

Martial Unity 481

Chapter 481: Border

Rui found it a shame that he couldn't kill the man himself, but the fact that there was a Martial commission to capture and retrieve him from a foreign nation using force meant that whatever his fate was, it was not pretty. He was definitely doomed.

Rui quickly memorized the intelligence that the Martial Union had gathered. He was particularly impressed that they had obtained the location of the target of the mission this quickly, as expected, the intelligence network of the Martial Union was not to be underestimated.

There was no doubt in his mind that the intelligence department of the Martial Union had Shadows stationed in every nation that were extremely specialized in sensory and stealth-oriented techniques in addition to a more conventional spy network. These spies' ability to obtain information was sharp and swift.

"In the southern region of the town of Garten in the Kingdom of Violis?" Rui remarked.

The Kingdom of Violis was an orbiter sovereign state of the Kandrian Empire, close enough to fall within the primary sphere of influence of the Kandrian Empire.

The precision of the location wasn't high, Rui would need to engage in a bit of surveillance and detection in order to find the precise location of his target.

The mission bill had specified that the Martial Artist needed to have wide-range sensory techniques that would allow them to detect the precise location of the target of his mission.

That was why Rui was eligible for the technique. With the Mindmirror brain amplifying the Seismic Mapping technique as well as his own enhanced senses as a Martial Squire, his sensory prowess had risen tremendously. As long as the intel wasn't wrong, he would definitely find them.

Rui quickly inputted all the data in the mission scroll into his Mind Palace for convenience before heading to the dispatch facility.

He quickly purchased the basic gear that he needed. The mission was straightforward and the risks were minimal. The only potential problem that could arise was the fact that the Kingdom of Violis did possess Martial Squires. Thankfully, they didn't possess Martial Seniors, which would make an infiltration of the kingdom much more of a pain and riskier.

Martial Squires were bad enough, of course, but that was much more manageable. The chances that he would be caught for infiltration were far lower, furthermore, his ability to cope was not low. He merely needed to be careful and the mission ought to proceed smoothly.

It wasn't long before nearly everything was done and he could freely dispatch and head off for the mission.

"One last signature here, Squire." A staff bowed to him.

Rui quickly obliged before putting on a mask and setting off.

The sheer speed at which he could travel was extraordinary, however, within the dense and bustling population of the town of Hajin. If he ran forward at top speed without care he wouldn't merely shove them aside, he would leave a slew of mangled corpses in his path due to the sheer amount of momentum his body had.

That is why he chose to Sky Walk instead of sprint on the ground.

Rui had familiarized himself with the natural ability of Sky Walking that came with obtaining a Martial body.

His foot pressed into the air as he stepped on seemingly nothing.

WHOOSH

His body elevated as he continuously pushed down in a periodic motion rising continuously higher and higher.

This was one benefit of breaking into the Squire Realm that he did not expect he would enjoy so much. Every single muscle was able to exert an extraordinary amount of force even without a single technique. Once he employed Outer Convergence, he could easily 'step' on the atmosphere like it was solid, he could swim through it like it was a liquid.

He decelerated as he hovered in midair, exerting just enough force with his motions to float midair and take in the full view of the town of Hajin.

He felt incredible, almost like a god.

"This is lit." He nodded, breathing deeply and setting off.

He employed Outer Convergence and Wind Breathing as he speedily dashed off into the air with severe speed. While it was less restricting and freer, it was slower as far as absolute top speed went. It was easier to travel with solid land under your feet than on air. However, it did help bypass traffic.

The kingdom of Violis was south of the Kandrian Empire, Rui had to cross the entire Empire to exit the Kandrian Empire facing south, it was the shortest and straightest route to the Kingdom of Violis.

It took him five hours to reach the border of the Kandrian Empire. Yet just as he came close to crossing it, he felt a sharp sense of danger. He froze on the spot in midair as a figure appeared before him with tremendous speed from below, hovering in midair before him.

The woman wore militaristic armor, something that Rui was unaccustomed to seeing. Her armor bore the insignia of the Kandrian Empire.

Yet what drew his attention the most was the sharp Squire-level aura she exuded.

"I am Squire Ranger Vera of the Kandrian Border Patrol Force." She introduced herself with an icy tone. "Your attempt to exit the Kandrian Empire through Sky Walking bypasses departure regulations. This is your first warning, abide by the protocols at all times. We will require you to provide valid identification to us as well."

Rui sighed at the consequences of his own rash actions as he pulled out his Martial license. Normally, the identification of a document from a non-governmental department was not considered a valid ID, but the Martial Union was different.

She nodded as she studied the card, before returning it to him.

WHOOSH

A thick gust of air smoothly and cleanly carried the ID card over to Rui.

('She's a master of wind manipulation techniques!') Rui inwardly gaped at the precision, accuracy, and control over the atmosphere that she had demonstrated.

Chapter 482: Arrived

Rui kept a blank face as he retrieved his ID card, but inwardly he was fanboying over her and her mastery of the wind manipulation techniques.

('She's like an airbender!') He exclaimed inwardly.

