

## Martial Unity 431

Chapter 431: Single

"I wonder if I should have done that." He scratched his head awkwardly. It was a dangerous plan, and it was a plan that only he could execute. He would be putting himself in a ton of harm, and for what? The Kandrian Empire?

He didn't even feel such a terribly strong loyalty to the Kandrian Empire. The Kandrian Empire was doing very fine in the first place, it didn't need a massive boost.

He shrugged. What was done was done. Besides, although it was risky, he somewhat welcomed it. Even the wars with the other nations were starting to grow a bit dull to him.

He was just too strong.

"At least this way, I can challenge myself with something extremely dangerous." Rui shrugged as he returned back to his lodgings.

It didn't even take a single day for the Martial Union to summon Rui back.

"Commissioner Feristen?" Rui asked as he returned back to the Martial Union office. "You called?"

"Yes." he nodded. "The strategic department has analyzed the plan you have provided and has evaluated it favorably. You have already expressed your personal consent in the execution of the plan, correct?"

"Yes, I'm willing to execute it if the Martial Union requires me to," Rui replied simply.

"Well, that's good to hear." Commissioner Feristen replied. "Then be ready, you'll need to go over the strategy to iron out the details with the strategic department."

Rui nodded. "Will do."

"If all goes well, we can try it out against the other nations over the dispute of certain territories in the center of the Serevian Dungeon." Commissioner Feristen told Rui.

Over the next few days, Rui ironed out the plan that he had proposed to the strategic department of the Kandrian Empire, honing out all the details to maximize the effectiveness of the plan and minimize the risk.

Soon, it was time for Rui to actually apply the plan in combat.

The four super nations were rapidly grabbing up all the remaining territories. However, the more they did that, the closer they came to the center of the Serevian Dungeon, and the territories began involving more than just one nation.

Before, each nation was contested by only the two closest nations, but now most remaining territories were being contested by three nations because the three nations were equally close to the territory.

This was predicted by all the nations of course, and it was only primed to get worse. Soon, at the very center of the core of the Serevian Dungeons were territories that were equally close to all four super nations, which would involve a conflict involving all four nations.

The Kandrian Empire reserved Rui's strategy for the right time. It would become less effective once it was known about by the other nations.

As the four nations began gobbling territory up, the only territory left was the territory that was equally distant from all of them.

The heart of the Serevian Dungeon was soon the sole remaining territory left that could be colonized by the four nations. Whoever gained control over the last and the largest piece of resource rich territory would likely win the Serevian Dungeon Wars.

Of the four nations, the Sekigahara Confederate, the Republic of Gortea, and the Britannian Empire each mobilized their armies of not just Martial Apprentices but also potion users.

Yet, the Kandrian Empire did none of that, much to the shock of the other nations. Each of the nations had a power information gather capability that allowed them to gain insights into the preparations and mobilizations of the forces of the Kandrian Empire.

Yet, to their surprise, the Kandrian Empire was not mobilizing all that much. The offensive team seemed to be on standby, but that was nothing. Where were all the large preparations and mobilizations that the resource-intensive military would be eating?

How could the Kandrian Empire not be engaging in heavy mobilizations like the rest of them? Did it plan on conceding the heart of the Serevian Dungeon to the remaining nations?

None of the other three nations thought that was a reasonable or likely position for the Kandrian Empire to have.

It was evidently clear that the Kandrian Empire was plotting something.

Yet none of them were sure what.

It was mindboggling. It was definitely not some high-end technological solution that exceeded the Squire Realm because the tree branch reacted to both Martial Artists and technological solutions that exceeded the limit it set. This meant reducing the number of possibilities it could be.

It was possible that the Kandrian Empire had learned something that reduced the value of the core territory of the Serevian Dungeon. This was speculation that the other nations went through even as their armies mobilized and were on the verge of being set out to wage war over the territories.

Many countries thought that the Kandrian Empire was biding time to let the other three nations fight it out amongst themselves and then charge in with an army afterward. In this case, the wisdom of fighting a war with the other two nations was raised into question.

However, at the end of the day, the possibility was dismissed because the fortifications would be erected by the winning party as soon as the wars were over, making it even more difficult to boot the

winner out of the territory. Furthermore, the spoils of war would all be claimed by the winner part alone.

Regardless, the three nations did not stop mobilizing their armies. The final war was inevitable and approaching. The three nations deployed their armies.

Later, the Kandrian Empire's gates opened as Rui walked out.

Alone.

He immediately began sprinting toward the heart of the core of the Serevian Dungeon. The three nations were incredibly confused when their surveillance channels caught a single Martial Apprentice being deployed by the Kandrian Empire.

This was much more confusing than if the Kandrian Empire had deployed nobody at all. What was the point of deploying a single Martial Artist?

#### Chapter 432: Clash

The nations recognized Rui even with his mask on. Martial Artists were distinct and Rui was very infamous at this stage. Every nation had had a hard time containing him in war. He was simply a menace and no individual Martial Artist lasted very long against him.

However, he by himself could not compensate for an entire army. The nations felt more confused than offended. What were they trying to do? Were they just sending a single Martial Apprentice to speculate the war and gather intelligence from a distance?

However, the Kandrian Empire did not need to engage in such tactics for surveillance. It was also quite clear that Rui wasn't primarily or even significantly a sensory-oriented Martial Apprentice. Thus, there was no way that Rui was being deployed due to a need for surveillance, there were many more fit Martial Apprentices that could be deployed for this particular role.

So why send their ace Martial Apprentice all alone in the middle of a war?

He shouldn't have been able to accomplish anything meaningful on a battlefield with three armies, yet the nations paid attention to his movements, if only because they were curious as to what his purpose on the battlefield could possibly be.

Rui didn't need to travel much to reach the battlefield. It was literally the final piece of valuable territory left and it wasn't far away at all.

Once he reached it, he was immediately attacked by many Martial Apprentices. These were powerful high-grade Martial Apprentices of each nation that had been assigned to stall and potentially defeat him. It was an overkill force but that was merely because they were the combined force of three opinions that each wanted to hold him off or ideally kill him.

All of them wished to do the latter, after being chewed out by their superiors for being unable to defeat a singular Martial Apprentice.

