with everything they had to ensure the goods would be safe. So, Rui was relatively certain that he would be fully remunerated for his services.

Furthermore, the covert operation of the Lowminer Industries was also a decent success. Although two Martial Apprentice bandits managed to escape, they had annihilated most of the bandits, including three Martial Apprentices.

This was a solid accomplishment that could not be downplayed.

All in all, Rui felt quite satisfied with what they accomplished. The fulfillment of nearly nailing a mission perfectly was quite high, especially when the mission was important and had high stakes. It far surpassed the trivial missions he had completed in the past week.

"Let's wrap things up and resume our journey." Rui suggested. "I highly doubt those two will be returning any time soon, but I think it's best if we make haste in our journey and get out of the Shadow Trails as soon as possible."

No one argued with that. The Martial Apprentices of the Lowminer Industries aided in sorting out the chaotic convoy while the Martial Quint returned to their carriage, exhausted.

"Man that was actually insane!" Kane exclaimed. "We fought and killed three Martial Apprentices. I bet our grades are all gonna shift up."

He was probably correct. Rui did not think his evaluation would remain at three. But what he was most interested in were the martial credits from the mission. Once he received the pay, he would have a total of six hundred and fifty-three martial credits. Furthermore, there was the additional bonus that the branch manager Savin had promised them.

Rui hoped the man would pay up, after all, it was merely a verbal promise, he wasn't obligated to pay up.

Soon, the convoy finally managed to wrap up and pull itself together. The Martial Apprentices had already long revealed themselves so they kept an eye out from the outside where it was easier to conduct surveillance.

Hours passed as the sun started going down, the clouds gathered, barricading its light. At one point, it even began snowing heavily. After all, Kandria was about to enter the most extreme phase of Winter.

And just like that, half a day passed.

No more ambushes, or attacks, the convoy passed through the Shadow Trails uneventfully. This was largely expected, but the Martial Apprentices kept an eye out for the two Martial Artists who escaped, especially the masked one. That one was truly formidable, although they did not think the eight of them would lose. If he chose to fight, there would probably be some casualties.

No one wanted to die.

They soon exited the Shadow Trails, and an hour later, had left the Basara Mountain range in the distance on the horizon.

The convoy finally relaxed; they settled down as the town of Gallagar was entering their field of view.

This was Rui's first time visiting a town aside from that of Hajin, he reveled in the experience. The town of Gallagar had a different feel to it than that of Hajin. For one, it was nearly as well-developed or commercial as the town of Hajin was. The infrastructure wasn't as good as that of Hajin, and the population was less dense in comparison.

There were a lot more residential areas across the entire town, and even at the heartland of the town. Unlike in Hajin, where the further you went to the center of the town the more commercial it became.

Soon they arrived at their destination in Gallagar. The convoy stopped as it arrived at a branch of the Lowminer Industries.

What followed was relatively quick and simple, the convoy was received and adequately handled. It was getting late, the snowfall had accelerated too, so the Martial Quint decided to postpone their journey back to Hajin. The Lowminer Industries graciously offered to take care of their housing and their return trip back to Hajin. Apparently, the actual client, the branch manager of the Lowminer Industries wished to speak to them privately.

"Hopefully for something good too." Kane yawned. "Well, at the very least they're willing to pay for our inn. We should go the most expensive hotel in town and dump the bill on the Lowminers."

"Let's not do that, the branch manager promised us an additional bonus reward, credits are way more important to me than a luxurious night out."

"Tsk tsk. You need to learn how to live."

"I agree with Rui." Fae said, throwing a disapproving look at Kane. "You're the heir of the Arrancar family, show some class. Rui here has far more grace than you do."

"Oh shut up, you're just a little girl who got spoiled by her grandmother." Kane retorted.

Rui sighed as that sparked the umpteenth bout of conflict between them, he had long given up on trying to mediate it. It was just a fact that those two didn't get along.

#### Chapter 123: The next step

The five of them treated the rest of the day as a holiday, peacefully relaxing after a stressful mission. They'd wandered around the town of Gallagar indulging themselves to a little fun.

"Man, I wonder who that masked dude was." Dalen thought aloud. "He was ridiculously strong."

"I wonder if he'll reform the bandit group and continue." Fae wondered.



"Unlikely." Rui pitched in. "Not any time soon, anyway. His men were slaughtered and he lost his Martial Apprentice subordinates, bar the masked Martial Artist. Rebuilding the bandit group to its former size and strength is going to take a while."

"I doubt he even wants to, in the first place." Kane said. "He kinda got his ass whooped."

They headed back to the inn after a while, heading to sleep.

The next morning, they cleaned up. Taking the opportunity to head to the Lowminer Industries branch of Gallagar. They quickly boarded the transport provided by the Lowminers, and headed straight back home. Rui used this time to gather his thoughts on the mission.

Although he was feeling pretty proud and content with his performance, looking at it more objectively he had to admit that things were pretty stacked in their favour in hindsight. They had eight Martial Apprentices against the five Martial Apprentices. It would be embarrassing if more than two managed to get away.

Still, this did not take away his sense of achievement.

Sometimes, things just went your way, and sometimes they didn't. In his first mission, things were ridiculously stacked against him. This was a bit of a compensation, in a way.

All he could do was be grateful and move on.

Half a day passed uneventfully, and they reached Hajin, and eventually, the main Lowminer Industries branch in Hajin.

