

Martial Unity 471

Chapter 471: Training

The time he spent with his family was healing and soothing. Helping them out with manual labor, and stockpiling enough firewood for the coming winter. Due to the distance between the Orphanage and even the closest district of the town of Hajin, it wasn't very practical to try and rely on it for resources once winter came in full force. The Orphanage stored up as much as they could on all essential supplies so that they would become self-sustaining for at least the harshest parts of winter.

Aside from that, he spent his time training Max and Mana too. Of all the children in the Orphanage, they were among the most inspired and motivated to follow in his footsteps and become Martial Apprentices. Their resolve had managed to withstand the test of time, and the difficulty of the training regimes that Rui had made them undergo.

They were both twelve. This meant that, soon, they would become eligible for the Martial Exam.

Rui had mixed feelings about letting thirteen-year-olds undergo the Martial Exam. Of course, he himself underwent it at the age of thirteen, but he was mentally an adult and he knew what he was getting into. Mana and Max were still kids, both physically and mentally.

Of course, in this world, people weren't coddled nearly as much as first-world kids back on Earth. The world was harsher and more dangerous. This forced them to mature faster.

Still, the Martial Exam guaranteed injury, and the possibility of death existed as well. The Martial Exam was made just tough enough that at least one applicant would die every year in each of the sixteen Martial Academies.

Part of this was no doubt to deter a large chunk of highly unfit Martial Artist aspirants that would have undoubtedly applied for the exam had the exam not been at least this dangerous.

Another reason he had some compunctions against letting them participate was that they would be younger and weaker than an overwhelming majority of the applicants partaking in the Martial Exam. Of course, failure was not bad. It would give them some experience with the difficulty and ruthlessness of the Martial Exam.

Still, that meant that they had a higher chance of suffering grave injury or, in the worst possible scenario; death.

Of course, it would be double standards considering that Rui had attempted and successfully cleared the Martial Exam at the age of thirteen.

Still, he had gotten a pass from everybody else because he demonstrated a genius-level intellect, having learned language and academics at an extraordinarily young age. He also had a generally calm and composed temperament from a very young age. So much so that after thirteen years of observation of him, Julian had hit the truth, even if jokingly, about Rui, about his reincarnation.

All of that atop his severe determination had led the adults of the Orphanage to allow him to undertake the exam.

The same could not necessarily be said for Mana or Max. They were driven, however, they had an immature temperament; lacking in patience and composure.

"What are we training today?" Max asked, interrupting his thoughts.

Rui turned to face the two of them. He found their determination and eagerness adorable and worrisome at the same time.

"Mental fortitude," Rui replied.

"Why are we so far from home?" Mana wondered aloud.

"This training can trouble others, unfortunately," Rui explained. "That's why I wanted to do it away from the others."

"Trouble?" Max frowned. "What even is mental fortitude anyway?"

"Endurance. Not of the body, but of the mind." Rui tapped his head.

"How do you even train such a thing?" Mana asked.

"The same way you train anything else," Rui replied. "Perseverance. Now, stand before me."

They obediently obeyed, curious at what was going on.

"Alright then, let's begin. From this point forth, you need to do your best to remain standing where you are to the best of your abilities, ok?" Rui asked.

They nodded, firmly planting their feet on the ground.

Rui breathed deeply, as he very mildly opened up a bit of the Mind Mask technique that had been covering up his Squire-level aura.

Mental techniques were easier to adapt to the Squire Realm because the evolution the brain underwent did not have a gigantic variation as far as mental parameters went. They were purely normal human brains scaled up through evolution. Thus, Apprentice-level mental techniques could more straightforwardly be used in the Squire Realm.

This was especially true for Rui, who had an affinity for mental techniques. In the past three months of his Squire habilitation phase, he had managed to retain most of the effectivity of the Mind Mask technique. Enough to seal off his Squire-level aura when interacting with his family. A Squire-level threat evoked too much passive fear in ordinary humans. He would be tormenting his family if he let his ablaze strongly.

The Mind Mask technique allowed him to appear no different from an ordinary person.

He had peeled off just the tiniest bit of the mask. He wanted to make sure he started at almost rock bottom before escalating the pressure bit by bit. If he started too high, he might trigger shock.

Max and Mana stiffened as they felt significant pressure mounting upon them. What was almost entirely insignificant to Rui at this point, was more pressure than the two of them had ever endured.

Yet, they gritted their teeth and stood strong against the pressure they were being put under. They did their best to fight away the fear with determination. Yet Rui merely increased the pressure he exerted on them, slowly and exceedingly carefully of course, but he increased it nonetheless.

Soon his pressure had reached the Apprentice Realm and they had reached their limits. They both took a step back, unable to bear it any longer.

"Not bad." Rui nodded as he extinguished the pressure. "Considering that you haven't had any training for it yet. However, this alone won't allow you to pass the first round of the Martial entrance exam."

Chapter 472: Decisions

Their mental fortitude wasn't quite there yet. At the level they currently were at, they wouldn't be able to pass the first stage. Building up the necessary mental fortitude would take months. Thankfully, months, they had.

The only problem was that Rui wasn't always going to be around. In fact, he planned to leave once the Quarrier Orphanage had completed all the required preparations for winter. He had stalled long enough and had taken enough of a break. The best he could do was commission a Martial Apprentice to continue their mental fortitude training.

And soon enough, the time had come. Rui bade his family farewell before he set out for the Martial Union. The time to strengthen and elevate his Martial Art to the Squire level had come. He could barely suppress his grin as he ran at an incredible pace to the Martial Union, reaching them in no time at all.

The more time he spent on his Martial Path, the further he walked down it, and the lesser time it took for him to cross to travel to the heart of the town of Hajin from the orphanage. He recalled a time when it took him around an hour, now, he crossed it in a minute, without any exertion at all.

Soon enough, he had reached the heart of the town of Hajin. He quickly provided his license to the security check-in before they allowed him in. Before he knew it, he had already reached the Squire Library, finally pausing.