The atmosphere grew taut as Rui's brains both went into top gear mode. Time slowed down as he analyzed his circumstances. He needed to break past and reach the center of the war.

That was his goal at the moment, reaching the center of the war being waged at the center of the Serevian Dungeon.

BOOM!

Rui somersaulted out of the way as he evaded a powerful long-range attack from one of them narrowly, immediately behind was a speedy Martial Apprentice.

POW POW POW!

Despite being caught off-guard, Rui reacted to all of his strikes perfectly, blocking them perfectly well, much to his opponent's surprise. His opponent had been hoping to land clean strikes that would draw blood.

Yet Rui's reaction speed was something that was outside the Apprentice Realm. The Mindmirror Secondary brain worked parallelly with his main brain thanks to the Mind Embed technique allowing it to amplify his Primordial Instinct technique as well. His reactions and reflexes were almost impossible to assail for even the fastest of Martial Apprentices to assail.

WHOOSH

Rui evaded yet another attack as he hoped to squeeze through his opposition hoping to get to the center of the Serevian Dungeon.

Yet, he had no such luck.

Three Martial Apprentices appear before him before, targeting him specifically. They boxed him, looking to simply dogpile him with sheer numbers.

They all rushed at him at the same time. Yet they simply underestimated how difficult Rui was to suppress.

Even while facing all three of them, he managed to keep up. He feinted and dodged, bobbed and weaved, and used his high-grade power, speed and durability to keep up with opponents. Furthermore, the predictive models were being constructed as rapidly as Rui could manage.

However, even without the predictive model, Rui's engagement with his opponents was phenomenal. It was impossible to dodge and block every single attack three Martial Apprentices dogpiling him, however, he could time and place his dodges and blocks correctly such that he could mitigate every single attack. Even if he did not have the ability to also simultaneously launch his own attacks while dealing with the onslaught of the opponents that outnumbered him, simultaneously.

That was until the initial predictive models were built.

WHOOSH

BAM!

Rui dodged a right as he ducked with impeccable timing and launch an uppercut that perfectly fit into the counter-vulnerable gap that was created by the hooking maneuver. The powerful blow crashed into his opponent's head, empowered with Outer Convergence, Flame Breathing, and Adamant Reforging. Furthermore, the Reverberating Lance technique permeated the impact deeper into his head.

The sheer impact shook the brain enough to trigger enough brain trauma causing his brain to shut down on the spot.

He fell unconscious from a single strike from Rui. Even though he was a powerful Martial Apprentice with techniques that weren't weaker than that of Rui, a combination of the right timing made all the difference in the world.

WHOOSH

Another Martial Apprentice tried to get Rui, not willing to loosen the pressure that they were exerting on him, yet Rui saw that attack coming a mile away with the help of the predictive model and his reaction speed and the attack crashed into a feint.

Rui leaped away backward as he launched a barrage of Tempestuous Ripples, slamming into his opponents, yet the second he distanced himself from the close-quarters combat, the long-range specialists launched all kinds of attacks toward Rui.

Yet to their frustration, despite the sharpness and timing of their swift attacks, Rui was simply too good at somehow mitigating all the attacks that were unleashed against him. It was ridiculous to watch. A team of Martial Apprentices fighting him simultaneously in close-quarters combat wasn't good enough to beat him in close-quarters combat and long-range Martial Apprentices also struggled to take down Rui with their extended long-range targeted attacking.

Rui lashed out towards the long-range Martial Apprentices, yet to his annoyance, the close-quarters jumped in, intercepting him. Both the long-range and close-quarters teams realized that they genuinely needed to work together to have any chance of taking down Rui Quarrier.

## Chapter 433: Epiphany

This was the single riskiest mission Rui have ever partaken in, not even the mission in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana that featured an enemy Martial Squire had been so threatening. Each of the three nations had sent its own team of Martial Apprentices that was meant to suppress him.

Of course, none of the nations had expected that he himself would be deployed alone with no backup. But the Martial Apprentices that were specifically deployed to target him were immediately informed of his arrival.

Rui pushed to his absolute maximum. He used nearly every technique at his disposal as he fought violently, trying to break past the many Martial Apprentices that had been targeting him. What surprised him was that although the Martial Apprentices targeting him from different nations did not actively cooperate with each other, they did not fight against each other either.

They were completely focused on taking down Rui.

He was forced to fight nine powerful Martial Apprentices that were specifically meant to take him down. Yet, to everyone's surprise. Rui managed to hold on, even if barely.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui managed to cleanly evade the powerful attacks of a close-range Martial Apprentice.

BAM!

He was immediately struck with a wide-range projectile, pushing him away.

('I can't separate from the close-range Martial Apprentices.') Rui immediately concluded. The long-range Martial Apprentices had to restrain themselves when he was in close-range proximity to their close-quarters teammates.

He immediately rushed forward to meet the close-range Martial Apprentices as they aimed to take him down in hand-to-hand combat.



Despite being surrounded by Martial Apprentices, he managed to keep up. His heightened awareness and reactions were an absolute godsend, the combination of the Mindmirror brain and Primordial Instinct was incredibly powerful even at the highest of echelons of the Apprentice Realm.

He blocked some attacks while simultaneously contorting his body to avoid an equal number of strikes. He abused his maneuvering and speed technique to the maximum, using Parallel Walk, Balanced Direction, and Wind Breathing to allow him to evade position himself at the right time and place accurately. He further used Phantom Step to feint to misdirect their attacks and aim. He used Flow Flux to intercept and destabilize his opponents while using Blink to land as many surprise attacks as he could.

PEW!

WHOOSH

He managed to land the Stinger on one of his opponents while evading a haymaker from behind.

POW POW POW!

An offensive speed-oriented Martial Apprentice managed to tag Rui with a barrage of strikes cleanly, hurting him in the process.

BAM!

Another powerful swing slammed into Rui, flinging him away.

POW POW POW!

The long-range Martial Apprentices peppered him with different kinds of attacks from varying distances.

He grimaced as he quickly regained his bearing, yet he was immediately beset by three more Martial Apprentices who unleashed an onslaught of attacks on him.

Rui pushed himself as he fought back. He used Inner Divergence, Acute Edge, Elastic Shift, and Adamant Reforging to deal with the attacks of two of his opponents as he targeted the remaining Martial Apprentice.