He immediately wished he had wind manipulation prowess as good as hers, but she had surely spent more than a decade as a Martial Artist obtaining her current level of skill. As an allrounder, he couldn't imagine how long it would take him to obtain that kind of prowess.

She escorted him to the Kandrian transit port leaving only after he had been admitted into the building. A while later he exited the Kandrian Empire. Thankfully, the due process needed to leave a country wasn't nearly as extensive and annoying as the process was on Earth, where effectively half a day could be gone into merely trying to leave a country.

DASH

He immediately began running south towards the Kingdom of Violis at top speed. He chose to stick to the ground, it was too dangerous to Sky Walk outside the Kandrian Empire. It drew too much attention and left him too vulnerable and open. Within the Martial Empire, this wasn't a problem, the probability of anything happening was too little.

BOOM!

He accelerated, picking up the pace, as a sonic boom rippled across the air. He was sprinting so fast that a sonic cone formed around him, facing the direction he was moving in. The Kingdom of Violis was only roughly five hundred kilometers away from the Kandrian Empire. It took him a little less than half an hour to reach the Kingdom of Violis.

He stopped some distance away from the border, scoping out the area with Seismic Mapping. Ever since he broke through to the Squire Realm, the same sensory techniques that he had carried along to the Squire Realm had all grown in all parameters. Even from a distance, he could accurately gain an understanding of what it was like on the other side of the wall.

('There's too many people in the vicinity of this section of the border.') Rui muttered inwardly, unhappy.

He had no intention of entering the country legitimately. Faraday Lowminer had demonstrated that he was a careful man, considering the fact that he successfully managed to leave the Kandrian Empire and run away from the consequences of his crimes. The possibility that he had a way to be alerted when a Martial Squire from the Kandrian Empire entered the Kingdom of Violis was not low.

The border was barricaded by a simple wall, as the intelligence provided by the Martial Union told him. Unlike the Kandrian Empire, the Kingdom of Violis couldn't afford to dedicate too many resources to border security due to its poverty and lack of necessary resources.

The Kandrian Empire was rich and loaded enough to have a much more secure border barricade, resembling a fortress than the mere wall the Kingdom of Violis had to make do with. The Kandrian Empire had the Kandrian Border Patrol Force that Rui had run into, which maintained border security, capable of detecting and stopping a Martial Squire from leaving the country unauthorized. The Kingdom of Violis only had small lookouts stationed at distant intervals.

Rui could easily escape their surveillance with his speed alone, that wasn't a concern. He just needed to make sure he was infiltrating a part of the country that didn't have too many witnesses.

('Found it,') Rui eventually stumbled across what he wanted after he circled around for a bit.

WHOOSH

In the blink of an eye, he had already closed the distance and leaped over the wall, maintaining extreme caution.

He had long put on a Mind Mask that suppressed all sense of threat and pressure that he, as a Martial Squire exerted on sentient life, reducing him to a normal seventeen-year-old boy. He had already memorized the map of the Kingdom of Violis, so he knew exactly where he needed to go.

He didn't draw any attention to himself by running at superhuman speeds, he quickly cloaked himself with a large cloak, so that his Martial Union would not be visible while wearing a large hat, tipped over to reduce the exposure of his appearance. His mask would give away his status as a Martial Artist, after all.

The Kingdom of Violis was warmer and had more humidity than the Kandrian Empire, which was colder, having been higher up north.

The towns of the Kingdom were reflective of the economic standing of the Kingdom itself. The infrastructure was more elementary, less sophisticated, and less well-maintained compared to the town of Hajin.

Despite his desire to mesh in, he inevitably drew attention. It was clear that he was a foreigner.

Of course, Rui didn't expect anything else, nor did he care. It was enough that he wasn't identified as a Martial Artist. The Mind Mask technique was a lifesaver in times like these.

Because the pace of his traveling had slowed down, traveling to the town of Garten, the town where Faraday Lowminer was supposed to be basing his operations, was taking time. Rui needed to travel for a longer period of time to reach where he wanted to.

Of course, when traveling through remote routes with no human presence, he could simply sprint and pick up the pace.

It took him a whole day before he finally reached the town of Garten.

"Alright then," Rui muttered. "Time to get to work."

The town was a bustling one, full of energy and vigor. It made it easier for him to move around without drawing attention, something he was grateful for.

He knew the base of operations of Faraday Lowminer was in the southern part of the town, he needed to figure out a way to sniff the man out, capture him and, ideally, his band of Martial Apprentices as well, and drag them to the Kandrian Empire.

Rui closed his eyes as he computed a list of courses of action he could take to dig out his target.

Chapter 483: Approach

The simplest and most straightforward method was a direct and head-on approach of manually interrogating the townsfolk, asking them about the men he was pursuing.

Of course, he immediately scratched that course of action out of his mind. It had a low probability of succeeding and a high probability of alerting Faraday Lowminer of his presence. If he realized that someone was in town looking for him, then he would simply vanish like the wind, in all likelihood.

Thus, Rui had to take a more indirect approach to capture.

('First, what would lead me to him in the first place?') He asked himself.