It's not that he hadn't considered what he wanted to re-master first, it just wasn't an easy consideration. He had mastered thirty techniques as a Martial Apprentice, he most certainly wouldn't be able to master all thirty in a single training phase.

He needed to pick and choose wisely.

The only real condition there was to the choices he made was that his Martial Art needed to be as well-balanced as possible as far as the techniques he would be mastering and the weightage they added to his Martial Art.

('Since I have effectively zero techniques at this moment, let's go for the maximum and purchase six. Can't really be trusted to go on Squire-level missions with fewer.') Rui noted.

He opened up his Mind Palace, another mental technique that worked exactly like it did when he was a Martial Apprentice. He skimmed through all the techniques he had ever mastered.

In the first training phase that he had ever undergone:

Vital Pressure, Elastic Shift, Helical Breathing, Acute Edge, and Balanced Direction. One offensive technique, two defensive techniques, one offensive, and one maneuvering technique. They were foundational techniques that, individually, were relatively weak, but were a force to reckon with when used alongside the many other techniques he had mastered over the years.

He quickly sorted all the techniques into groups.

Offensive techniques:

Vital Pressure (striking), Flowing Canon (striking), Mirage Dive (grappling), Stinger (striking), Reverberating Lance (Striking), Tempestuous Ripple (Projectile launching)

Defensive techniques:

Elastic Shift, Inner Divergence, Acute Edge, Adamant Reforging, Shifting Silhouette/

Maneuvering techniques:

Balanced Direction, Parallel Walk, Blink (also stealth), Phantom Step, Shadow Step.

Supplementary techniques: Outer Convergence (offensive enhancement), Flame Breathing, Wind Breathing, Helical Breathing, and Final Breathing.

Counter-offensive techniques;

Binding Lash, Flow Flux.

He discounted the mental techniques for obvious reasons. The same could be said for sensory techniques, which did not require re-mastering.

Now, he had to choose just the right and strongest combination of techniques while also ensuring that they constituted a well-balanced Martial Art that was just right for him.

That was the hard part. A satisfactory outcome was easy enough, all he needed to was pick a reasonable selection of diverse techniques. But that wasn't satisfactory to Rui, he was aiming for the best choice, the most optimal choice.

('The first thing I can do is rule out the foundational and lower-grade techniques unless necessary.') Rui noted.

The only reason he had ever chosen foundational techniques was that he had no choice in the very beginning. After all, he didn't have the capital to purchase any worthwhile technique at the time, he had to choose among the foundation techniques that were free of charge.

Considering he had only six slots or so, he was going to fill them up with high-grade techniques.

('My Martial Art needs to have offense, defense, and maneuvering equally, for now, everything else comes later.') He nodded.

That left two techniques for each of them.

('Outer Convergence for offense is surely the first choice.') Rui nodded.

It was a powerful technique that allowed Rui to bolster his offensive prowess with power from every muscle group in the body.

This technique was powerful, and highly versatile and could be used in a lot of situations and scenarios. It had saved Rui's life many a time in the field, and he had grown too attached to the technique as well.

That was one down.

('I'll have to go with Reverberating Lance for the second option.') Rui decided. It was a powerful technique that permeated the impact of his strikes deeper into more vulnerable and vital areas to cause more damage. It increased the damage he inflicted with every strike.

Of course, there were other candidates. Flowing Canon had been with him for a long time, and he did intend to remaster it someday. As for the Stinger, it had lost some of its value at the Squire Realm. Having experienced other types of Martial bodies, he knew that the danger of the smaller punctures in the flesh that the Stinger technique inflicted were no longer as effective as they were against Martial Apprentices. The endurance of Martial Squires towards flesh wounds and blood loss had evolved to a higher level, unless he pierced an extremely vital spot, it was not going to be nearly as effective.

Another strong candidate was the Tempestuous Ripple technique, of course. A powerful technique that gave him long-range damaging capabilities. But he wanted to ground his fundamentals before he retained his other capabilities.

If he ever chose to re-master all his other techniques in the first place.

Chapter 473: Individuality

He had made his choices for offense, the next was defense. This was a remarkably easy choice for Ves.

('Inner Divergence and Adamant Reforging it is.') he nodded.

These were his two most powerful defensive techniques. Inner Divergence was an active defensive technique that worked by spreading the impact of the strike across all muscle groups. Effectively the muscles of the body acted as a shock absorber for the entire body. The impact was safely dispersed instead of inflicting damage on the area of the collision.

Adamant Reforging was a training technique that strengthened the flesh of the user. Flesh would grow more reinforced across many rounds of restorative healing from wounds inflicted in just the right manner, allowing for a tougher exterior. This would result in a passive defense for the user in question.

A good balance between passive and active defenses.

That left two maneuvering techniques.

One of them was definitely the Phantom Step technique. The technique was incredibly useful and had helped Rui immensely since the very day that he mastered it. However, none of the other techniques were all too alluring at this point in time. Out of the remaining four, two of them were foundational techniques that automatically ruled them out in his head.

That left Blink and Shadow Step. However, one was obsolete in the Squire Realm while the other was not combat-oriented. It was suited for infiltration and other operations that required genuine stealth. He didn't have another technique.

('I guess I can go for Wind Breathing?') Rui wondered, scratching his head. Technically, it was a supplementary technique, not a maneuvering technique, but it boosted his agility and speed. Still, it suited his needs.

That was his technique roster;

Outer Convergence.

Wind Breathing.

Phantom Step.

Inner Divergence.

Adamant Reforging.

Reverberating Lance.

He quickly picked the scrolls of the techniques he was looking for. However, what he wasn't prepared for was the price of the techniques.

"Sheesh," Rui muttered aloud.

Squire-level techniques were far more expensive than Apprentice-level techniques. The total sum was nearly an order of magnitude more expensive than even his most expensive training phases in the Martial Academy.

If not for the fact that the mission in the Serevian Dungeon had yielded him a tremendous amount of income, he would not have been able to

Of course, this wasn't greed. Squire-level techniques were far more precious than Apprentice-level techniques, that was for sure.