"Should we really visit him before we complete post-mission protocol?" Rui wondered.

"Well, he did handle our housing and transport." Fae said. "Let's just pay him a quick visit before heading back."

Rui shrugged. He wasn't particularly in any hurry, and he was a little curious about what the man had to say.

"Welcome!" Savin said once they entered his office. "I've already been given a detailed report by the Martial Apprentices of our company. Allow me to begin by expressing my gratitude, I am thoroughly grateful for your services and performance. I was quite pleased to hear that all but two bandits were eliminated, this is more than good enough to achieve the desired result."

"We were just completing our mission." Fae responded. "We are appreciative of your gratitude."

She left the floor open to him.

"As a token of our gratitude, we have decided to double the bonus reward." Savin smiled charmingly. "We hope we have not burdened you in an untoward manner during this mission."

Rui immediately understood what was going on. ('He's currying favour with the Martial Union.')

There were several reasons he would do this. Firstly, the Martial Union was an entity that basically ruled the Kandrian Empire after the Royal Family. Kissing its ass was always a good thing to do. Secondly, Rui was cognizant enough to realize that the Lowminer Industries were probably worried they had annoyed the Martial Union.

They had clashed with the Martial Union's mission very directly during the events of Rui's first mission, directly causing its failure, that too with a private Martial Apprentice. Although there was no straightforward concrete evidence besides from Wern's words, the truth was the truth and the Martial Union was not stupid. They knew who was responsible for Bella's death, the Lowminers knew the Martial Union knew, and the Martial Union knew the Lowminers knew.

Furthermore, this particular mission was somewhat unorthodox as well. It wasn't deviant as the first mission which was a whole four ranks under-graded. But the Lowminers did in fact exploit the Martial Union to some degree with their hidden operation.

Although the Martial Union would not directly retaliate over such a trivial matter, it was still in their best interests to mend their shaky relationship with the Martial Union. Even the tiniest bit of effort from the

Martial Union's end could utterly annihilate every trace of the Lowminer Industries from the face of the country.

The Lowminers were top dogs, however that was limited to a handful of sectors and industries across a handful of towns. They could not compare to nation-wide companies or even region-wide companies.

This was the only reason Rui could think for the Lowminers to go as far as doubling the bonus reward.

Not that Rui was complaining. Double the reward would result in a total of one thousand martial credits!

This when summed up with Rui's existing balance, resulted in 1153 martial credits!

This sum was above Rui's set bar to reach for purchasing new techniques and immersing himself in training.

Rui was so excited that he could barely control himself from shivering and jumping in ecstasy.

With such a solid budget, the techniques he could purchase would be just as reliable. The foundational techniques he had obtained for free weren't too bad, however they were just barely enough to allow Martial Apprentices to complete simple missions. The Martial Academy had carefully made a select set of techniques free so that the Apprentices would just be strong enough to be able to earn credits to purchase more techniques.

To be honest, the shortcomings of his techniques were already starting to become apparent. He had begun to feel that during his first mission with Bella, but had really noticed this during this mission in the Shadow Trails. He could sense that he was probably the most under-developed Martial Apprentice in that entire battle.

He was able to compensate for this with the predictive and counter-deductive capacity of the VOID algorithm, but this was not a long-term solution. This wasn't particularly his fault, he had barely been a Martial Apprentice for half a year and was much stronger than any Martial Apprentice that inexperienced.

But now that would change, once he finished with this round of training, he estimated he would reach a whole new level of capability.

## Chapter 124: Priorities

Rui stopped listening after the extra bonus was mentioned. He frankly didn't care all that much about anything else the Lowminers had to say. The rest of the meeting passed in a daze as the branch manager tried to make as good an impression in the limited amount of time they had left.

Soon enough, Fae promptly excused all of them and left the branch, heading to the Martial Union. Once they arrived at the Martial Union, Rui raced to complete the post-mission protocols as fast as he possible could.

"What's he all excited about?" Dalen asked with confusion. "We just got back after a tiring mission."

Kane and Fae sighed.

"Forget about it." Fae shook her head.

"Nerds spend time in the library." Kane said. "That's exactly what he wants to do."

Rui couldn't even be bothered retorting to the barbs. Once he filled up the forms and signed the what needed to be signed. He rushed to the Apprentice library the second his work was finished.

"See you guys later!" He yelled as the figure of his friends grew smaller in the distance.

Seeing that Kane got up, stretching. "Well, I should probably train too, I can't have him surpassing that easily."

Fae agreed with Kane, as she rarely did. "It would be embarrassing if the runt I smacked in the Entrance Exam one-upped me in just a year."

Saying this the two of them proceeded to bid Dalen and Milliana goodbye.

Once Rui entered the Apprentice library, he was so excited he felt jittery. Like a child who had entered a gigantic toy store after saving up his or her allowance for a whole year.

What techniques should he learn? In what direction should evolve or develop his Martial Art in? There were so many options he simply didn't know where to begin.

The foundational techniques were not only limited in grade, they were also limited in variety. The premium techniques consisted of a much more diverse set of types of techniques that relied on different mechanics and principles.

Before Rui could even dive in. He first calmed himself down, inhaling and exhaling deeply, regaining his composure. There was no point in getting too excited and making stupid decisions about how to spend his martial credits, these were hard-earned credits. He needed to spend them wisely.

Firstly, what was he here for?

To develop and expand his Martial Art.

In what manner did he want that to happen? What were the constraints to the development trajectory of his Martial Art?