He could either obtain the information directly by extracting the information from someone who did know his exact location or indirectly by following a trail that would lead him to Faraday. No matter how well he hid, as long as he was running an operation of any kind that made him money of any kind, he was inevitably connected to arrows that pointed in his direction.

Even if he distanced himself from everything, he would need people managing his operations on his behalf. These people would most certainly be required to be physically at the site of the base of operations, overseeing inventory, schedule, supplies, processing, and shipments. The base of operations could be tracked via the influx and outflux of funds, and the influx and outflux of goods.

However, this was the avenue of intelligence gathering that the intelligence department of the Martial Union was responsible for.

And so far, they had done a good job with the intelligence that they had managed to obtain.

Faraday Lowminer had already long set up the foundation for a base of operations in another state even before he escaped the Kandrian Empire, according to the intelligence that the Martial Union had provided to Rui.

The man had not hurriedly set up a new base of operation but simply went all-out with an existing base of operations.

The intelligence that the Martial Union managed to dig up was more specific, of course. The man had set up a drug trafficking and selling business. The esoteric kind, the kind that was illegal and heavily penalized.

It made sense, he was once in the esoteric resources-supplying industry, the legitimate one. He had no choice but to delve into the underworld once he was ousted by the Kandrian Empire.

The Kandrian Empire had an extradition treaty with almost all states in the geographic surroundings of the country. Meaning he couldn't just travel to another state and set up shop and continue with a legitimate business. He would either need to travel extremely far to do that, in nations he had very little exposure to and understanding of. Or choose to remain in a part of the Panama Continent he was more familiar with.

The Martial Union had done a good job trying to narrow his location down soon after his escape, meaning his plan had come close to failing. The intelligence department could easily narrow down his location by tracking exchanges in funds and tracking down the movement of the illegal esoteric drugs that he was receiving and supplying.

However, that only worked as far as narrowing down the general location of his base of operations. It took more time to pinpoint it.

Rui did not intend to try and aid the intelligence gathering by following in their footsteps. While analyzing the flow of money and drugs was certainly useful, he wouldn't be able to add much value as dedicated experts and specialists were already on the job.

Sure, he wouldn't be useless, but was it really his most effective and efficient way to find his target?

('The intelligence analysts can do what they do best, I intend to do the same.')

His operations weren't the only way he could be traced.

The fact that he had a band of Martial Apprentices was another opening through which Rui could trace his location. Rui could easily detect whether a person was a Martial Apprentice or not. Furthermore, the Kingdom of Violis most certainly did not have anywhere near as many Martial Apprentices as the Kandrian Empire.

The town of Garten was unlikely to contain a large number of Martial Apprentices. As long as he latched on to each of them one by one, he would inevitably have found himself on a trail back to his target.

Rui intended to go down the list of all Martial Apprentices in town that he detected and verify whether they were one of Faraday's men. If it was true that Faraday's base of operations was based in the town of Garten, then it was quite likely the case that all of the Martial Apprentices were also inhabiting the town of Garten.

It wouldn't be quick or easy, but it was quite a reliable plan. He had computed several other plans as well, of course, but given his circumstances and capabilities, none of them were nearly as reliable as this one.

Furthermore, it was a plan that extremely few Martial Squires, including Rui, could complete. The plan would require the ability to sense Martial Apprentices within a reasonably wide area, otherwise, it would take far too long and was far too unreliable. Rui was able to sense Martial Apprentices within a wide area thanks to the presence of both Primordial Instinct and the Mindmirror brain augmenting it. There were very few who could accurately detect Martial Apprentices over a wider area the way Rui could.

Even if some of the Martial Apprentices that Faraday was employing had high stealth capabilities, it wouldn't matter because there were several others who Rui could use to lead him back to Faraday. There were very few things that could go wrong with the plan as long as Rui was careful and cautious.

He immediately began solidifying the details of his approach as he fleshed out the plan. Details such as how would he come to eventually verify whether a Martial Apprentice he was tracking was a target or not, or how far he should track them from, and other important details.

Chapter 484: Profile

Rui immediately got to work. He hit the mission commencement button on his mission tracker device as he traveled across town.

The town of Garten was a highly commercial location. However, unlike Hajin, commerce did not come from larger corporations conducting organized business. Most of the market was comprised of smaller-scale businesses and entrepreneurs of various kinds.

There were a lot of flea markets of various kinds and different areas for different kinds of goods. The population and energy were high, resulting in a lot of chaos.

('An ideal place to run an illegal drug distribution operation.') Rui noted.

Illegal activities illicit less attention in chaotic circumstances. The fact that there was so much happening at all times was the perfect cover for an operation like the one Faraday Lowminer was engaging in. Isolated and shady hideouts were unreliable because they couldn't do a good job hiding the base of operation of a certain drug distribution operation.

Martial Artists would sniff out the location of the base of operations in a heartbeat with no difficulty if the base of operations occurred in a distant but isolated and shady location.

On Earth, there were no sensory techniques, and although there was sensor technology that allowed investigators and law enforcement to pinpoint location to a surprisingly high degree, it wasn't as effective as Rui's sensory capabilities, for example.