('Furthermore, I have to pay for guidance and equipment, unlike when I was in the Martial Academy.')
Rui groaned inwardly.

Thankfully, he was very familiar with these techniques. He didn't need any guidance from an experienced Martial Squire, or even a Martial Senior to help him train with the techniques. All he needed was some basic aid in operating some of the equipment.

Once he purchased the techniques, he sat down at one of the tables in the library with his scrolls, skimming through all of them and inputting all the data into his Mind Palace.

('Interesting.') Rui noted as he processed all of it.

The techniques were not entirely the same as their Apprentice-level versions. It seems they weren't scaled identically all the way to the Squire Realm.

('The Squire-level version of Outer Convergence is most suited to Martial bodies with high muscle mass to body mass ratios.') He quickly realized, studying the details of the technique.

The technique was more compatible with users with larger muscles, which allowed for a greater amount of energy transfer across the body. Of course, this did not mean that Rui couldn't use it, however, it meant that it would not nearly do him as much good as it would do a heavyweight power-oriented Martial body.

As Rui went through the other techniques. He quickly realized that each technique wasn't nearly as apt to him as their Apprentice-level versions were to him. Because Martial bodies could have all kinds of wacky configurations and quirks compared to normal humans, the variety and diversity of Martial bodies of Martial Squires were much larger. There were all kinds of configurations that led to unnatural types of bodies. Techniques needed to cater to a significant portion of the Martial Artist population, otherwise, they were useless. If a technique could only be used by a handful of Martial Artists due to its incompatibility with other Martial Artists, then its impact and contribution to Martial Art were minimal.

Thus, each technique was generally catered to be compatible with a larger proportion of the Martial Artist, which meant that it could not be too compatible with any one particular Martial Artist, otherwise, its compatibility with a lot of other Martial Artists reduced drastically. It needed to be more generalized.

This was the issue that Rui was undergoing right now. A lot of the techniques he had chosen to learn were in a similar spot. Of course, it wasn't as though this would be a hindrance, just a bit of a bigger shortcoming that he had realized it would be when he was informed about this by his Squire habilitators.

('This must be one of the driving incentives for creating your own techniques. Or at least personalizing and altering all the techniques you do use, to some degree.') Rui mused.

The abundance of techniques in the higher Realms was much lower and only grew progressively lower and lower with each Realm. This was because of the scarcity of Martial Artists in higher Realms, but also because of how difficult it was to conduct research and development of techniques in the higher Realms.

Martial Artists were inevitably forced to develop their own techniques if they wished to reach higher Realms. What Rui was experiencing was likely just the beginning. As time passed on, purchasing techniques to master them the way he already had all this time, would become more and more unfeasible.

It was both scary and exciting. On one hand, the difficulty of growing stronger would increase, without a doubt, on the other hand, it was that much bigger a canvas to express himself.

Chapter 474: Training

Thankfully, the training regimens for all of the techniques weren't all that different from the Apprentice-level versions of them.

Outer Convergence had three training stages, just like it did in the Apprentice-level version.

The first stage was some elementary form of 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 were 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 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.

Inner Divergence had two training stages. The technique required that attacks be landed as close to the center of the body as possible, otherwise, it wasn't possible for all muscle groups to absorb the impact as shock absorbers did. The first training session was dedicated to learning how to intercept strikes closest to the center of mass of the body.

The second stage involved learning how to time the gradual stiffening and tensing of the muscles to be able to absorb the impact. If the muscles were stiffened taut too slow, then the technique would be ineffective. If the muscles were stiffened too fast, then the impact wouldn't be absorbed very well and the body would suffer harm.

Wind Breathing required increasing the intake of air first. The first stage of the technique was a demanding regime of breathing exercises that would increase lung capacity and strengthen the diaphragm. The second stage of the training regime for the technique was mastering the timing for Wind Breathing. The rush of oxygen that all the cells received from deeper breaths needed to be timed with the initial acceleration of the body. This ensures that the body has all the energy it needs when accelerating at speed. Since the oxygen from inhalation does not instantly reach the cells upon inhalation and takes a brief amount of time to travel to the various cells across the body, it needed to be done ahead of time.

Mastering the timing of the deep inhalations such as that the incoming surge of energy matched the acceleration of the body was the key part of Wind Breathing.

Adamant Reforging was the simplest for Rui to undergo, he merely needed to resume the conditioning process for his new body and he would eventually obtain flesh that was tough even for Martial Squires.

The final technique was reverberating Lance. The training regime of this technique was centered around learning to vibrate and then learning to apply the vibrations to permeate the impact deeper into the body. The Squire-level version of this technique was the closest to its Apprentice-level version, which is one of the reasons he picked it. All he needed to get used to was the differences that his new center of gravity and other physical parameters that had changed in him would cause in his execution of the technique, and he will have mastered it as well as new.

Once he completed the training regimes of these techniques, he will have obtained six new techniques. Of course, this didn't mean he only had six techniques, after all, he retained his mental and sensory techniques.

This meant that he still had his Mind Palace, Mind Switch and Mind Mask techniques, as well as his Seismic Mapping and Primordial Instinct techniques. This meant that he was going to start off with eleven Squire-level techniques.

('Can't wait.') Rui grinned. He felt like it had been a long time since had seen any real action, he couldn't wait to master these techniques so that he could go ahead and undertake Squire-level missions. He couldn't wait to test his combat prowess against another Martial Squire once he got out.

('All of that comes after.')

He intended on finishing the training regimes as soon as he humanly could. Normally, six techniques weren't something that he could finish in a short amount of time, especially ever since he got the Mindmirror brain, however, his immense familiarity with these techniques and the fact that he had already mastered the Apprentice-level versions of these techniques made the task a lot easier. He would be able to speed through the training a lot quicker than he would have otherwise. What would otherwise have taken a year could be finished in six months, perhaps even less if he worked particularly hard and efficiently.