This was a bit more complicated and nuanced. First, he was an all-rounder. This meant he could not allow his Martial Art to develop disproportionately higher in any one field.

Another constraint at this point in time, would be to fill in the holes in his Martial, and avoid filling what is already well-filled.

What were the relative strengths and weaknesses of his Martial Art?

('My offense is still lacking in general lethality.') Rui immediately surmised.

In his last training session, he had tried to bolster his offensive arsenal with Flowing Canon and Mirage Dive, a striking and grappling offense move respectively. However, both of these techniques lacked flexibility. They could only be used in a handful of all the circumstances that Rui normally found himself in.

Flowing Canon was a technique that required a run-up to accumulate momentum. This turned out to be much more limiting than Rui had hoped. After all, it wasn't possible to run back and forth every time you wanted to strike your opponent.

Most of the times, he was limited to using Vital pressure, a technique system that targeted vitals in the most effective way with every strike by optimizing hand form, location as well as angle of impact.

However, this was nowhere near a lethally threatening move, all it did was allow his strikes to inflict damage greater than he normally would.

That wasn't enough.

Thus, Rui decided to fundamentally improve his offense on a general level. What else?

('Another lacking aspect of my combat is combat speed.') Rui mused.

Although he had mastered maneuvering techniques like Parallel Walk and Balance Direction, those helped only in more locomotive speed, allowing him easily increase or shorten the distance between his opponent and him, allowing to engage in guerilla tactics well enough. But the fundamental speed of his combat was still too low.

Thus, he quickly added combat speed to the list.

Those were the two most glaring holes in his Martial Art. Everything else didn't have any overwhelming insufficiency.

His defense wasn't all too outdated, surprisingly. Though that was partially due to the fact that the defensive techniques he had mastered; Acute Edge and Elastic Shift were dependent on timing and placement of the techniques. The better Rui's timing and placement was, the more effective these techniques were.

The VOID algorithm loved such techniques, since it provided Rui with as close to the optimal timing and placement of these techniques adapted against specific opponents. Which is why Rui didn't particularly notice a deficiency.

('Still, bolstering my defense with a technique will help regardless.') Rui mused. Defense was what protected his life. He did not want to be dismissal of it.

('I can't think of any other critical shortcoming...') Rui scratched his head. All of the fields of his Martial Art and attributes were not unsatisfactory.

('Well, we'll see.') He shrugged. He could always decide what to do with the leftover reserve of martial credits once he finished handling the most important aspects of his Martial Art.

He could add trump cards with high efficiency that would allow him to vanquish his opponents instantly, or he could add more esoteric techniques that are difficult to counter, making him much more of a menace to deal with. Or he could be conservative and add a technique that increased his chances of survival and avoiding severe damage in battle. He wasn't sure.

Having decided what exactly he was looking for, he finally dove into the offense section of the Apprentice library.

## Chapter 125: Choices

In truth, he did not need to spend much time searching for the perfect technique for his Martial Art that fit the criteria he had set. He had already long set his eye on a technique.

[Outer Convergence]

This technique was one of the core techniques of Fae's Martial Art.

It was a technique that allowed the user to strike with the power of all muscle groups in the body. Normally, this was possible to do in only a handful of positions. But Outer Convergence took it a step further and made it universal.

The technique was based on the principle of additive torques.

A bullet shot by a normal gun moved around the speed of sound.

However, what if the man firing the gun was sitting in a bus also moving at the speed of sound?

Then the speed of the bullet to someone outside would be the speed of the bullet plus the speed of the bus. The total speed of the bullet would be twice the speed of sound.

However, what if the bus itself was standing on top of a plane moving at the speed of sound? Following the same logic, the net speed of the bullet would be thrice the speed of sound. The bullet essentially got boosted by the added speeds of the bus and the plane.

The Outer Convergence was a technique that boosted speed and power equally, that functioned similarly to the bullet analogy.

The fist was the bullet in this case, and the various muscle groups were akin to the bus and the plane.

By moving in a manner that ensured the force and acceleration generated by each muscle group would cleanly sum up and funnel into the strike ensured that the power of the strike was vastly higher than if the strike was thrown merely with a portion of the muscle groups across the entire body.

Fae had partially mastered this technique during the Entrance Exam, and had gone on to fully master it once she entered the Academy, allowing for her power and speed to have surged remarkably.

This was a technique that would kill two birds with one stone, fixing his two biggest shortcomings.



He winced when he glanced at the price. ('four hundred martial credits, oof.')

Thankfully, the technique was justifiably powerful, furthermore, he truly needed the technique to increase the foundational formidability of his Martial Art. So, he put aside his compunctions about the matter

He also had seven hundred and fifty-three martial credits left.

He walked over to the defense section of the Apprentice library, skimming through the technique scrolls slotted in the shelves.

[Elastic Dispersion]

A successor to both Acute Edge and Elastic Shift. It added muscle relaxing techniques that further made collisions elastic, dramatically decreasing the damage inflicted on the user.

('It effectively makes the user a bouncy ball, hard to actually damage with blunt force.') Rui mused. This was a solid candidate, furthermore as a successor to techniques he had already learnt, he would be able to get a hang of it much quicker than other techniques of the same difficulty.

But the price was a deal cutter for Rui.

('Four hundred and twenty martial credits.') He flinched. ('I'm good, for now.')

He did not intend to overcompensate for his defense. He glanced around, eying the closest techniques with interest.