Thus, a better solution than hiding was actually disguising. Hiding could be overcome in a straightforward and brute force fashion because they could be directly sniffed out, but disguising bypassed that because you didn't where what you were looking for was actually amidst the things you were searching.

Considering how much of a wide area the chaotic nature of the small business and entrepreneur commercial part of the town spread, Rui could easily see why the Martial Union had had a little troubling it down any further.

He had already begun looking for Martial Apprentices within the area just as he had planned. Furthermore, he had already formed a system by which he either confirmed that a particular Martial Apprentice was or wasn't a Lowminer.

If Faraday was as careful as Rui suspected him to be, then it was quite likely that each of the Martial Apprentices maintained a very low profile even when they were in traveling the commercial part of the town, especially when they were traveling outside their base of operations.

That meant it was unlikely that they would talk loudly or make noise, it was quite likely that they had something obstructing their appearance, and it was quite likely they would avoid picking fights or engaging in any kind of conflict.

This already was a pretty decent way to focus on the Martial Apprentices that were more likely to have a connection to the Lowminers. Of course, this was necessarily absolute, but there was quite a high

probability that they would be instructed to minimize the amount of attention they drew. Of course, as a Martial Apprentice, the people immediately near them would be able to pick it up, but by minimizing his emotional expression, he was able to reduce the attention he drew.

Unlike Rui, of course. Even as a Martial Squire, he could only reduce his presence all the way down to an ordinary seventeen-year-old boy, he could even go further beyond and truly minimize the attention he drew. He had taken the initiative to do so.

It was especially ideal in a scenario where the chaos in the environment made it so that he was effectively invisible.

He had already dialed Primordial Instinct and Seismic Mapping to the absolute maximum. The former sense quickly gave him the threat level of each person even in his general area. An overwhelming majority of people gave him zero sense of danger.

The entire town could gang up on him and he would still feel unperturbed. Even as a Martial Apprentice, humans were entirely obsolete unless they were amped up on potions or were using some kind of technology.

Suddenly, his senses perked as he felt a greater, but ultimately still insignificant, amount of weight from one particular individual that entered his sensory range as he kept walking forward.

('Martial Apprentice.') Rui rejoiced as he walked toward the source of the pressure subtly.

The man was drunk, causing a bit of a scene before everybody.

"You messing with me punk?" He slobbered, holding a young man up by his collar.

The Martial Apprentice had loud and ostentatious clothes, he had companions who looked more like servants than acquaintances or friends. The food and beer he had consumed were also not little, furthermore, they each had their own saddled horses.

('Rich kid who somehow managed to discover his Martial Path.')

He sighed. Partly because the probability that the Martial Apprentice was of the Lowminers was quite low. If the Lowminers were stupid enough to have someone this unreliable as a part of their drug operation then they would have long been caught.

Furthermore, Rui quickly deduced that he was most likely the heir of a wealthy and influential family. His garments were of much higher quality than what Rui had observed in the market, and the fact that he had servants and a horse was also indicative of his status, yet their light belongings and lack of other goods indicated short-distance traveling. That coupled with the fact that he was being an insufferable prick for no reason was also consistent with the profile that he would expect from someone with that background.

Rui made sure that there were no prying eyes that could be watching with Primordial Instinct and Seismic Mapping, before returning his attention to the drunk idiot before him.

Time slowed down in his perspective as he leaped forward with extreme speed.

WHOOSH

TAP

He simply jabbed lightly with a karate chop at the neck of the Martial Apprentice as he crossed to the other side.

THUD

The man collapsed like a puppet cut from its strings, earning the surprise of the crowd. Rui had moved so fast that even a crowd was far too slow to perceive him and catch an image of him.

Chapter 485: Decision

Even as a Martial Apprentice, he was blindingly fast to normal humans, as a Martial Squire, normal humans were so slow in his eyes that they were no different from statues. It was as though he gained

the ability to slow down and freeze time. Knocking him out without anyone noticing was an extremely simple and easy task.

The crowd didn't even suspect a thing.

"He drank himself out."

"The young master is a wretched drunkard who abuses his power."

"Well, at least he didn't hurt anybody this time."

Those words affirmed Rui's deductions about the man. He was clearly a local and a resident of the area, most certainly not a newcomer Martial Apprentice associated with the Lowminers. It seemed even his drinking and harassment weren't uncommon.

It was an odd sight to Rui. Yet it showed him how much better the Kandrian Empire was. Martial Artists weren't allowed to run around hurting people with impunity. While it was true that the sentencing penalties for violence were light, this wasn't because of class privilege, but it was because Martial Artists were a crucial part of the state and were too important and valuable to be wasted rotting behind bars for a decade.

Of course, this didn't mean they got away scot-free. They usually signed an agreement with the Martial Union or the Kandrian government where they worked free of cost for certain degrees of limited freedom, depending on how severe their crime was.