He immediately headed to training. The Martial Union had training facilities that he had already paid to use. He had only paid for some basic aid from assistant staff members who would be aiding him with anything that required more than one person. There were training regimes that required the remote

operation of training equipment by another person such as the Outer Convergence and Reverberating Lance techniques.

He had reached the training facility just as he wrapped his thoughts.

Chapter 475: Training

The training sessions went smoothly, due to the fact that he already knew how they went. Of course, there were varying degrees of difficulty. The easiest among them was the Adamant Reforging technique. His tolerance of pain had risen tremendously thanks due to the breakthrough to the Squire Realm. The sheer amount of agony and suffering the procedure put him through was shocking.

The pain hadn't reduced, but his tolerance of it was high enough that the training phase for the Adamant Reforging training technique was both easy and simple.

The more difficult techniques were the techniques that had the highest demand for accuracy and precision. The most difficult of them all was the Phantom Step technique which required extremely accurate and precise timing and placements.

The Phantom Step technique allowed extremely convincing feints that were so effective that the target of the technique momentarily experienced a brief illusion of the projected motion of the feint. This involved actually beginning the motion but freezing it at just the right moment for the feint to be convincing enough.

It was the most mentally challenging training phase of them all.

However, it was only a matter of time before he mastered it.

And as enough time passed, he did.

Half a year later, Rui had completed his training.

"Fuuu..." He exhaled deeply.

Unadulterated energy coursed through his body. A full-fledged Squire-level aura descended upon the world, declaring his presence.

Rui's clenched fist tightened as he adopted a striking stance, opening his eyes.

He was in an uninhabited natural environment. A lush forest surrounded him, peaceful just a moment ago until his power scared the fauna in the vicinity. Yet his eyes were fixed on what was before him.

A boulder. One the size of a building.

"Fuuu..." Rui exhaled once more, before inhaling. A surge of power flowed through his body as oxygen rushed across all his cells.

It was then.

With the sharpest abruptness, his wound fist launched forward with tremendous speed and momentum. The atmosphere recoiled away in shock as he produced a sonic boom with just the sheer velocity of his motion, exceeding even the sound barrier.

Yet, that wasn't the only barrier that he broke.

BOOM!!!

The sheer power of the blow was tremendous, with Outer Convergence drawing power from every muscle and directing it into his fist. The power of the impact spread across the entirety of the boulder due to the Reverberating Lance technique.

CRACK CRACK CRACK

The boulder cracked, shattered, and crumbled into chunks and pieces that were launched some distance away.

Thorough destruction.

"Fuuu..." Rui exhaled as he took it upon himself to inspect his handiwork.

"How many full-powered attacks would it have taken me to do that when I was a Martial Apprentice?" Rui murmured as he scrutinized the debris.

Dozens, realistically.

"And despite just beginning my climb in the Squire Realm, I can already exceed anything I was capable of before with the simplest of ease," Rui murmured.

He glanced down at his palms with incredulity. He had become so much stronger that it was hard to believe, he half-expected to wake up, realizing all of this was just a dream and he was still a Martial Apprentice.

He glanced at his pocket watch, noting the time. "I should get going now, I don't want to be late to my next rendezvous."

Ever since he became a Martial Squire, his perspective of time had changed. He was capable of accomplishing a lot, especially mentally, in a shorter amount of time. His evolved and accelerated metabolism was to blame of course.

Thus, he was more wary of the passage of normal time.

He immediately began sprinting back towards the town of Hajin. Right now, he was well outside the town of Hajin in the Drunfil Forest, testing himself in isolation. He had only just finished his training and had left the artificial and engineered environment of the training facilities of the Martial Union to test his own power.

Thankfully, Drunfil Forest was only four hours away by carriage.

Or about five minutes on foot with exertion for a Martial Squire. The power he gained was certainly the highlight, but the ease of traveling to distant destinations and back was quite amazing. The entire nation was well within his reach with a minor amount of exertion.

Though, he didn't return to the town of Hajin. He instead made his way to a remote but barren flat plain. It was one of the farmlands that were not being used for the season.

Soon, he sensed a presence approaching his location, reaching it swiftly.

"Rui." Squire Kyrie addressed him. "Congratulations on becoming a Martial Squire. It's truly hard to believe that a little under five years ago you were merely a novice student among hundreds of others."

"Squire Kyrie..." Rui smiled. "Thank you for accepting the commission."

"It is a commission." She replied blankly. "You are paying me to be here."

"Yes, but I know you don't accept commissions anymore, so thank you for humoring me."

"It's not that big of a deal, really." Squire Kyrie dismissed his words lightly. "I can't say I am not curious. I wouldn't be human if I wasn't."

Rui smiled at those words.

This would be the third time he would be fighting Kyrie. The first time felt like a lifetime ago, he had just entered the Apprentice Realm and had mastered some weak foundational techniques. The second time occurred after he had obtained a significant amount of power, and after he had mastered the pattern recognition viability problem of the VOID algorithm.

And this would be the third time after he ascended to the Squire Realm. He was still a newbie Martial Squire, as far as techniques went, but he was by no means particularly weak. His Martial body was

boosted by the Mind Switch technique that boosted his stamina and allowed him to expend greater energy and power. Furthermore, he still retained other advantages like the Mindmirror brain that aided battle cognition and of course; the VOID algorithm.

Chapter 476: Mitigate

He had chosen that locations because the two of them could go all out and not worry about causing destruction to people and infrastructure. There wasn't any of either within a decently large radius.

"Let's begin then." kyrie adopted a simple balanced stance. "I have a training session to head, soon after this."

Her stance placed an equal weight on power, mobility, and defense. A neutral, all-rounder stance.

Rui simply adopted a similar stance.

The two of them simply maintained a deadlock, staring at each other. The sheer weight of their focus and concentration yielded a pressure that exerted itself on the scant sentient life that was anywhere even remotely close to them in any capacity.

Birds took flight, and pests and other small critters evacuated as they scurried for their lives. Their battlefield grew truly barren of any sentient lifeform.

And then, Rui made the first move. He cautiously stepped forward shifting his weight back and forth, making his movements less apparent through their center of gravity. Kyrie simply waited, unfazed, as Rui approached her step by step.