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui launched a barrage of swift and powerful attacks, using Reverberating Lance to permeate the impact of his attacks to his vital organs, leaving him reeling.

The brief respite allowed Rui to focus on the remaining two Martial Apprentices, he positioned himself between them and waited for the right moment.

WHOOSH

BAM!

POW!

Their attacks crashed into an empty image, passing through it and striking each other off-guard.

Rui raced through the field as he evaded the attacks from the long-range Martial Apprentices and unleashed an avalanche of strikes, trying to tag him. He threw them off with a combination of Phantom Step and Shadow Step and the Mind Mask technique that reduced his presence and sense of danger to the absolute maximum.

Rui disappeared into the chaotic battlefield as the Martial Apprentices chased after him, using the environment to his favor.

The atmosphere grew tense as the Martial Apprentices saw flashes of him in the chaotic environment. The other nations had already built an extensive profile on Rui and the way he fought. He was extremely resourceful and tactical, when he fought, the environment fought alongside him.

None of them wanted to get caught up in his spell.

Yet none of them had realized it was too late.

BAM!

He caught the group in their blind spot with Shadow Step and the Mind Mask technique, slamming the offensive speed-oriented Martial Apprentice with a power Flowing Canon. At his current level, the attack's sheer power was beyond what something a speed-oriented Martial Apprentice could withstand when caught off-guard.

The attack launched him into the distance, as Rui reduced one of the Martial Apprentices meant to target him.

His enemies felt a shiver down their spine as they realized their roles had changed.

They were no longer targeting him.

No.

He was targeting them.

He let go of the Mind Mask restraining presence as the weight of his mind was unleashed. The sheer pressure of the concentration of one of the singled greatest Martial Apprentices of the modern era crashed onto them, jolting them

It was then that it hit them.

They might actually lose. Despite all the odds.

That was how fearsome Rui was in their eyes

What ensued was a devastating battle. Rui fought like a demon, expressing combat prowess they had never felt before. The difference between now and before was that Rui had finally completed the predictive models for all of them. He was no longer on the back foot.

The remaining seven Martial Apprentices weren't weak, they were among the cream of the Martial Apprentices deployed by their respective nations.

Attacks emerged from three different directions of the Martial Apprentices of the three different nations.

Time slowed down in Rui's perspective as his pupils dilated.

He knew exactly what he needed to do in a moment of incredible clarity and peace.

('I've arrived at the higher Realm.') He realized.

#### Chapter 434: Execution

Rui rode a wave of euphoria as he felt his Martial Art maturing, it was a feeling of unmistakable clarity. He lashed forward as he acted on the predictive models that he had created for each of the over the span of the fight while deriving the best counter to their impending actions with the adaptive evolution model.

WHOOSH

BAM!

He avoided a predicted low kick by leaping forward with a flying knee kick, striking his opponent's diaphragm with a powerful impact. It was especially worse because Reverberating Lance permeated the

impact deeper into the body, shocking the diaphragm and impeding his opponent's breathing. The woman collapsed, writhing on the ground.

Six more Martial Apprentices to go.

WHOOSH

POW POW POW!

He evaded a roundhouse kick as he threw a combo of strikes at his opponent, disorienting him with the powerful impacts of his strikes permeating deeper.

The remaining two immediately ganged up on him.

BLINK

PEW!

He managed to land a Stinger on his opponent's neck veiled through a Blink. He immediately grimaced, retreating as he cradled his bleeding neck.

The final remaining close-range Martial Apprentice threw a swing that Rui saw coming from a mile away thanks to the predictive model.

CLASP

He intercepted the swing with Flow Flux immediately, destabilizing balance and leaving him wide open in the balance.

BAM!

A powerful kick to the jaw rattled his head violently, causing enough blunt-force trauma to cause the brain to shut down. Rui didn't bother trying to kill them as the long-range Martial Apprentices immediately unleashed an onslaught, yet it was too late.

Rui avoid them as he confused them with feints and misdirection along with his swift maneuvering. He ran straight toward them as he launched multiple Tempestuous Ripples to block and neutralize as many of their attacks as he could while he relied on maneuvering to evade all of them.

The long-range Martial Apprentices furious launched as many long-range attacks as they could, whether it meant extended flexibility, wind attacks, launching land, or other sorts of attacks, yet Rui dealt with all of them, much to their dismay.

BOOM!!

A powerful Flowing Canon crashed into the necks of one of the long-range specialists.

He died on the spot.

It didn't take him long to swiftly take down the remaining Martial Apprentices.

He only took a moment of respite after he had defeated all of them. All of the Martial Apprentices were part of the anti-Rui strike forces that the various nations had created. He had defeated a total of nine powerful high-grade Martial Apprentices.

All by himself.

In front of the entire world, he had forged himself a new feat. At some point in time, the mask he had put on had broken before he had even noticed. The various nations immediately verified his identity as they learned more about the foe that had foiled every response that had ever been thrown against him by any of them.

Yet despite their shock and anger at his feats, there wasn't much fear in all of them.

A single Martial Apprentices could not singlehandedly affect an entire large-scale war all by himself, no matter how brilliant he was.

Or so they thought.

Rui immediately began sprinting to the very center of the chaotic war. He used Mind Mask and Shadow Step to avoid gathering the attention of the many Martial Apprentices and potion users that were wrangling with each other in his vicinity and the many siege tanks and other large-scale weapons in the distance.

And soon he arrived.

He immediately knelt on the ground.

The time to execute the plan that he had proposed to the Kandrian Empire had come.

He closed his eyes, while still wary of his surroundings.

He crushed every stray thought that flashed through his mind as he began gathering his concentration and focus like he had done so many times. Yet this time, they were especially important, they would be playing a very significant role in the upcoming plan. He knew that there was no way he would be able to execute the plan successfully.

In his mind, he began using his imagination in the Mind Mask technique to construct the most powerful mind mask he ever had. He pictured himself as invincible, invulnerable, and omnipotent. He pictured himself embodying the very concept of power, and everything that it meant to be strong. This was the most Mind Mask he had ever created.

He opened his eyes as he prepared his reflexes and alertness. He knew that if he didn't react appropriately and timely, he would die in an extremely painful way and no number of potions would be able to save his life.