This was the way that the Kandrian government and the Martial Union punished Martial Artists that crossed the line while also exploiting them for free Martial labor. It was a ruthless but clever system that squeezed Martial Artists of their value. Not only were no resources wasted in imprisoning Martial Artists in special prisons meant to withstand even the massively superhuman power that Martial Artists were capable of exerting, but positive utility was obtained from such an arrangement.

The only reason Martial Artists didn't complain was that the deal was still much better than being imprisoned. Thus, it was ultimately a win-win for everybody involved.

The Kingdom of Violis was much different in that regard, it seemed. For half a second, Rui considered killing the Martial Apprentice, yet quickly reigned in that thought. It drew too much attention, especially as the young Martial Artist appeared to be the son of someone important. It might also alert his target.

He immediately walked away from the scene inconspicuously, before resuming his search.

The good thing was that there wasn't a large population of Martial Apprentices for him to have to work with. Of course, this was to be expected.

The rate of breakthroughs of human beings into the Apprentice Realm was one in a thousand, roughly speaking. Only 0.001% of the population of a country was a Martial Artist, after all.

In time, he ran into yet another.

This time, the chances were much more optimistic. He maintained a decently low profile, did not employ his power recklessly, and did not draw attention unnecessarily through any other means.

('This seems like a good shot,') Rui thought optimistically. He memorized the man's seismic signature and began tailing him from a distance. Thankfully, he could tail him even with a large distance between them thanks to Seismic Mapping. There was absolutely no risk of being caught for tailing him due to the sheer distance between them.

The man took his time, slowly navigating through the bustling crowd. Yet to Rui's surprise, he was heading away from the commercial areas of the town, heading closer up north. To Rui's dismay, this reduced the probability of him being associated with the Lowminers.

And he was proven right.

The man entered a residential area and eventually walked into a house. He was greeted by a woman carrying a child. Rui sighed as they exchanged embraces, walking back down to the south of the town. The man was clearly a local, and not someone who had migrated to the country extremely recently.

He ran into a lot of duds, far more than he had expected.

Some of these Martial Apprentices were earnestly shopping, others were commissioned to act as a bodyguard by a client, escorting her around as she shopped.

Rui had almost given up hope when he detected one more Martial Apprentice just up ahead in the distance.

It was only after he made he got a glimpse of his face did his eyes widen.

A masked man, one that looked nearly identical to the one that had separated Rui from Bella on his first mission many years ago.

('That bastard...!') Rui's eyes narrowed.

He hadn't expected that he would verify a member of the Lowminer gang this fast after detecting a Martial Apprentice.

('I've hit the lottery. I just need to follow this guy back to wherever he goes and I'll find the base of operations of the Lowminers.')

Rui had no intention of letting him go. He would lead him to the base of operations, and he would pay for making Rui fail to protect Bella Hier.

Rui was on max alert as he made sure to follow the Martial Apprentice from a distance as inconspicuously as he possibly could. He wound about through the alleys of the bustling marketplace before he entered the flowering district. A large group of shops with flowers and bouquets set up on the top.

('This is it.')

Rui nodded.

This place was it. Not just because the Martial Apprentice had entered it, but also because Rui could sense an underground layout with activity coming from under through Seismic Mapping.

He was about seventy-percent certain that this place was the actual base of operations or one of the bases of operations. It had a limited underground layout that probably served as the inventory for drugs

But Rui wasn't primarily interested in the base of operations as much as he was interested in the ringleader, who actually was the target of his mission.

('Alright then...') Rui wondered. ('What exactly to do now?')

Chapter 486: Interrogate

There were several courses of action that he could take. The first one was, of course, the most straightforward course of action. He could just storm in and start interrogating the people running the show.

But the odds were high that that would alert the target of his mission before Rui actually reached him. First, he would be assuming that the people there were actually aware of the location of their ringleader. Second, even if they were aware, he needed to be careful of how he extracted the data from Faraday's men. It was risky.

Even if he killed all of them after interrogating them, there was a high chance that Faraday would find out about the leak and would immediately scram, making Rui's job even harder.

The probability that the target of his mission was waiting at this location was, of course, unlikely. Rui was relatively certain this was merely the location where the drugs were sold and distributed. The actual location where they were received and processed was likely not at this particular location, which was clearly just a commercial outpost.

('Barging in is risky.') Rui noted. ('I should nab a Martial Apprentice and interrogate him separately.')

It didn't take long for the masked Martial Apprentice to leave the flower shop. Rui waited for the right moment.

WHOOSH

One moment the Martial Apprentice was simply walking minding his own business, and the next moment he was gone.

A few random people who were near him turned, and glanced at the spot he was just at in confusion, before shrugging and going on about their day.

In a distant remote alley away from the commercial district, Rui dropped the man to the ground. Although Rui had moved extremely quickly, the Martial Apprentice had still struggled to break free from his grip while they were moving. Too bad that in front of him, even a grade ten martial Apprentice was no different from a child compared to a sports athlete.

The Martial Apprentice dashed away the second he was dropped to the ground, yet Rui simply tore off his Mind Mask.

"Freeze." He said calmly.

The masked Martial Apprentice froze on the spot as if forcefully halted by a powerful force.

Fear was a powerful force.