They were only a few steps away from each other.

And the first move came soon enough.

The atmosphere shook as a sonic boom emerged from Rui's flying hook. He launched a simple attack, testing her.

WHOOSH

Kyrie smoothly evaded the strike, ducking while launching one of her own with the opposite arm.

POW!

He defended her attack by stepping forward and intercepting the blow at the forearm and the wrist. This was a common tactic that was used even on Earth to deal with strikes like the hook. Punches dealt damage via the fist, generally, this could be circumvented by intercepting and blocking strikes at parts of their body besides from the fist but was just as vital to the generation of power.

He threw a flurry of swift jabs at her, having blocked her attack.

WHOOSH

His attacks were quick but she demonstrated remarkable agility and nimbleness as she swiftly evaded all of them.

He launched a powerful frontal kick, yet she merely somersaulted away backward in time, avoiding the attack entirely.

The sheer speed of Martial Squires was such that, in real-time, the amount of time commenced since the start of the battle was no more than a single moment or two. Yet the Martial Artists had already launched and dealt with several attacks. Their metabolism and cognition were so far beyond human limits and even the Apprentice Realm, it was as though they existed in a different level of time and speed.

Yet, the battle continued. Neither side was nearly going all out. Rui simply observed her Martial Art and combat style as he inputted its properties. He had come to notice details about her Martial Art and combat style that he hadn't noticed before.

Back when he fought her in the Apprentice Realm, she hadn't used her true prowess, not even close. However, how she had begun using her Squire-level prowess, it had become quite clear that she was not a perfect all-rounder.

('She places a greater weightage on speed and maneuvering compared to offense and defense.')

He realized.

Her Martial body leaned more towards speed than power, and this reflected in her techniques as well. However, it wasn't significant enough to make her a maneuvering-oriented Martial Artist.

POW POW POW!

Kyrie managed to cleanly bypass his guard as she landed a flurry of jabs on Rui's abdomen, much to his surprise. With the Mindmirror Symbiote and Primordial Instinct, bypassing his active defense was extremely difficult. Yet, she managed to do so with ease.

Her power and strike began escalating as he did his best to cope. He could sense that she wasn't anywhere near going all out, yet her combat parameters had already reached a stage where he was struggling to hold on.

WHOOSH

Kyrie cleanly evaded a blow from Rui as she moved in, launching a blow with tremendous power and speed toward him. Yet, to her surprise, the blow crashed into an empty image.

BAM!

A strong kick landed on the back of her head, causing her to stagger forward. She immediately turned back, a flash of surprise rippling across her face.

She immediately leaped forward, attempting to land another blow on him. Yet, Rui shifted his head ever so slightly, and the attack completely missed him.

She launched a flurry of strikes with great speed, yet none of them landed. Rui's evasive capabilities had suddenly spiked.

('I see. This is the same as last time.') She noted. She recalled that in their previous fight, Rui's fighting style had changed drastically as the accuracy of his movements in their capacity to counter her own had risen astronomically. It was clear that the same thing was occurring at the moment.

"I suppose I should stop holding back." She murmured.

It was a murmur, yet it hadn't escaped Rui's enhanced senses. Primordial Instinct felt a tremendous amount of danger as Kyrie's aura spiked.

WHOOSH

Suddenly, she disappeared in his field of vision.

BAM!

An attack of hers crashed into Rui's gut with tremendous speed and momentum. He grimaced in pain as he did his best to mitigate the damage with Inner Divergence. Yet Kyrie didn't stop. With newfound speed and power, she launched an avalanche of Squire-level attacks against him. Had Rui not had the VOID algorithm, he would have been mangled from head to toe even before he lost consciousness. However, the predictive and adaptive-evolutionary models saved his life. He managed to move at exactly the right time and in the right manner to avoid the brunt of her power. What he hadn't expected was the fact that the gap between them was still so large. However, in hindsight, it wasn't particularly unusual. She was a veteran with many years of training and battle experience in the Squire Realm.

Even with the VOID algorithm, he couldn't overcome such a huge gap in techniques and experience. The best he could do was mitigate it to the best of his abilities.

Chapter 477: Outcome

She had mastered several dozens of techniques, techniques Rui had never heard of or seen before. She was constantly using several techniques at once, at a minimum and that number could rise to double digits very often.

Her speed was blurringly fast, and it took Rui everything with the VOID algorithm, Primordial instinct, and the Mindmirror Symbiote to be able to keep up. Had he lacked even a single one of those elements, he would not have been able to keep up with her, even in a passive position.

However, he was no quitter. He racked his brain for a path to victory as he desperately defended and evaded her onslaught. The problem with all-rounders was that they didn't have an obvious weakness. Thus, there wasn't a particularly obvious or straightforward avenue that he could exploit in order to gain an advantage against her.

('I need to turn the battle into a grappling one.') Rui knew. The VOID algorithm agreed with him. A grappling battle mitigated the effectiveness of her speed advantage. Of course, as an all-rounder, grappling as far from her weakness, however, would likely end up being a better outcome than allowing her to capitalize on her best asset.

The only problem was that he hadn't mastered any Squire-level grappling techniques.

POW POW POW!

Rui guarded against a flurry of jabs.

('I'll have to go for basic grapples but apply Outer Convergence and hope for the best.')

He waited patiently as the optimal moment showed itself. In the meantime, his body had already begun aching immensely as her staggering blows and soon enough it did.

WHOOSH

Rui evaded a hook as he crouched, dashing for her hip, using Outer Convergence for power and Wind Breathing for speed.

BAM!!

A tremendous and blindingly fast elbow crashed onto his head.

The sheer impact rattled his head and his brain. Despite all the evolution that he had undergone, he was still very much susceptible to blunt-force trauma.

He staggered, disoriented, yet before he could regain his bearings:

POW!

A swift kick landed on his chin, sealing the deal.

THUD

Rui collapsed to the ground, unconscious.

When he woke up, he found himself staring at a white ceiling.