[Adamantium Flex]

The extreme opposite of Elastic dispersion in principle, it aimed to make the user harder than the opponent's attack for a brief moment by executing an extreme momentary blood-rushed flex of the

muscles, thereby inflicting damage onto the attacker rather than the user. It was effectively like trying to punch a steel wall, no matter how hard you hit, your fist will always break before the steel wall, every time.

Still, it was an extremely high-grade technique, with immensely high efficiency and flexibility. This meant it was extremely expensive proportionately.

He moved onto some of the lower-graded techniques which were much less exaggerated in their effectivity and of a lower grade too.

[Axis Fortress]

This was a technique that allowed the user to defend against attacks much more effectively by ensuring the impact travels parallel from one end of the bone straight down to the other end.

Bones were much easier to damage and break if force was applied at the mid-point of the bone from outside, they were much more difficult to damage and break if the force was applied through the bone from one end to the other, by an entire order of magnitude!

Rui recalled reading research that bones could be sixteen times more durable through the bone end-to-end vs against the bone at the mid-point.

However, he had never thought that that fact could be applied such a manner!

[Raging Reforge]

This was a technique the focused on general all-round body conditioning. Improving the toughness of epithelial tissue; skin and flesh, as well as the durability of the skeletal and the muscle systems using very specific recurring patterns of strenuous micro-damaging and healing procedures.

[Chain Clash]

This technique was a technique that strengthened the joints through rigorous conditioning. The joints were just as important as the bones. In clashes, an immense amount of stress was put on the joints. The one with stronger joints, experienced less damage, ultimately allowing their durability to increase significantly.

('Hmmm...') Rui was quite impressed by these techniques. They were simple and effective, and got the job done.

He was quite impressed by his creative some of these techniques were. They applied simple biological and physical phenomena and facts of the human body and nature in resourceful ways to achieve significant results. Rui hadn't even considered many of these, despite being well aware of these facts and phenomena.

Not that it was due to his lackluster imagination or creativity, but many of these would straightforwardly be entirely impossible for normal humans. It was only due to the cognitive boosts provided by the discovery of the Martial Path that allowed for Martial Apprentices to master such potent techniques.

Chapter 126: Have it now

He had yet to choose a technique, he had grown far too engrossed in the creativity these techniques displayed.

He wasn't entirely sure what technique to pick, he didn't want to go all out on defense and pick an extravagant technique since his defense was sturdy enough. He skimmed through the section a bit more as his eyes landed on something interesting.

[Inner Divergence]

This technique was a defensive technique that dispersed the impact of strikes across the entire body by positioning the area of impact as close to the center of the body as possible. By conducting the impact across the entire body and not just the area of impact, the impact would be diluted and not inflict any damage.

It was similar to how a weight placed on top of a pyramid would be burdened by every block in the pyramid. By dispersing the impact cross the body, it was easier to withstand than if a single portion of the body withstood it.

The technique was extremely high-grade, however for some reason it was not priced very high, a meagre two hundred martial credits

As Rui skimmed through the scroll, he quickly realized why.

('It has a disproportionately high degree of difficulty of mastery.')

The more difficult a technique was to master and execute, the less its value was. Two high grade techniques with different difficulties of mastery had different value.

It turned out that Inner Convergence was such an obtuse technique that its effectivity of application was one hundred-percent dependent on the timing and judgement of the user, it's effectivity could potentially be worse than Exploration techniques. It required remarkable judgement, timing and placement, far more so than most other techniques.

If timed well, it could apparently surpass its grade, but if timed poorly it could even get one killed in the worst-case scenario.

The technique specifically warned the reader of the high requirements of mental faculties, and advised the reader to not purchase the technique if the reader's mental attributes were not significantly above average.

Rui's twinkled as he felt an uncontrollable laugh boil from his stomach. It took superhuman effort to restrain himself, but he did not want to look like a weirdo to the other Martial Artists and staff in the library. Above average mental attributes? That was all Rui had going for him! He put his hand on the scroll without much hesitation.

Outer Convergence for offense and combat speed.

Inner Divergence for defense.

('With the power of Convergence and Divergence, I will elevate myself to the next level.') Rui mused to himself.

He still had a total of five hundred and fifty-three martial credits left. He wanted to expand his Martial Art's general capability beyond just offense, defense, maneuvering and supplementary measures.

The last ten days had taught him that missions were much, much more about just hand-to-hand combat. Missions were not official duels where the only thing that mattered was one's combat prowess. In fact, he had come to realize that pure straightforward combat prowess was at most half of what was necessary to complete missions more optimally.

Having additional useful skills that would help him out in the field. They would not only increase the probability of success, but could also save his life.

This was one of the reasons he was reluctant on splurging on defense. His defense wasn't nearly weak enough for him spend that kind of money.

He walked over to the miscellaneous section of the Apprentice library, skimming through the techniques that they offered.

"Wow." Rui raised his eyebrows. The section was divided further into several sub-sections;

Stealth

Sensory

Environment-centric

Beast-centric

Labour-centric

Weapons-mastery

...

And several other niche fields. These sub-sections were too small to form their own major sections like offense, defense or maneuvering, but also too big to not be categorized in some way or the other.

Rui was immediately interested in the sensory sub-section. This sub-section broadly encompassed techniques that in one way or another allowed the user to perceive or gain more information about the environment and surroundings or specific phenomena or targets.