The grand aura and force of a Martial Squire descended upon the area as the masked Martial Apprentice shivered in his spot.

He knew that Rui could kill him with the slightest exertion of effort.

"You," Rui spoke in Kandrian. "You're of the Lowminers, aren't you?"

The Martial Apprentice stiffened as he realized what all this was about.

"I know you're not sticking with the Lowminers out of sheer loyalty. Faraday Lowminer must be paying you hefty to earn your services. The question is whether whatever he's giving you is worth your life." Rui told him.

The Martial Apprentice didn't reply, but he understood where Rui was going with this.

"I have an ability that can allow me to detect whether you're lying or being honest," Rui told him. "I can accurately determine what is true and what isn't."

In reality, it wasn't that convenient. With Primordial Instinct, Rui could gauge emotion and intention in normal people to a certain degree. He could tell the difference between the sincere truth and a complete lie, but when things were a mix of both, he had no idea what was the truth and what wasn't.

"You will answer my questions truthfully. If you lie, I will inflict horrific suffering on you. I won't let you die. You will suffer at my hands and at the hands of the Kandrian martial Union until you spit out the truth. This doesn't need to happen if you speak the truth. Is that clear?"

He nodded nervously.

"Alright then." Rui calmly asked him. "Where is Faraday Lowminer?"

There was a moment of silence before the Martial Apprentice opened his mouth to answer Rui.

"He's at our main base of operations, in an underground base that poses as a homeless shelter on the surface."

Rui processed the information that the Martial Apprentice gave him as he carefully studied the man with Primordial Instinct.

('Sincere... Hm,') Rui noted. "Where is this homeless shelter?"

"A little south of the commercial districts." The man quickly ratted out.

('So it was even further south than we suspected, while he certainly did use the chaotic commercial districts as a way to distribute drugs without attracting much attention, I suppose it's not feasible to have their main base in such a populated area.') Rui realized.

"Give me an address, be as precise and accurate as you can," Rui told him calmly.

He carefully eyed the man as the latter spat out an address, as well as some landmarks.

"You're lying. Trying to throw me off?" Rui snorted.

"I'm telling the truth!" He exclaimed, repeating the address again, being more descriptive this time. Rui kept pushing him despite that.

SNAP

"AAARRRGH!" The Martial Apprentice cried out loud as Rui casually broke his arm with a single hand.
"I'm not lying!"

"Hm..." Rui stared at him.

In actuality, Rui sensed a lot of desperate sincerity from the man, he just wanted to make sure there was absolutely no avenue for him to lie whatsoever.

"Last question," Rui told him. "Do you remember the assassination of Bella Hier?"

His eyebrows scrunched in confusion, wondering why Rui randomly brought up something of that sort.

He nodded slowly, nervous.

"Do you remember the Martial Apprentice you fought?" Rui asked with an icy tone. "The one you attacked, fought, and separated from Bella Hier?"

More confusion, more nodding.

"That Martial Apprentice had been too weak to fight and protect his target back then, hadn't he?" Rui said, looking at the sky, before turning back to him. "What do you think he would do to you if you were standing before him after all that time?"

More confusion followed until the Martial Apprentice had a scary realization.

He turned towards Rui in fear, but a jittery shiver flew down his spine.

Chapter 487: Infiltration

He stared at Rui with fearful eyes. Rui calmly returned his stare with an icy one of his own.

"ACK!" He choked as Rui grabbed him by the neck.

"I know it was no more than an assignment for you." Rui strengthened his grip. "I know it wasn't personal for you."

He brought the man's face closer.

"But honestly?" Rui asked. "I don't give a damn."

"...!" The Martial Apprentice's face grew red. He felt as though his head was going to burst. He struggled desperately, trying to pry Rui's hands off his neck while kicking Rui with all the Apprentice-level technique he could.

In vain, of course.

His measly attacks couldn't even budge Rui even when he wasn't using any Squire-level defensive techniques.

The Martial Apprentice's eyelids fluctuated as his vision blurred.

The brain tended to automatically shut down when blood flow to it was shut down for more than seven seconds.

Rui clenched his grip, squeezing down hard.

SNAP

A Martial Apprentice's body was fundamentally human, barring the brain. Rui didn't even need to use Outer Convergence to snap his neck with ease, killing him on the spot.

THUD

He dropped his body to the ground, sighing.

('Not the most rational decision.') He had enough self-awareness to realize that wasn't the best decision he could have made. Maybe the Martial Apprentice had mastered some mental technique that allowed him to fool Rui's Primordial Instinct. Maybe the location that he had given Rui was wrong and fake, and he successfully fooled Rui using that technique.

In that case, Rui should have kept him alive in case the location was wrong so that he could extract the real location from him.

Of course, it wasn't likely, but Rui was normally quite careful on missions.

This time, however, he had acted irrationally.

He sighed, shaking his head. He quickly scoured the man's body, finding some cash and a communication device, both of which he took. There was nothing else of value on the corpse.

He raised one foot up in the air.

THUD!!