('An unfamiliar ceiling.') he thought, jokingly, before getting up and looking around. He was in a medical bay, occupied by several other nurses and patients.

"Squire Quarrier." A voice addressed him. A doctor walked towards him. "Glad to see you've woken up."

"Where exactly am I?" Rui scratched his head.

"Within the medical wing of the Hajin branch of the Martial Union, of course." The doctor replied. "I'm pleased to inform you that you've made a complete recovery. You have an unnaturally high healing

capability for your particular Martial body, by the time you were brought to the hospital, all your physical wounds had completely healed. We didn't even need to administer any healing potions."

Of course, Rui was not surprised by this. The Mind Switch technique that he had mastered triggered autophagy, which supplied the energy for the higher rate of healing his Martial body had evolved to have.

"You have access to the data of my Martial body, doctor?" Rui asked.

"Of course." The doctor replied casually. "Medical treatment of Martial Squires is more complicated than that of medical treatment of normal humans due to your evolved and inhuman parameters. We require your personal data in order to ensure you receive personalized medication and treatment."

Martial Squires had evolved genes, which meant that the field of medicine had to develop an additional branch that allowed them to treat different kinds of Martial bodies. Changes in genes produced changes in the metabolism of the Martial Squire. Ordinary medicine that was not personalized to suit Martial Squires was not only effective but also dangerous and risky.

"You said I've fully healed up, correct? Does that mean I can be discharged immediately?" Rui asked.

"Of course, you just need to sign some paperwork and you're set to go." He informed Rui.

Rui obliged, and soon he found himself leaving the Martial Union, heading home.

"I got my ass beat." Rui sighed. He wasn't surprised, of course. Squire Kyrie may have been retired for quite some time, but physically, she was still in great shape. Furthermore, she was an extremely strong Martial Squire who had been dubbed the Berserker of Hajin. She had also won the Martial Contest when she was a Martial Apprentice of the Martial Academy.

If the Squire Realm was as large and wide as the Apprentice Realm, then it made perfect sense. He had only just begun his journey in the Squire Realm, he was still at the bottom of the ladder. It was no different from when he first broke through into the Apprentice Realm. Any grade-ten Martial Apprentice would have annihilated him with ease. The same could certainly be said for Martial Squires.

"Her speed and power were ridiculous." Rui sighed. "She didn't use an enormous number of techniques, but the techniques she did use were extremely potent. Either she mastered some crazy grade eight and nine techniques or..."

Or she had developed her own personal techniques. Personal techniques that made the best of her own particular Martial body and its unique parameters and quirks. Allowing her to exhibit a level of efficiency that techniques created by the Martial Union, which weren't customized for her, simply couldn't.

('Maybe I should prioritize individuality a little more than I did before.') Rui sighed.

This partly gave him a bit of a goal to aspire to as he continued his training. The primary goal, of course, was to elevate his Flowing Void Style and the VOID algorithm to absolute perfection, if such a thing was even possible, and master it. He would need to pursue his Martial Path deeper.

He glanced up to the sky, closing his eyes. He could see his elevating Martial Path overlapping with the blue sky, illuminated by the brilliant blinding sun.

"Step by step... and eventually I'll get there."

Chapter 478: Missions

Of course, the question was; what was the next step, precisely? This was something he had wondered the entire day later, even after he returned to the Orphanage.

Normally, after a training stage, he would undergo some missions to gain more experience with the techniques that he had just mastered and solidify his foundation of those techniques in combat with missions.

This time, however, it wasn't strictly necessary. Each of these was a technique that he previously used for a long time. Although they were less comfortable by virtue of not being nearly as well suited to him as they were when he was a Martial Apprentice, it wasn't as though he needed experience using them in battle. That imperative was missing this time.

Still, he was in favor of completing some Squire-level missions. After all, he hadn't yet completed a mission since he broke through, and it had been nearly nine months since he broke through. Although Rui still retain a great chunk of all of his earnings from the Serevian Dungeon, he still needed to earn money.

A mission it was.

Rui scrolled through his accouter he scrolled through his mission inbox. He had recently indicated that he was accepting commissions again, and he had received some within a reasonable timeframe. However, the rush for him wasn't nearly as strong as it was when he was a Martial Apprentice.

Of course, he wasn't surprised. The answer was obvious.

He was the most powerful Martial Apprentice of the Kandrian Empire when he had been a Martial Apprentice, however, after becoming a Martial Squire, he had once again reached the bottom of the ladder.

The Squire Realm was a different league altogether.

There were an overwhelming number of Martial Squires who were more powerful than him, more experienced, and more reliable than him. This was a fact that he needed to accept. In fact, newbie Martial Squires like himself didn't generally receive personal commissions. However, his fame and reputation as a Martial Apprentice were great enough that some of it managed to rub off into the Squire Realm.

He skimmed past them, examining them.

[Hunter class mission: procurement

Clientele: Ferena Fillisburg

Target of the mission: One kilogram of herpious limestone.

Location of the target: Fatanuy Hills. [876.5, 60.76] +- 10 kilometers

Difficulty grade: two

Mission summary: This mission is a hunter-class mission that requires the Martial Artist to procure a kilogram of herpious limestone; a solid esoteric crystalline substance. Fatanuy Hills is home to many dangerous creatures that are at the peak of the Apprentice Realm and several active and aggressive beasts that are quasi-Squire-level as far as combat prowess goes, raising the difficulty of the mission to the base of the Squire Realm. The target of the mission is a substance that is relatively abundant across the forest, procuring the desired amount will require the continuous collection of smaller amounts of herpious limestone, increasing the probability of encountering a quasi-Squire-level creature significantly. The procurement of the target can be done via special storage devices that need to be rented for the mission,

"Hm..." Rui read through the mission summary.

A hunting mission wasn't bad to kick him off. It was relatively straightforward and as long as he was careful there was effectively nothing to be feared. A proper Martial Squire would most certainly not lose to a quasi-Squire-level creature.