('It's time.') He whispered. The weight about what he was going to hit him, if he succeeded, most of the people on the battlefield would die. It was a heavy burden.

He sighed. ("Here goes nothing.")

He donned the mind mask he had created.

Suddenly, the battlefield froze as a Squire-level aura weighed across the entire battlefield, every Martial Apprentice recognized that feeling, the pressure of mind of a being that was very well a higher life form than themselves. They felt weak and primitive before such might like they were insects.

Rui had also chosen to channel his bloodlust, the bloodlust of a Squire sent shivers down everybody's spine as they barely had time to wonder what a Martial Squire was doing in the Serevian Dungeon.

Yet, that was when it happened.

The branches of the singular tree that had formed the Serevian Dungeon had activated.

Rui had already documented that these branches had evolved to instantly attack any threat perceived to be in the Squire Realm by the tree.

However, the battlefield was specifically chosen because it was barren, with no vegetation. The closest ring of branches was outside the battlefield.

This was the plan that Rui had cooked up.

He deliberately put himself at the center of the war, so that when the tree branches attacked, they would be forced to attack from outside the battlefield. And in reaching him, they would run through everybody else first.

That was why he had positioned himself in the center of the battlefield. Everybody would become targets along with himself.



## Chapter 435: Outcome

The branches of the trees of the Serevian Dungeon had incredible penetrative power. Rui recalled when he had first entered the Serevian Dungeon, he had been penetrated by a branch that easily impaled him with no difficulty, despite the Adamant Reforging technique making him extremely tough and durable. It had also moved fast enough to bypass his reflexes when he wasn't alert and focused.

This meant that it was extremely likely to be quite lethal to most Martial Apprentices. However, this never mattered because the branches weren't a threat to Martial Apprentices they were only a threat to threats perceived to be in the Squire Realm.

This was the very core of the plan that Rui had come up with. If he used the Squire-level mask, he would be triggering the tree and the branches would be unleashed toward him.

He also knew from experience when testing them that the branches didn't give a shit what was in between them and their target, they simply moved through the shortest path between themselves and their target; a straight line.

They didn't care what blocked their path, they simply blasted past any and all obstacles between them and their target.

Rui had wondered, what if there was an army between him and them?

In this case, the branches would blast through the army in order to reach him.

What if that army was an army of the enemy?

Wouldn't that have meant that Rui could vanquish an entire enemy army in a blink of an eye as long as he and the army and the trees were positioned correctly?

It was then that Rui realized that the squire-level Mind Mask technique was extremely powerful because it had the power to manipulate the Serevian Dungeon to its favor.

In the Serevian Dungeon, Rui was the only being who commands the Serevian Dungeon, indirectly. When Rui realized the devastating potential of his plan, he immediately submitted it to Commissioner Feristen and Colonel Carnes. The two of them were initially skeptical of such a plan, but as Rui explained they grew increasingly shocked as they realized the viability of the plan wasn't low.

The other nations had initially thought that Kandrian Empire had lost its mind when they deployed a single Martial Apprentice instead of an army.

But Rui wasn't alone.

He was fighting with the entirety of the Serevian Dungeon on his side. The others had an army, he didn't need more than himself.

What followed was one of the most shocking occurrences that any of the nations had seen since they stepped foot in the Serevian Dungeon.

The entirety of the part of forest surrounding the battlefield warped as the branches shot outwards at staggering speeds and power. Branches from all directions from outside the forest shot inwards with ferocious momentum.

The tanks were hit first.

The branches blasted through the tanks, spurring countless holes in them as they shot forward. Instantly, all the personnel that was operating the siege tanks died in an instant. They were merely normal human beings who were impaled by an avalanche of branches.

A tsunami of razor-sharp branches shot through the battlefield at extraordinary speeds and power.

It was blindingly fast.

Most Martial Apprentices were impaled across multiple locations.

Most of them died.

Of course, not all of them died.

The Martial Apprentices with extraordinary passive defense managed to get away unscathed.

The best and also the most fortunate of speed-oriented Martial Apprentices were fast enough to somehow evade the branches as they were lucky enough to be in a position to react rather than too consumed with their opponent or the war to react.

All of the Martial Apprentices on the battlefield were not incompetent. They were high-grade Martial Apprentices who were qualified to be on the battlefield of the Serevian Dungeon.

Had they been alert, focused, and prepared for the branches, most would have at least managed to survive.

However, they were all extremely distracted by the war and their opponents. Their lack of awareness and the surprise and shock that followed greatly hindered their movements. The initial pain also messed with their response, causing them to make suboptimal responses. All of these factors caused them to fall prey to the flood of branches.

The branches spiked across the battlefield as they lashed out towards the center of the battlefield, towards their target.

Fifty meters.

Ten meters.

One meter.

It was only when they were ten centimeters away from him did they stop.

Rui had managed to deactivate the Mind Mask technique in time, just in time. This was the riskiest part of the operation.

If he stopped the Mind Mask technique too early, then it would not have done its job and the operation would only be a partial success, but if he stopped the technique too late, then he would simply die after the branches impaled him from all directions.

Still, he had managed to cut it close.

"Too close." He whispered as the branches retracted once the Squire-level aura had subsided. The branches quickly retracted as they returned to their original position.

They left behind carnage, unlike anything Rui had ever seen.

In just a few moments, countless people had died.

The few that survived looked around with the rawest, unadulterated bewilderment and shock that they had ever seen. They looked at the countless littered corpses, completely dumbfounded and speechless.

They didn't even know what to do.

What should they have ought to do in such a situation?

There was nothing in the protocols on what to do if you survived a freak branch catastrophe that annihilated your entire army.

However, the Kandrian Empire did not mess around. They had been waiting in anticipation and tension. They had bet everything on this plan succeeding, going so far as to allow the three countries to fight over it. The Kandrian Empire immediately opened its gates and they deployed the offensive team immediately. The team soon arrived at the scene, since it was that close.

## Chapter 436: Aftermath

All of the nations had been surveilling the war at the heart of the Serevian Dungeon closely. It was an important war over the richest of territories with the highest esoteric resources yield. Whichever nation of the four nations won that war would likely 'win' the war of the Serevian Dungeon as a whole.