His foot struck the ground, cratering past the soil. In an instant, he had created a crater several meters deep, tossing the corpse in it. Within five minutes, he had buried the body in soil and had completely covered it, and flattened the ground.

"Alright then." He clapped his hands, dusting them off. "Time to set off."

First, he updated the Martial Union on the intel he had acquired, through the communication device. It was necessary to keep them in the loop as soon as he got access to new intel, a policy that ensured that Martial Artists did not die before conveying valuable intelligence to the Martial Union.

He turned, facing south. That was where the location of the homeless shelter was.

RUMBLE!

The very ground shook as he dashed away at incredible speeds. The air recoiled as a sonic boom blasted through it.

Twenty seconds, that's how long it took him to reach the location that the Martial Apprentice had given him.

The homeless shelter part appeared to be accurate, this was a good sign. Rui could sense a large number of people within the warehouse, huddled together. It was a cramped location. Seismic Mapping detected an underground layout as well, whose only entrance was at the center of the shelter.

There was no reason to hesitate.

He ignored the odd stares that the people inside gave him. He was clearly not one of them. There appeared to be helpers who aided the needy, they too threw confused looks at him. Rui simply ignored all of them as he headed toward the entrance to the underground facility.

"Hey." A man stopped him. "Who are you and where the fuck do you think you're going?"

A bunch of armed guards stopped him.

"I'm here to kill Faraday Lowminer." Rui simply replied.

He studied the looks of shock and anger that emerged on their faces. Their reactions supported the claim that the target of his mission was here.

THWACK

Rui simply waved his hand across the two guards, killing them instantly.

All hell broke loose as the commotion attracted the attention of the rest of the security team.

He simply tore off his Mind Mask and watched them all freeze in fear, studying their reactions. He was trying to gauge how confident they were in their defenses.

"Hm..." He dashed forward, running through them like they were light curtains. Deeper inside the facility was what appeared to be a locked section. Rui could sense the tunnel leading underground behind the gates.

BAM!

He broke through, shocking the many people within.

Inside was a large opening into the ground that inclined downwards. There were storage vehicles that entered and exited the tunnel. There were many men loading and unloading boxes, filled with drugs no doubt.

The guards immediately raised their muskets and other projectile weapons, yet they never had a chance to fire them.

Rui simply disappeared from their vision.

He was already running down the tunnel.

"Deep." He murmured.

A security block soon entered his vision, they manually checked all the incoming vehicles, before letting them pass. Amongst them was a man in what appeared to be a suit, overseeing the security team.

POW POW POW!

Rui killed all the security guards in the briefest of moments. It happened so fast that the security head hadn't even realized what had happened until after Rui killed all of them.

"You're the head of security?" Rui asked him in international language.

He tried pulling out a musket, pointing it towards Rui. Yet he shivered his knees buckled. Rui took off his Mind Mask, drawing out his primal fear.

"Where is Faraday Lowminer?" Rui coldly asked.

The man pointed with a shivering finger down the block.

('Good, he's here.') Rui nodded. "How many Martial Apprentices does he have?"

"S-Seventeen." The man gulped.

Not a small number.

"How many Martial Squires?"

"N-None."

"You're lying." Rui scoffed.

CRACK

"AAARGH! It's the truth!" The man sobbed, caressing his broken arm.

Chapter 488: Drag

In actuality, he wasn't lying. Rui just wanted to make sure.

"Where is he exactly?" Rui growled.

"H-He's in his office, at the very end of the underground warehouse." He managed to squeeze out.

Just then, the armed guards from above that he had simply zoomed past had finally caught up, having rushed downhill at top speed.

Rui tossed the man outside, but he couldn't be bothered dealing with them. Why waste time killing people that he could simply avoid? It's not like they could do anything in the first place. His goal was

primarily to capture and bring back Faraday Lowminer, and secondarily to bring back the Martial Apprentices alive, if possible.

Of course, he had killed one of them already, but he didn't care too much. He didn't mind not perfectly completing the mission in order to regain some revenge.

They fired at him, but the various bullets and arrows were too slow to be able to tag him. Or hurt him if they did hit him. He just disappeared from their field of vision as he headed further down.

"Hm?" His senses pricked as he faintly felt a heavy presence at the edge of his field of senses. The type that only Martial Apprentices could dish out.

He immediately happened upon a storage facility where men were unloading and docking boxes into the storage room. It was immediately evident that his place served as the inventory for the drug operation. However, his attention was most fixated on the two Martial Apprentices he had happened upon.

They immediately lashed out against him, yet they simply froze when he unleashed his Squire-level aura. To a Martial Apprentice, Martial Squire's bloodlust aura was no different from a Martial Apprentice's aura to normal people.

In fact, when Squire Caella Freelia unleashed her aura upon Rui and his friends in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana, only Rui had broken out of the fear it generated while his friends were still paralyzed.

Rui didn't even need to bother anymore with interrogations, he had already gotten close enough. Furthermore, there were plenty of Martial Apprentices that were huddled around in a somewhat small area and a single human.

('There he is') Rui sighed in relief.

POW POW!