This mission was the kind of mission that was too weak to threaten Martial Squires but was far too dangerous for nearly any Martial Apprentice. Thus, it had been classified as a Squire-level mission. Many of the very low-grade Squire-level missions were only evaluated as Squire-level because Martial Apprentices were too inadequate to handle them.

It was a good candidate for a mission, still, Rui wanted to take a closer look at some others. He scrolled to the next one.

[Defense-class mission: bodyguard mission.

Clientele: Vintar Industries.

Target of protection: Supply shipment.

Location of mission: Trade route from the town of Frentoy to the Kingdom of Farjen. [123.45, 764.3] to [224.6, 564.88]

Difficulty grade: One.

Mission summary: Clientele Vinta Industries has commissioned a Martial Squire bodyguard to escort and protect a supply shipment convoy traveling from the town of Frentoy to the Kingdom of Farjen. The supply route the convoy will be traveling through is the shortest and the quickest by distance, however, it is fraught with danger. The route is home to many bandit gangs that consist of many Martial Apprentices. They often ambush and attack convoys with insufficient protection and deterrence.]

This mission was different in so far as the fact that it could be completed by a large group of Martial Apprentices. However, Rui could see why it had instead been evaluated to be a Squire-level mission. Even he would not be able to successfully complete this mission as a Martial Apprentice. Protecting something else, especially something as large as a convoy, was much harder than surviving by himself, which he was confident of even as a Martial Apprentice.

However, rather than diverting a large number of Martial Apprentices on a singular mission such as this, it was better to evaluate it as a Squire-level mission and leave it to a single newbie Martial Squire. It avoided forcing a large number of Martial Apprentices to go off on a risky mission where a lot of valuable Martial Apprentices would be lost, or waste time if an attack didn't occur. Instead, it gave a newbie Martial Squire some experience with missions at the bottom of the barrel of Squire-level missions.

However, Rui wasn't particularly interested in this mission. No Martial Apprentice in their right mind would attack a Martial Squire, a single attack would mean death or excruciating and incapacitating suffering if they managed to survive. Rui's arms had been mangled and broken all over due to a single strike, a quick reflexive one rather than a proper attack that too, and he had lost consciousness after being launched away by the impact through numerous walls of the facility and through several trees.

It was a particularly painful memory, second only to the Squire breakthrough procedure.

Chapter 479: Tame

Rui skimmed through some other of his personal commissions but ultimately shook his head in dismay. What he was looking for wasn't there at all. None of these were particularly stimulating missions. Ideally, he would have liked to have had a mission that would pit him against another Martial Squire. But he wasn't quite yet eligible for such a mission just yet.

He was evaluated to be a grade three Martial Artist in his current state. He was inexperienced with combat in the Squire Realm and had only just re-mastered six techniques. Normally, such a Martial Squire would be graded at grade one, but not Rui.

For one, he had the VOID algorithm. This technique allowed him to keep up with those with combat parameters much higher than his and even defeat them. Furthermore, he had naturally retained his mental and sensory techniques as well, increasing his formidability thanks to it. Thirdly, his body was above that of a baseline all-rounder Martial Squire. He was stronger, faster and healed faster, and had greater stamina.

All these factors allowed him to operate several grades above grade one, which he would be without those factors. He didn't think he would lose even if he were pitted against another Martial Squire, as long as they weren't too much of a much higher grade than his own.

Unfortunately, none of his personal commissions could provide him with that.

That was why he found himself standing in the mission library of the Martial Union, the Squire-level one. If he could find a mission that pit him against another Martial Squire, he would most certainly take it. It wasn't as though he wanted to fight a Martial Squire because there wasn't another way that he would be able to fight one, he most certainly could commission a sparring partner if he wanted to.

However, there was always a large difference between a sparring partner and someone who was genuinely hostile against you in a fight in the real world. The latter was a much greater experience than the former. The former usually operated within a certain limit, otherwise, death was plausible and that was something no sparring partner would want.

It simply wasn't real.

He glanced around the mission library.

Even at the Squire level, missions were divided similarly to the way they were divided in the Apprentice Realm; Offense, defense, hunter, shadow, and miscellaneous classes.

The best class to guarantee combat in a mission among all of the classes was...

('The offensive class, without a doubt.') Rui glanced at it, walking over to it.

Ideal missions in the defense, hunter, shadow, and miscellaneous missions were those missions that didn't entail combat and conflict. However, the same could not be said for missions of the offense class.

The offense-class mission necessarily entailed conflict. Which meant that Rui could ensure that he was participating in some form of conflict. All he needed to do was find one that allowed him to fight against a Martial Squire.

He began skimming through some of the lower-grade missions.

[Offense-class mission: elimination mission

Clientele: Frilin Marnen

Targets of elimination: Apprentice Jurver, Apprentice Gernin, Apprentice Har, Apprentice Vundeg, Apprentice Kernil, Apprentice Seren, Apprentice Axel, Apprentice Meren, Apprentice Kolun, Apprentice Hilos, Apprentice Gringar.

Location of targets: Kingdom of Gunir, town of Hatchel (65.34, 54.2)

Difficulty grade: two

Mission summary: The clientele seeks to commission a Martial Squire to eliminate eleven Martial Apprentices who, on average, are high-grade. The difficulty of the mission arises not from the physical difficulty of killing Martial Apprentices, which is trivial, but from complications of even a single or two of

the target Martial Apprentices escaping the assault in time that most are killed. Or complications arising from the Martial Apprentices learning of their impending fate and going into hiding.]

"Hmmm..." Rui winced at the mission. He was not interested in mass-murdering Martial Apprentices. It was distasteful, not to mention pointless and boring.

He skimmed through a few more mission bills at the lower grade, but unfortunately, they were not too dissimilar.

A lot of the lower-grade missions involved an enormously large number of normal humans, requiring him to mass murder many thousands of humans, if not tens of thousands without letting a single one escape alive, or mass-murder a large number Martial Apprentices, or in many cases, capture them instead.