The Sekigahara Confederate, Republic of Gorteau, and the Britannian Empire had thought the Kandrian Empire had simply thrown in the towel as it chose not to send a powerful army, but instead a single Martial Apprentice. A single Martial Apprentice who, while no doubt extremely impressive, could not accomplish anything meaningful in a war of this scale all by himself.

Thus, one could imagine their sheer shock and bewilderment when a huge tide of branches swept across the warzone wiping out almost all of the military and Martial Artist assets from the entire battlefield.

Initially, they were shocked as such a catastrophe was completely outside of any predictions of any of the nations. However, the nations weren't stupid, it didn't take too long for the intelligence departments to gain an understanding of what happened.

Or what they thought happened.

"The Kandrian Empire violated the Serevian Pact by bringing in a Martial Squire!" The delegate of the Britannian Empire snapped, barely containing his rage.

"The Sekigahara Confederate strongly supports the Britannian Empire in its allegations of the Kandrian Empire." The delegate of the Sekigahara Confederate coldly supported the delegate of the Britannian Empire.

"The Republic of Gorteau also chastises the Kandrian Empire for this violation of the Serevian Pact." The delegate of the Republic of Gorteau chipped in.

The three nations were infuriated, and an emergency diplomatic Summit had been called for by all three of them as they applied pressure on the Kandrian Empire.

"The Kandrian Empire vehemently denies the accusations levied by the Sekighara Confederate, the Republic of Gorteau, and the Britannian Empire." The delegate of the Kandrian Empire calmly stated. "The Kandrian Empire has not violated a single clause of the Serevian Pact. The Kandrian Empire advises the three nations to not make defamatory allegations."

"There is irrefutable proof that the Kandrian Empire deployed a Squire-level asset. Multiple surviving Martial Apprentices from different nations have corroborated that the bloodlust and pressure they had experienced were in the Squire Realm." The delegate of the Britannian Empire.

"The Kandrian Empire employed a Martial Apprentice, we do not believe that the three nations are unfamiliar with the Martial Apprentice deployed." The delegate of the Kandrian Empire said. "We have documented proof that the Martial Artist deployed is a Martial Apprentice. The Kandrian Empire is even willing to allow the other nations to verify this, under the supervision of the Kandrian Empire, of course."

"The testimonies of the surviving Martial Apprentices of the three nations cannot be explained by a Martial Apprentice." The delegate of the Britannian Empire coldly retorted.

"Sure they can." The delegate of the Kandrian Empire replied casually. "The Martial Apprentice in question is a Martial Apprentice that has mastered a mental technique that allows the user to manipulate the pressure and danger exuded by the user. The Martial Apprentice in question can use the technique to exert Squire-level aura and danger. This explains why the surviving Martial Apprentices of the battlefield report experiencing a Squire-level aura. We have documented proof of this as well."

The delegates of the three nations remained silent at that as they furiously thought about a valid counter to the explanation that the delegate of the Kandrian Empire.

In reality, none of the three nations gave a damn about whether the Kandrian Empire did or didn't break the Serevian Pact. All they wanted was an excuse to diplomatically justify the extra retaliation from the three nations. They were enraged by the losses they suffered and were simply looking for the best excuse that could justify the three nations taking measures to make the Kandrian Empire pay for their losses.

Yet, to their surprise, the Kandrian Empire had an airtight excuse. The nations could not simply trigger a war outside the bounds of the Serevian Dungeon because each of the three nations had publically agreed to the Serevian Pact that prevented them from escalating the conflict outside the Serevian Dungeon.

If they did not have just cause in any measures for retribution they took, they would not be able to justify even the slightest bit of retribution outside the Serevian Dungeon.

It would violate their credibility and reputation in the international geopolitical market. It would affect alliances, partnerships, agreements, and trade as well. Nations would not want to engage in trade with a nation that violated written agreements with such ease. It would jeopardize trade and supply chains and channels that were vital to the economies of their nations.

If only the Kandrian Empire had violated the Serevian Pact, then their responses would be justified. However, it had become exceedingly clear as the delegate of the Kandrian Empire provided irrefutable proof in favor of its claims, that there was no possibility of that being the case.

The Kandrian Empire had prepared extremely carefully, the strategic department had predicted the need for proof and had already conducted several demonstrations of several kinds that proved the truth.

"Thus, we can say with absolute certainty that the operation was carried out by a Martial Apprentice." The delegate of the Kandrian Empire concluded, switching off the projection. "There was no violation of the Serevian Pact, all MARTIAL and military assets that the Kandrian Empire has ever deployed have been limited to the Apprentice Realm. If there's nothing else, then this emergency diplomatic meeting comes to an end."

The delegates of the three nations were silent, there was nothing more to be said.

"Good day to you, ladies and gentlemen." The delegate of the Kandrian Empire chuckled as he logged out of the call, causing them to leave silently one by one as well.

Back in the Serevian Dungeon, the Kandrian Empire claimed the heart of the Serevian Dungeon as it rapidly began erecting powerful fortifications around the entire area, claiming it for itself.

Chapter 437: Next Step

The Kandrian Empire had timed the application of this strategy quite well. It had used this tactic for the final and the most important territory in the Serevian Dungeon so that the element of surprise would be at the highest for the most important territory to be claimed.

The three nations did not mount a retaliatory force against the Kandrian Empire within the Serevian Dungeon in order to reclaim the core of the Serevian Dungeon.

Not because they chose not to, but because they couldn't, it wasn't viable. Each of the three nations had lost a large sum of assets to the branch attack that Rui had triggered. Their bases in the Serevian Dungeon were simply too lacking in the military and especially Martial Artist assets needed to siege and overrun the fortifications that the Kandrian Empire had erected around the core of the Serevian Dungeon that they had now claimed as Kandrian territory.

Martial Apprentices did not grow on trees. Each nation had a limited number of Martial Apprentices. This naturally meant that each nation had a limited number of Martial Apprentices that could be deployed to the Serevian Dungeon.

The nations couldn't possibly deploy every single Martial Apprentice in their Martial Artist population to the Serevian Dungeon. Each nation had estimates of required Martial Apprentices based on different scenarios and circumstances to fulfill different goals, as well as a thorough analysis on the costs vs benefits of varying degrees of ambition in their Serevian Dungeon endeavors. All of these together created hard limits to the number of Martial Apprentices that they were willing to deploy to the Serevian Dungeon.