[All-Seeing Eye]

This technique trained all five senses using techniques that exploited the cognitive boosts of the Martial Path to exponentially increase the range of all senses, allowing the user to cleanly perceive all objects within a range far greater than the normal human limit, allowing the user to form a detailed three-dimensional model of everything within said range. Furthermore, it was more of a technique than a passive state, meaning the user could deactivate it when unnecessary.

This was the highest graded techniques in the entire section, costing a whopping four hundred martial credits. This technique almost entirely guaranteed that all covert operations within a certain range of the user would not go undetected.

It was useful in every single scenario.

Rui was extremely tempted to purchase this technique, but he did not need something this extravagant. The sheer prowess of this technique was meant for Martial Artists who routinely performed in extremely dangerous environments and situations rife with immediate risk.

Rui definitely wanted to purchase a sensory technique, but he wanted to purchase something a little less extravagant that would still serve its purpose.

[Sixth Sense]

A technique that trained the danger evaluation intuition of the user, allowing them to subconsciously detect dangerous phenomena within a certain range.

This was also quite the high-grade technique, but a bit more manageable as far pricing went.

Just as he was about to reach for it, another technique caught his eyes.

[Seismic mapping]

This was a systematic training system rather than a technique that put the user through a series of training sessions using highly specialized training facilities in the Martial Academy that allowed the user to map out general topography as well as moving objects in contact with the ground. It did this by sensitizing the user enough to be able to detect vibrations in the ground.

Different topographies and physical properties of the ground would result in different micro-vibrations, allowing the user to reliably detect their surroundings.

Rui sighed. If he had had this technique during his first mission, there was a pretty good chance that Bella might've been alive. He would have detected the gangs being mobilized by the Lowminers in all likelihood, as well as the racing Martial Artist who was sent to separate him from Bella.

Alas, there was no way he could have gotten his hands on the technique before the mission.

('But I have it now.') He thought, gripping the scroll.

Chapter 127: Decisions

Outer Convergence and inner Divergence handled the pure combat-oriented aspects of his Martial Art. Seismic Mapping increased his competence in mission solving.

He had three hundred and fifty-three martial credits left. He wanted to splurge all of it on one more technique in order to get something that would benefit him all-round.

He wasn't sure where to go with this. A condition like that was too vague to allow him to narrow down his search.

He began by dismissing environmental techniques, that was too specific. Labour-centric techniques were also instantly disqualified.

Beast-centric techniques were interesting, but he did not intend on deep diving into hunting class missions just quite yet, he also wanted something a bit more fundamental before expanding to esoteric fields and applications.

Weapons-mastery was certainly interesting, but he felt it was far too much of an initiative. Mastering even a single weapon was no joke, and usually required many years of hard training.

He also wasn't particularly interested or attracted to them. He was a hand-to-hand purist fanboy. Though dealing with weapons was something he would eventually have to do. Upgrading the VOID algorithm to deal with weapon users was part of the long process of adapting the VOID algorithm to the world of Martial Art.

He also hadn't seen much of hand-held weapons either, he wasn't sure why, perhaps he ought to ask one of their squire instructors when he got around to it.

('That leaves...') He glanced at the final section he left untouched. ('Stealth.')

Stealth techniques were mainly useful for covert operations, but being capable of some degree of stealth was probably generally useful.

('If I had stealth capabilities, I might have been able to hide Bella to safety.') He thought. But again, there was no way he could have.



He skimmed through the sub-section, unsure of what to expect. What he saw blew his mind.

[Void Step]

A technique that employed the highest degree of misdirection to completely escape the target's cognition, bypassing all manual surveillance and perception. At the highest level of mastery, a user could effectively move around a room filled with Martial Apprentices and not be noticed at all.

Six hundred and sixty martial credits.

Grade ten difficulty.

('What???) Rui was flabbergasted. He did not think such ridiculous feats were possible via Martial Art techniques. It was truly a ridiculously beyond what he thought would be the norm. He glanced through some more techniques, ascertaining their prowess.

[Blank Melt]

Avoid detection by travelling outside the peripheral vision of observers with a combination of light misdirection.

[Dead Step]

Avoid the production of noise in the air by manipulating air via a coordinating breathing technique that cancels out the sound waves in the air.

('You're kidding me.') Rui wouldn't have been surprised if someone told him he was being trolled.  
(There's no way this is possible.)

But alas, it was. Rui set aside his disbelief and skimmed through them. If the previous sections had intrigued him, it was nothing compared to the fascination he felt as he shuffled through the stealth techniques.

He had already decided to pick one of them for his final technique, he just wasn't entirely sure which one to go with.

Void Step was the highest graded technique in the entire sub-section, and this was despite the it's extremely high difficulty of mastery. Rui, for one, did not think it was over-graded or overpriced, the stated capabilities of the techniques professed by the technique summary was utterly nonsensical.

Rui was almost grateful that the technique extraordinarily difficult to master, he would be scared to leave the house if every Apprentice had mastered that technique!

Still, he hadn't yet decided which of them to purchase. Just as he began skimming through, a particular technique caught his eye.

[Blink]

This was a relatively simple technique. It was a technique that trained the user to be able to act during an observer's blink, partially bypassing their vision. It was a technique that could be used to bypass ordinary observers and even had some utility in combat, allowing them to catch their opponents by surprise by initiating attacks during blinks. It was useful in pretty much all fields and classes of missions, including the hunting and assault class missions.