In hindsight, Rui should have expected this. The lower-grade missions were missions that were not supposed to threaten the life of the Martial Artist undertaking them. The moment a mission involved other hostile Martial Squires, his life would be at threat and the difficulty grade would likely exceed his own grade as a Martial Apprentice.

Something similar was also the case with Apprentice-level missions, missions at lower grades of the Apprentice level were centered around larger groups of humans that no single ordinary human could defeat. It was only at grade four and above that missions could threaten his life, and involve other Martial Artists of the same Realm as the Martial Artist undertaking the mission.

('I guess for now I should just level up until I reach a point where I can undertake a mission that involves fighting against other Martial Squires.') Rui shrugged.

As long as he gained more experience and demonstrated his abnormal and unnatural combat prowess, he was bound to be upgraded to a higher grade as a Martial Artist.

The Martial Union by default placed newbie Martial Artists at extremely low grades regardless of their capabilities. The lack of experience was the main issue. While it wasn't as though the experience of the Apprentice Realm was useless or obsolete, Martial Squires differed too much from Martial Apprentices, allowing brand-new Martial Squires to fight against experienced Martial Squires was too risky. Rui would

need to prove his combat capabilities and gain some experience with combat in the Squire Realm before he could be eligible to fight other Martial Squires.

Just as he finished his thoughts, he happened upon an interesting mission bill that caught his eye. A familiar name from the past...

Chapter 480: Old Receipts

[Offense class mission: Capture mission

Clientele: Kandrian Bureau of Investigation

The target of the mission: Faraday Lowminer

Location of the target: Kingdom of Violis, a town of Garten

Difficulty grade: two

Remuneration: 15,000 Martial credits

Mission summary: Faraday Lowminer is the founder and former president of Lowminer Industries, a once-reputed and large esoteric resource supplier in several towns in the Mantian Region. In the past five years, the target of the mission; Faraday Lowminer has been implicated in a variety of crimes, including fraud, tax evasion, blackmail and bribery, assault, and murder conspiracy. The litigation was delayed and stalled due to a lack of evidence, however, when the evidence of his crimes came to light, Faraday Lowminer had already left the country illegally, migrating to an orbiter state; the Kingdom of Violis, along with his bodyguard team of Martial Apprentices. The mission objective is to capture and retrieve the target alive.]

Rui's eyes rose.

Lowminer Industries.

He had not forgotten that name. His very first mission was a mission to protect a girl named Bella Hier. He had ultimately failed that mission because he was unable to protect her from the gangs affiliated with the Lowminer Industries, while he held off an assassin sent to kill her.

Furthermore, in a twisted turn of events he was roped into a mission for the Lowminer Industries by committing to a mission whose client he hadn't known was them ahead of the time.

While Rui was far too consumed with Martial Art to be self-absorbed in the failures of the past, he had never forgotten his very first mission. It was ironically the one mission he remembered the most vividly like he could close his eyes and replay it from the moment he first saw Bella to the last time he did.

Especially the last time. It was an image seared into his memory.

"...Fate must be smiling upon me." A hint of darkness dampened his expression, as the tiniest of smiles cracked at his cheek. "To think I would get a chance to get revenge this quick."

Rui had felt the urge to storm into the main branch of the Lowminer industries and wreak havoc and kill the man responsible for Bella's death, but the risks were too high. If he had done that, the Martial Union would eventually dig up something or the other implicating him, just like it did with the Lowminers.

It wasn't a matter of him making mistake, or not executing it properly. He could conjure up the best plan to murder and get away with it, but his knowledge of the forensic and investigative capabilities of the Kandrian Empire was unreliable. He effectively knew nothing about the kind of esoteric technology that the Kandrian Bureau of Investigation employed. It could be that they could narrow down the possibility of techniques that were used in killing a victim, or perhaps even the exact technique.

Then they could further narrow it down to possible Martial Apprentices and eventually he would likely end up being the prime suspect. Or they could perhaps employ the mental sensory techniques that he was exposed to more than half a year ago to verify that he was truly a Squire candidate. Perhaps they could forcefully verify his honesty and sincerity if they ever managed to pin him as a suspect.

There was simply too much to risk, and the outcome wasn't worth the risk. Sure, he was mad that he failed to protect Bella, he was mad that she died the way she did under his protection, and he was mad

that the very first mission he had ever undertaken was his single worst mission to this date by far. But that was it, he wasn't super attached to Bella on a personal level, and he didn't even know her.

He didn't want to ruin his life by committing a crime. Although Martial Artists were not punished as hard, it was undoubtedly true that it would halt his progression. Especially at a time when his growth was extremely important.

But this time, this was different. The clientele was the Kandrian Burea of Investigation, and the mission was accepted and approved. Meaning both, the Kandrian Empire and the Martial Union were on his side.

Meaning he didn't have to worry about anything.

He looked at the commission date and time, the exact time the Kandrian Burea of Investigation commissioned this mission.

"Three hours ago. Wow," Rui muttered.

It was an extremely fresh mission. One that came rather quickly. Usually, missions like these would be put out in the library, free to be accepted by any Martial Artist that is eligible to accept the commission and undertake the mission. However, if it sat out unaccepted for too long, then it would mandatorily be assigned to a Martial Apprentice.

The Martial Union could assign Martial Apprentices missions that they were obligated to complete, this was one of the terms of the licensing contract. It was used for important missions that needed to be completed quickly. One such mission was the offense-class mission that Rui and his friends were assigned in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana.

Rui immediately plucked the mission bill out of the slot of the shelf before immediately heading over to the registrar, quickly accepting the mission officially before opening the bill in a corner of the library at a desk.

"Alright then," Rui murmured to himself. "Let's see what this is all about."

He began reading the details of the mission in greater depth. The intelligence network had managed to gain information on the location of the base operations that the former president of Lowminer Industries was operating at. It appeared that he had managed to escape by simply escaping with the immediate liquid and transportable assets of his company that he had managed to gather before escaping just before the warrant for his arrest was released.

Rui found it rather surprising that he managed to make it out of the country and successfully migrate to another country, but it could be inferred that Faraday Lowminer had been preparing for this for a long time, most likely.