In order for the three nations to challenge the Kandrian Empire, they would need to exceed the hard limit of Martial Apprentices that they were willing to deploy in the Serevian Dungeon.

As much as they hated the Kandrian Empire for the moment, they were unwilling to cross their limits. If they deployed any more Martial Apprentices to the Serevian Dungeon for yet another battle, they would cross the threshold where the net losses incurred would exceed the benefits of the resources extracted from the core of the Serevian Dungeon.

This was how the Kandrian Empire annihilated three armies without a single casualty and proceeded to claim the territory over which the three armies were waging war.

Leaks of the happening leaked into international media as many people in the local geo-political sphere that encompassed the nations in question gaped at the shocking result.



The details were unclear and the media outlets that reported on the issue merely reported that the Kandrian Empire had pushed back three nations over a territorial dispute with some operation that allegedly featured a single Martial Apprentice.

The public went wild at that report as many speculations regarding what the operation was or who the Martial Apprentice were spurred wildly. Of course, there were a large number of people who expressed heavy skepticism over the news. After all, it was simply too wacky and wild to believe.

The Serevian Dungeon Wars came to an end as almost all of the resource-rich territory had been colonized by some nation or the other. The nations deployed enough number of defensive Martial Apprentices, while the rest of the Martial Apprentices would be sent back home and their mission in the Serevian Dungeon would be complete.

"Allow me to congratulate and thank you on behalf of the Kandrian Empire." Commissioner Feristen told him. "Your contributions to this mission have been disproportionately higher than what we would expect from a participating Martial Apprentice. We had high expectations of you in the field given your track record and other accomplishments. You not only exceeded those by making a visible impact on the battlefield in every battle despite facing active and targeted suppression, but you also brainstormed and singlehandedly executed an operation that allowed us to annihilate all opposition in a war over territory without a single casualty."

He took a pause. "The Martial Union is very pleased with your performance and has decided to double your already immense earnings, as a token of our appreciation. Should you need anything, you may turn to the Martial Union for aid, and you will find that we are willing to make accommodations and offer assistance that we would not extend to anybody else in your position. We hope to see you go far down your Martial Path."

"Thank you, commissioner Feristen." Rui bowed lightly. "I'm afraid the Martial Union has overestimated me."

"Not at all." He replied. "We're quite sincere in our appreciation of you."

The conversation proceeded blandly for a bit until commissioner Feristen asked an important question.

"What do you plan to do from here on out?" Commissioner Feristen asked curiously.

Rui paused for a moment as he contemplated his answer. "... I think I have achieved Squire candidacy. The clarity I feel about the current state of my Martial Art... Seems the last battle finally pushed me far enough to the point that I could reach this stage."

Commissioner Feristen's eyes lit up in elation. "Incredible! That's absolutely amazing to hear. The Martial Union will gladly aid you in the breakthrough to the higher Realm. Have you had any thoughts on whether you want to begin preparations for the breakthrough to the Squire Realm immediately?"

"I do want to begin them immediately." Rui nodded at his words. "I have waited long enough. Are you aware of what the preparation entails?"

"I'm not authorized to reveal it, unfortunately." He shook his head. "The Martial Union will first verify whether you have indeed achieved Squire candidacy when you apply for it. Once your status as a Squire Candidate is verified, you will be offered the Squire breakthrough process."

"How much does it cost?" Rui asked.

"Do not worry, the cost is incurred as a loan without interest even if you are unable to pay for it." Commissioner Feristen assured. "However, with the income you have accumulated from the Serevian Dungeon, I can't imagine you being forced to go down that route."

#### Chapter 438: Plans

A large number of Martial Apprentices left the Serevian Dungeon as the cope for conflict in that territory had gone almost completely. Each of these Martial Apprentices was simply no longer necessary.

"What do all of you plan to do when you get back?" Rui asked.

"I plan on increasing my ability to cope against a greater number of Martial Apprentices," Fae replied. "The Serevian Dungeon has shown me that I'm ill-prepared to handle such circumstances, and that is quite concerning. In the real world, it's not impossible to run into such scenarios. I might end up perishing due to my inability to handle it."

"That's a good initiative." Rui nodded. Fae was a powerful close-quarters palm striker. Increasing her ability to handle multiple opponents was something she had mentioned before.

"I think I might leave the Academy," Kane replied.

Rui raised an eyebrow in surprise. Not because he didn't think Kane was ready. Kane was incredibly powerful as he was right now, stronger than he might have been able to deal with prior to his last training session.

However, if Kane left the Academy, he would have to return back to his family, in all likelihood, something Kane would despise having to do.

"Are you sure?" He asked cautiously.

"I'm seriously considering it." Kane sighed. "The Academy is becoming stuffy and suffocating, I don't want to hide in there forever."

Kane had initially entered the Martial Academy to get away from his family. It would have been the first time he would be living outside their grasp. However, now he was no longer satisfied by that enough for him to force himself to remain there.

"I understand that feeling, the Martial Academy had begun to feel small and shackling to me as well." Rui nodded. "But it's a big decision your you, leaving the Martial Academy. Have you thought about what you want to do?"

"Well, I've become an adult legally." Kane sighed. "That alone isn't enough for me to break away from the grasp of my family as easily, but I have also joined the Wind Sect which is opposed to the Fire Sect that my dad and several other prominent Martial Artists of the Arrancar family belong to."

"Wind Sect, eh? Makes sense." Rui nodded.

The Lightning Sect was the Martial Sect that was surrounded by speed and maneuvering-oriented techniques. However, Rui wasn't surprised that Kane had chosen to join the Wind Sect, a sub-sect of the Lightning that focused on evasive maneuvering specifically.

"Can the Wind Sect help you?" Rui asked.

"If I'm valuable enough, it certainly can." Kane nodded in response. "But only if I'm worth the expenditure of the political capital."

"Fortunately for you, you're a genius with a high affinity for maneuvering, speed, and specifically evasive maneuvering techniques and stealth as well," Rui noted. "Which means they'll probably be willing to go far for you. Is that your plan?"