It was a beautifully simple technique, that could be incredibly powerful depending on how well it was timed and how the user exploited it. Another technique with good compatibility with the VOID algorithm.

Furthermore, it costed three hundred and twenty martial credits, falling well within his budget, unlike the highest-grade techniques.

And that put an end to his shopping spree.

Four techniques; Outer Convergence for power and speed, Inner Divergence for defense, Seismic Mapping for sensory and Blink for stealth.

Rui was satisfied to with his choices. He had only gone for four techniques, prioritizing quality over quantity.

Once he mastered these four techniques, he was confident he would be able to hold his own even in higher grade techniques.

Perhaps soloing missions at grade six and above would still end up being too much, but grade five and below would be completely fair game.

"Made your choices?" A voice called out to him, breaking him from his reverie. "That was quick."

Rui didn't even need to turn around to recognize him. "Kane, what's up?"

"Not much, same as you." He said. "Looking to get some techniques to bump up my fluidity in maneuvering."

He paused, before looking around. "But still, you're getting a stealth technique huh? That's a bit unexpected. I thought you weren't too interested in covert stuff."

"Not particularly." Rui admitted. "But it's dawned me that some degree of covert capacity is needed. Have you made your choices?"

"Not yet." Kane said. "I just arrived. I think I'll pick two techniques this time."

Those words earned a wince from Rui. "You better master them quickly my friend, otherwise I'll be leaving you in the dust when I'm done training." He playfully said in a challenging tone.

"Heh, don't get ahead of yourself." Kane smirked. "I'll run circles around you when I'm done."

## Chapter 128: Excited Yet

Rui left the Apprentice library, leaving Kane to figure what techniques he wanted to purchase. He wanted to begin the training session immediately. The first training facility he headed over to was the designated training center for the technique.

"Instructor Dylon." Rui greeted the head instructor of the Apprentice facility, a Martial Squire.

Generally, the Apprentice students were mentored and trained by veteran Martial Squires with deep expertise and experience with whatever field they were assigned to.

Squire Kyrie was the head instructor of combat training. Squire Dylon was assigned to offensive striking.

"Hm?" He glanced over, focusing on Rui. Just this gesture alone, generated a bit of mental weight on Rui. "Ahhh, kid. What brings you here today? Here to learn six techniques in one month this time?" He teased with a nonchalant smile.

"Only four." Rui replied, sincerity.

"..."

"I just purchased this technique." Rui said, waving the technique scroll of Outer Divergence. "I wanted to begin the training right away."

"Ah, that one." He said. "Good technique, I used it all the time in the field even after I became a Squire."

Rui's eyes widened at those words. "Wait what? I thought Apprentice-level techniques were too weak for Martial Squires."

The man made a complicated expression. "Well yes and no. Actually, I'm not supposed to talk muc-"

He paused as he felt Rui's intense stare burning holes in him.

"Alright alright." he made an exasperated sigh. "The Realm of a technique is not related to the power of the technique. It's related to the pre-requisites and the compatibility between technique and Martial Artist."

Rui tilted his head, confused.

"There is a very qualitative and fundamental difference between Martial Squires and Martial Apprentices, it's not just a matter of strength, speed and durability." He explained. "The quintessential foundation of our material bodies is different."

"Huh??" Rui made an incredibly confused expression at the cryptic nonsense the man spouted. ('Is he for real?')

"Because we are fundamentally different, our techniques function mechanically different." he continued, ignoring Rui's confusion. "An Apprentice-level Martial Art technique simply cannot utilize our full power because it is not meant to handle our power. Squire-level techniques are simply techniques that can handle the power of Martial Squires, and can only be used by Martial Squires."

"So, they're just designed to be compatible with the power of a Martial Squire?" Rui asked, still frowning.

"Yes, and it's harder than it sounds." He directed a pointed look at Rui "The difference between us exceeds your imagination."

"But... what is this difference? Why can't you just... use Apprentice level techniques?" He pressed, the man was not telling him the key detail.

He simply shook his head. "There's a reason we don't tell Martial Apprentices about the path to Martial Squires, kid. And it isn't just to sound mysterious and cool." He chuckled. "There's a very practical reason for avoiding spilling the secret to every little runt who discovered their Martial Path."

"And why is that?"

"Because we've discovered that revealing the breakthrough to Martial Squire before one's Martial Art has matured and one's Martial Path has deepened... reduces their chances of breaking through." He explained. "Kids are too immature; the knowledge simply has an adverse effect on most of you. It's kind of the same reason we don't allow children to drink alcohol or have sex. You're just not ready, it will have an adverse effect on you and end up ruining an entire generation of children if normalized."

"What?" Rui frowned.

"And that's about all I'll say." He shook his head.

"Well, then at the very least tell me how you continued using Outer Convergence even after you became a Squire?" Rui asked. This was a valid question, how did Dylon use an Apprentice-level technique as a Squire if Apprentice-level techniques were too inadequate for Martial Squires?

"Ah, Apprentice-level techniques can be evolved and adapted to suit Martial Squires through training and experience. The moment the user has completely evolved it to suit his or her body, they're no longer Apprentice-level, but now Squire level." He said. "The Martial Union has Squire-level versions of all the Apprentice-level techniques which can be purchased in order to hasten up the process."

"I see..."

"..."

"..."

"You're here to train right?" He sighed. "Quit tryna learn what you're not supposed to. Instead focus on learning what you came here to learn."