Kane nodded. "The more I accomplish, the greater the value I am of to the Lightning Sect, and the more and longer they will be willing to accommodate my needs for political protection from my family."

Rui nodded. "That's a realistic and pragmatic plan. You're in no position to resist your family as a Martial Apprentice who just barely is an adult. Your plan gives you a reasonable way to resist."

"Yeah, that's the plan, for now." Kane sighed.

"You've thought it through, have faith in yourself." Rui nodded. "Besides, you've got me, for what little it may be worth. I'd suggest frequently taking long-term missions outside the Kandrian Empire."

"That makes sense. The more time I spend away from the Kandrian Empire, the less I'm incurring from the Lightning Sect, and the less pressure I'm in. Ironically enough, I might actually be able to more relax on foreign missions than I might be able to in the Kandrian Empire." Kane sighed.

"You should also move to the other side of the Empire, just put as much ground between you and your family," Rui noted.

"That won't help all that much to be honest." Kane shrugged. "Distances don't matter to them."

"I suppose that's true."

In truth, Kane just did not want to move away because he wouldn't be able to interact with Rui if he did. Communicating through their communicators or accounters was just not the same, he would feel quite dull if he could not interact with his friends physically.

Even Fae, as much as he would not admit it out loud, had grown on him in the past three years.

"This was an incredible mission." Fiona sighed. "I'm going to be going back to Vargard though, no big changes."

"Same here." Hever calmly replied.

"I want even bigger missions!" Nel grinned.

"Are there even bigger missions of the Apprentice grade?" Kane wondered.

"Most certainly not," Fae added. "The Serevian Dungeon mission is an extremely rare kind of mission in so far as the scale and the difficulty went. Even grade eight Martial Apprentice were merely barely above average in such circumstances."

Many of the high-grade Martial Apprentices that had participated in the Serevian Dungeon wars had forgotten that they were high-grade Martial Apprentices that stood far above the average Martial Apprentice. It was difficult for them to hold the opinion that they were special after having fought in wars in the Serevian Dungeon. The mission had shown Martial Apprentices from not just the Kandrian Empire but all nations just how small and insignificant they were in the grand scheme of things.

There was only one Martial Apprentice that had the right to disagree with that. Yet he didn't care about such things. He had already forgotten all about the Serevian Dungeon as he laid his eyes on the Realm above him. He could almost feel it await his arrival.

The time had finally come. He was quite certain that his Martial Art had achieved a certain degree of maturity. It would not change in its shape all that much even if he mastered several more powerful techniques.

#### Chapter 439: Verify

The six of them eventually split ways when they returned to the Kandrian Empire. Fiona broke off from them first when she returned to Vargard instead of Hajin. Rui broke off from the remaining four of them as he returned home instead of the Martial Academy.

"RUIIIII!" Alice tackled him with a hug when she saw him. "You're back!"

"Alright alright." Rui squeezed out after getting choked by her.

"You went away for more than a month!" She chided him.

"That's not unusual for missions, you know." He sighed.

He was soon swarmed by children and adults alike who inquired about him and his mission. The Orphanage was always excited to hear about Rui's unique experiences as a Martial Artist.

"I'd expected to see you soon when the news of the war in the Serevian Dungeon dying down spread." Julian smiled. "I also heard the most ridiculous tale of a single Martial Apprentice in the Kandrian Empire singlehandedly defeating three armies all by themselves."

Rui chuckled. "Technically true, but overblown and misrepresented."

Julian's eyes widened in shock. He had expected Rui to deny the alleged report.

"But who...?"

"Yours truly," Rui smirked playfully, yet Julian's reactions were even more exaggerated. He knew that Rui was not someone that lied for the sake of an ego boost. It meant that he was quite serious.

"You're picturing the wrong image." Rui waved his hand dismissively. "It's not nearly as impressive as you think it is."

Julian's eyes scrunched in confusion at those words. "I see... You've certainly had a colorful experience in the Serevian Dungeon, it seems."

"Indeed," Rui affirmed. "The drastic experiences I underwent in the Serevian Dungeon have helped push my Martial Art above the threshold."

"Threshold... Surely you don't mean...?" Julian probed.

"I mean exactly that." Rui nodded. "I'm ready to break through to a higher Realm of Martial Art."

Julian was amazed at those words. "That's incredible! Congratulations."

"Thanks, but save it for when I actually reach it." Rui chuckled. "The breakthrough process is anything but easy and simple, as you know."

Julian cooled down at those words. "Indeed. I imagine they won't just plop you into the breakthrough procedure when you announce your Squire candidacy. I'm actually curious about the system that they have created for new Squire candidates."

"As am I." Rui nodded.

"When do you intend to apply for the procedure?" Julian asked.

"As soon as I'm done with lunch," Rui replied. "Besides, I have some things to do in preparation for the procedure as well."

"Oh? What's that?" Julian asked, curious.

"I have a technique to master," Rui said as he recalled the Mind Switch technique.

It was a mental technique he had spotted in his last training session that he had identified as a technique that could potentially help him in the higher Realm. Rui had considered taking a look at that technique if and when he got the time.

('I'll make a decision on that after the Martial Union is completely done debriefing me regarding the Squire breakthrough process.') He noted.

He hadn't grown conceited, believing that he didn't require briefing from the Martial union regarding the breakthrough process to the Squire Realm. After all, although he had figured out the secret to the Squire Realm, he had only figured out the general mechanics and principles of the process, he may as well have been illiterate on the details.

Furthermore, the Squire breakthrough process that the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana had discovered was the most primitive and unrefined version of the process that Rui would likely ever come across. The Kandrian Empire's breakthrough process was likely far more refined, efficient, and effective.

He had no doubt that the Martial Union had likely dumped an obscene amount of funding into the research and development of even marginally better breakthrough processes that were just a touch safer than before, or just a notch more efficient and effective. The current iteration of the breakthrough process was something that had likely undergone decades of refinement and improvement.

Rui was curious to learn more, it was quite likely that the process would be dumbed down immensely to cater to Martial Artists, still, Rui hoped he could ask questions.

He didn't want to waste any more time. That day, he immediately headed towards the Hajin branch office of the Martial Union.

"Purpose of visit?" The security team asked him as they verified his Martial license.



"Purchasing of growth resources," Rui replied, and soon he was on his way to the reception.

"Hello." Rui greeted a receptionist. "I wish to apply for the breakthrough process to the Squire Realm."

"Of course." The receptionist nodded as she punched some buttons into her terminal device. "Name and ID please."

"Rui Quarrier." He replied as she provided her with the necessary documents.

"Before you can actually purchase the Squire breakthrough procedure, the Martial Union will need to verify the fact that you actually are a genuine Squire candidate. Once the fact of the matter is verified, you will gain access to actually purchasing the breakthrough procedure or incur its cost as debt with no interest..."

Rui simply nodded to her explanation before signing some paperwork.

"Office number forty-three in the training facility." She told him.

It hadn't taken him long to reach there.

KNOCK KNOCK

Rui knocked on the door.

"Come in." A clear and strong voice instructed him.

He hadn't even needed to enter the room in order to understand who he was dealing with.

('Martial Squire.') He mused as he entered the room, making eye contact with a Martial Squire that had been waiting for him.

"Apprentice Rui Quarrier. I've heard a lot about you." She admitted. "Your prowess and feats are powerful and undeniable. However, that is entirely separate from the matter of whether or not you have fulfilled the two conditions of Squire candidacy. I am Squire Deria, and I will be verifying whether or not you have genuinely achieved complete Squire candidacy and are eligible to undergo the breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

#### Chapter 440: Test

Rui already knew this was coming, but he didn't know the process could be conducted by a Martial Squire.

"We will conduct an examination of you to ensure that you have indeed fulfilled both conditions of Squire candidacy." She explained. "Once that's happened, you will be briefed on the breakthrough to the Squire Realm and everything about it. The mechanics and principles that allow a Martial Apprentice to become a Martial Squire, and what it even means to be a Martial Squire. Once the briefing is done, we'll move to the preparatory phase, and only then will you undergo the actual breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

"What exactly does the preparatory phase entail?" Rui asked, curious.

Squire Diera shook her head in response. "The preparatory phase will be explained thoroughly if you have indeed fulfilled the conditions to the Squire Realm."

"I understand." Rui nodded. "Will the examination begin immediately?"

"It will, I require you to sign this consent form before that." She explained.

"Consent form?" Rui frowned. "What for?"

"The verification examination can be mentally distressing if you are not a Squire candidate." She explained in response.

"Distressing?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Only if you aren't a Squire candidate." She explained. "It's not too late to turn around. There's no shame in admitting you aren't ready, it is nothing to be ashamed about."

"I'm quite ready." Rui signed the form after having read it.

"Good, then follow me to the examination room." She gestured to him to follow her. "The examination requires me to test your mental fortitude by applying a tremendous amount of mental pressure on you."

Rui's eyes lit up in interest at those words, as he processed them.

('I see.') He realized. ('The procedure allows the Martial Union to test the mental fortitude of the Martial Apprentice in question, Squire candidates naturally have a stronger mental fortitude thanks to the breakthroughs in the individuality of the Martial Art in question.')

Thus, the Martial Squire would be able to weed out the wannabes from the real deal by subjecting an immense amount of mental pressure and seeing who cracks and who doesn't. However, that by itself did not verify that those who didn't break under her pressure were in fact Squire candidates.

('There's probably a specific mental threshold for that as well.') Rui mused.

Mental and neurological fortitude was required to survive the breakthrough process to the Squire Realm, as Rui had learned from the research data he had brought back from the mission to the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana. The Martial Squire could probably test him to see if he had the required amount of mental fortitude required to survive the process by exerting mental pressure on him.

They traveled for a bit before they reached a separate facility. Rui was made to sit on a chair with several contraptions and a helmet-like device wired to it, which reminded Rui of Professor X from the X-Men series.

In the facility were several screens with images projected on him.

"Prep him for the Squire breakthrough verification process." She told a team of a doctor and his assistants.

They made Rui sit down on the chair as various devices were hooked up to him. If Rui had to guess, they allowed the team to gain a lot of data on his metabolic data. Rui guessed this would aid in the verification of whether he had fulfilled the first condition of Squire candidacy.

"Bite down on this at all times." One of the assistants instructed him as she placed a bite guard in his mouth.

('They're taking some precautions alright.') Rui frowned. He was even strapped to the seat tightly, which were some ridiculous measures for a simple verification examination.

"Is all of this really necessary?" He asked Squire Deria through his bite guard.

"As I said earlier." She replied. "The examination can cause distress in the applicants of the examination."

Rui raised his eyebrow in surprise. This was one of the most rigorous verifications he had been through. Soon, the medical team left the entire facility, leaving him and the Martial Squire alone.

Rui felt awkward.

But the emotion went away as a profound sense of danger erupted within him with Primordial Instinct. The sensation rippled through him as he recognized the feeling.

('This is similar to when Squire Dylan was serious against me for a moment.') Rui felt his nerves tingling sharply. Primordial Instinct screamed in fear as it gnawed at Rui's self-control wanting to force the body into a panicked state of fight or flight mode.

Her eyebrows narrowed as the pressure mounted increasingly on him. Yet to her surprise, he didn't grimace or wince or break down in fear. He maintained his calm and composure despite the heavy pressure that she exerted on him. He met her gaze with a measured gaze.

('Interesting...') She mused. It certainly proved he was not simply lying about the first condition to Squire candidacy, otherwise, he would not have lasted this long. Yet it was the manner in which he prevailed against the pressure that she was exerting on her. She had never seen a Martial Apprentice withstand the degree of pressure that she was currently extending, she had already exceeded the bounds of pressure that any normal Martial Apprentice could possibly exert.

Barring Rui, of course.

She grew absorbed as she tried to gain an accurate and precise measure of his mental fortitude. The pressure she mounted on him would have incapacitated him by now. Rui had already previously witnessed an aura in the Squire Realm freezing his friends in shock and fear, he didn't think he would be nearly that easy. Yet, he was able to withstand it. At some point she even began exerting tinges of her bloodlust in the weight that she exerted onto Rui, however, she was unable to push him over the limit. Rui had grimaced from time to time as he withstood everything she threw him with and more. He relied purely on mental fortitude, not even certain mental techniques that may have aided him on the matter after all.