Rui was so engrossed in thought that he'd actually forgotten why he had originally even made his way here.

"Right..." Rui pulled himself together. "I'm here to master the Outer Convergence technique." He said with a hint sullen pout.

"Don't look so down." He chuckled as he took a boxing stance. He threw a straight punch, the strike flew with such ferocity and power that it whipped through the air, causing a powerful blast of air to slam against Rui, pushing him back a little. He looked on at Dylon, shocked at the display of power.

"That was Outer Convergence at peak Apprentice-level, I reduced my power to pinnacle Apprentice-level show you what you yourself can eventually achieve." He said, leaving Rui speechless.

The display of power was beyond almost anything he had ever seen. The only thing that was comparable was the mysterious masked Martial Apprentice bandit who saved his comrade and evacuated.

"...And this." He took a stance as his expression grew more serious, and his concentration intensified, his muscles growing taut. "Is what Outer Convergence can do that at the Squire-level..."

Rui felt every hair on his body stand up as he instinctively leapt back.

BAM

Just the very motion caused a huge shockwave far more powerful than before that pushed him back. Dylon disappeared, Rui only saw his starting stance and ending stance. Everything in between was too fast for Rui perceive.

"See?" He said, exhaling. "Outer Convergence is an incredible technique. It's saved my life many a time, and reaped those of my adversaries in the Martial World many a time."

"Well?" He glanced at Rui. "Feeling excited to learn it yet?"

A wild grin crept onto Rui's face.

Chapter 129: Training begins!

"Let's begin immediately." Rui said with a determined expression.

"That's the spirit." Dylan said, chuckling. "I assume you've gone through the scroll completely, right?"

Rui nodded. "I remember it perfectly."

"Good." He said as he gestured Rui to follow him. "Then you know exactly what's waiting for you in store, correct?"

Rui nodded.

The devised and recommended training regime for Outer Convergence was quite interesting.

The first stage was some elementary form training, that had the user go through a set of motions that involved all muscle groups simultaneously. These were intensive dynamic workouts that focused on priming the user's mind to get used to delicately coordinated muscle group expansion and contraction rhythms.

This was the very first step to eventually paving the way to converging the power generated by all those muscle groups, the end goal. There was a total of thirteen elaborate dynamic exercises in total. Which Rui noted was equal to the number of broad muscle groups in the human body.

The second stage of training was sparring with equipment that restricted the motion of certain muscle groups. The user would have to rely on muscle groups that would normally not be used to a high extent. Rui had instantly realized this was to ensure that the process of regularly and routinely drawing power from each muscle group would become part of muscle memory. The more one rigorously trained each muscle group individually, the more smoothly and timely one would be able to use it.

The final training stage was actually wearing a suit that heavily resisted the motion of the body. The suit was carefully configured to ensure that the user's raw strength was not enough. This was done by conducting a series of weight-lifting tests to measure the physical strength of the user, and the suit was configured accordingly. The user was then supposed to utilize the gains made from the previous training stages simultaneously to be able to move past their physical limit.



Rui immediately realized that the purpose of this training stage was meant to force the user to consolidate the gains made from the previous stages and use them not only simultaneously, but as one. Draw immense amount of power from each muscle group using the muscle memory inherited in the second stage, and then constructively funnel it across the body using the coordinative muscle memory built from the first stage.

He figured the more and more the user was able to accomplish this, the closer the user would be to mastering Outer Convergence. The fact that the user was supposed to be able to move normally despite the suit was an indication that principle of Outer Convergence had been mastered.

The final step was to get used to applying it to strikes, which could be accomplished through rigorous sparring.

Rui fell in love with the entire training process. It was such a novel means of mastering a powerful technique. He couldn't help but want to devote all of his time purely to Outer Convergence.

"Alright, let's begin." Dylan said. "You've memorized all the workouts, you said? Then begin with the first one."

Rui immediately picked up some training weight bands, wearing them in the specified location. Then he began the strange set of exercising routines, performing what resembled a twisting or a spiralling squat. It may have looked comical from the outside. But Rui's background in training regimes for combat sports allowed him to realize what was happening.

This training regime forces his mind to coordinate five muscle groups simultaneously and cooperatively in order to perform this exercise under the burden of the heavy training weights on his limbs. If the muscle groups did not cooperate and coordinate, then the body would simply be unable to perform this exercise.

The exercise was grueling and painful, it reminded him of when he had just started out more than a year ago.

That thought brought back immense nostalgia. Back then he was a nameless runt among more than a thousand other nameless runts, who had managed to pass the Entrance Exam among a million other nameless runts.

And now here he was being personally guided by none other than a Martial Squire.

Truly, it was surreal looking at how far he'd come.

"Focus." Dylan warned. "Your form is crude. Don't hasten the squat up, and don't bounce as you come down. This stage is extremely important. If you don't do this well, you can kiss your chances of mastering this technique goodbye, young man."

Rui wordlessly nodded, huffing as he felt his muscles burning as he squatted up and down.

The burn was excruciating yet immensely satisfying. It was a strange experience, to feel such contradictory emotions simultaneously.

Soon, Dylan had him move on to the other workouts.

Each of them focused on the coordination of a particular muscles group with other muscle groups.

The Latissimus Dorsi, Rhomboid, Trapezius, Teres Muscle, erector Spinae muscle groups that constitute the back muscles were all individually coordinated with other the other muscle groups across the body. These exercises often involved the simultaneously bending or twisting back and forth of the spine in conjunction with some other movement that put pressure on the upper skeletal system.

If the coordination of the muscles weren't perfect, then there would be damage to the back muscles. This is why such exercises were strongly recommended against on Earth as opposed to safer workouts. But on Gaea, damage in training often meant very little. This allowed Rui to engage in training regimes he would have never even dreamed of recommending, let alone doing himself. And the gains were worth it.

Each and every muscle group was moving in ways that it seldom did, strengthening those movements and refining them.

Even though this was his very first day, he could feel that he had made satisfactory progress. These movements that he had never felt the need to focus on would now become the foundation for a new technique that would bolster his Martial Art!

### Chapter 130: Inner Divergence

Rui spent a few hours on the first stage of Outer Convergence training. It was more draining than he'd expected. He had to consume two potions before he was good enough to continue training.

Though much to Squire Dylon's surprise, he halted his training and left the facility after bidding him farewell.

Rui had purchased four techniques, not one. He wanted to begin training in all of them. Once he got an idea for how difficult or easy the training regimes for each technique was then he could formulate an efficient plan and schedule as for how to go about it.

Dedicating an equal amount of time for techniques that were unequally difficult to master was not an efficient allocation of time.

"Alright..." Rui stretched as he left the striking training facility. "What to do next?"

He shrugged before heading over to the defense training facility. He wanted to begin training Inner Divergence as soon as possible.

"Squire Fare." Rui greeted, bowing to the head instructor of the defense training facility with respect. "I'm here to begin training with the Inner Divergence."

A muscular woman built like a tank turned around, glancing at Rui. "Training a third defensive technique? Acute Edge and Elastic Shift are falling short already?" A flash of surprise crept onto her

chiseled face. "I would have thought you would go longer without purchasing a defensive technique, with how well you mastered them."

"Me too." Rui shrugged. "But I decided to take a cautionary measure anyway, after having run into two dangerous missions twice in a week."

She snorted in response. "Good choice, defense is the most important part of combat, it is literally the only thing that separates you from death. Too many people don't develop their defense enough, and what happens as a result? They die." She glanced at Rui with an approving look. "I'm glad you aren't foolish like them. Come, I'll train your defense so that it never cracks!"

Rui smiled wryly as he nodded.

"Inner Convergence huh?" She glanced at the scroll. "Interesting choice. It's a technique capable of much, but it has high demands of the user. Fail to fulfill them and the technique will fail you. Are you sure you want to learn such a technique?"

"Well, I've already purchased it and refunds aren't allowed." Rui said. "But also, this technique has a high synergy with my Martial Art."

"Hmmm... True." she admitted.

Rui's strange Martial Art was not a secret within the Apprentice circles in the Academy. A powerful, yet bizarre all-rounder style, but not really because it would change shape depending on the fight and his opponent. All the Martial Squires had long become acquainted with it and its capabilities.

"Alright, let's begin." She said. "Inner Divergence is a technique that diverges and dissipates the power of all impacts across the entire body, diluting the effect over a great space thus negating the attack." She reiterated to begin. "The core means by which one does this is by ensuring the attack's trajectory is aligned to the center of mass of the human body. That in combination with flexing each muscle group to support the area of impact will disperse the impact across all muscle groups."

Rui nodded. The concept was simple in theory. By having each muscle group rigid enough, they would be no different from how the shock absorption springs in vehicles work; each muscle group absorbing the shock of impacts.

Technically it wasn't impossible for humans to perform this technique, but the reasons humans couldn't master it was because the mental faculties required to accurately and precisely execute it were superhuman.

That was why it was an Apprentice-level technique; Only Martial Apprentices could perform it.

The Inner Divergence had two three training stages. The first training stage was to simply train the user to shift when attacked to ensure all attack trajectories would be aimed at the center of mass of the human body.

This was because the center of mass was the middle point of the body, the only point that was close enough to all muscle groups to be supported by them like shock absorption springs.

This was a difficult stage of training, no doubt. Rui was simply unaccustomed to the thought process and the mindset needed. He was starting to see why the technique warned the user of the potential risks and mishaps.

If one messed up the initial set up for ensuring the attack lines up at or close enough to the center of mass, then the technique would simply be ineffective. The user will simply be left defenseless in this case.

Still, if Rui managed to master this part, it would become an extremely valuable tool. One of the reasons for this was that Acute Edge and Elastic Shift were perfectly compatible with Inner Divergence.

Each technique operated by entirely different principles and mechanics that were mutually exclusive with each other, meaning there was no friction between them and they cooperated perfectly.

Acute Edge operated by making the angle extremely sharp instead of direct, this reduced the impact. A bullet that just nicked sharply a wall would do less damage than a bullet that hit a wall straight and head-on.

Elastic Shift worked by increasing the distance and timeframe of the impact, making the impact more elastic. It was like effectively putting a thick bouncy mattress in between the target and the strike, making the strike hurt less.

And Inner Divergence reduced the impact of the strike from within, by using all the muscle groups as shock absorbers, sharing the dispersed impact.

Acute Edge and Elastic Shift mitigated the impact by focus on external factors like angle, distance and time frame of the impact, thus there was no overlap of their focus.

These three techniques cooperated very well. Rui anticipated he might become extremely sturdy once he mastered Inner Divergence.

Over the next few months, he intended to burn the Inner Divergence technique into his muscle memory, no matter what it took.