He knocked the two Martial Apprentices out, before administering to them a potent drug that would leave them knocked out for twenty-four hours. He ignored all the human workers, they didn't even register to him.

Even an army of ordinary humans had a perfect zero chance of defeating him.

He headed towards the area where he could sense the many Martial Apprentices huddled.

BANG!

He kicked open the door.

Nine people turned their attention to him.

Of the nine of them, six were Martial Apprentices, they were frozen, having sensed that their opponent was a Martial Squire.

The other three were normal humans, two of them were clearly natives of the Kingdom of Violis judging by their facial features which were generally distinct from that of Kandrian natives.

And the man at the center, who was hurriedly packing up a suitcase with money and some files, simply stared at him with a grim expression.

It was him.

Faraday Lowminer.

He looked a little different from the image that the Martial Union had provided him. He looked wearier and older. But there was no doubt in Rui's mind that this was the man he was looking for. The man who had gotten Bella killed and had caused Rui to fail his first mission.

"Faraday Lowminer." He addressed the man with a calm voice despite his emotions. "As authorized by the Kandrian central government, I'm here to escort you back to the Kandrian Empire where you will undergo a trial for the charges levied against you by the Kandrian Bureau of Investigation."

The man gritted his teeth. "I'm going nowhere! Attack him!"

Only one of the six Martial Apprentices managed to break free from the oppressive fear that Rui generated in all of them. He was a particularly powerful Martial Apprentice, judging by the weight of his mind and the fact that he broke through.

Yet before he could even take one step forward.

POW POW POW POW POW POW!

Rui flashed past all of them, and a single strike knocked all of them out.

STEP

He was just before Faraday Lowminer, staring deeply into the man's eyes. "You're going to pay for your many crimes."

Before the man could even open his mouth, Rui had already stuck the syringe needly into him, injecting him with a drug. The man collapsed on the spot.

Rui wanted to ensure he didn't get provoked to kill him by mistake, so he quickly dosed the man so that there was no chance of that.

He quickly drugged the Martial Apprentices. Before using the highly portable bags to tie the drugged Martial Artists and the target of his mission into them.

He turned back to the two other humans that had remained frozen since the very start. They weren't Kandrian citizens and while they were guilty of crimes, they had not violated the law of the Kandrian Empire within the territory of the Kandrian Empire.

He simply ignored them.

When he was walking up, he didn't receive any resistance. In fact, he hardly ran into anybody. However, he wasn't surprised. The guards and workers here weren't extremely loyal, once Rui had shown how formidable he was and they had finally understood he was a Martial Squire, they ran away like the wind, knowing that this drug operation was doomed.

Not that Rui cared. He had obtained what he came for and didn't really care much for the small-time crooks that were involved in this operation. It just made his job easier, he would rather not mass murder if he didn't need to.

He dragged his targets out, this was the boring part of the mission. Hauling the targets of his mission to the nearest Martial Union office. Thankfully, he did not need to manually drag them back to the Martial Union, handing them over to the Martial Union office would seal the deal.

Chapter 489: Charged

"We have successfully acquired the targets of your mission, Squire Quarrier." A woman wearing a uniform with the emblem of the Kandrian Martial Union told Rui, bowing. "Thank you for completing your mission."

Rui nodded. "Will there be any problems with handling the Martial Apprentices and getting them back to the Kandrian Empire?"

"Not at all." She politely responded. "The Martial Apprentices will be carefully monitored by a team of experts who will ensure they remain sedated. We have an extradition treaty with the Kingdom of Violis and there are many channels that the Martial Union has established for smuggling larger goods in and out of the Kingdom of Violis."

Rui nodded in response.

"Is there anything else, Squire?" She asked politely.

"Not at all, I'll be taking my leave then." Rui nodded.

"I bid you farewell then." She wished him.

He left the branch office of the Martial Union soon after, breathing a sigh of relief. He had finally gotten something off his shoulders after this long, he felt like a weight had gotten lifted off of him, leaving him more refreshed and at peace.

On the way back, he pondered the mission he had just completed.

('Certainly one of my smoother missions.')

Rui noted.

He had an incredible success rate as a Martial Apprentice, failure was extremely rare. Of course, this didn't mean that the mission itself was too easy, it was just about right for its grade. The actual arrest was the easy part, the investigation and location of the target of the mission were the harder part. The mission deployed a Martial Squire to extract and return an escaping charged criminal back to the Kandrian Empire the moment his location was determined.

Of course, normally, the intelligence gathering was done by the intelligence department of the Martial Union. But Rui took the matters into his own hands and made more progress in a few hours than they had made in a week, thanks to the resourceful and effective means of acquiring intelligence that he had come up with.

He didn't expect anything other than a perfect evaluation from the Martial Union.

THUD

He landed after jumping over the wall that ran along the perimeter of the country, before running back towards the Kandrian Empire casually. Just like when he set out for the Kingdom of Violis from the Kandrian Empire, it took him only half an hour to reach the Kandrian Empire.

He quickly entered the Kandrian transit port before undergoing the brief protocols that returning Martial Artist citizens needed to go through before finally setting foot into the Kandrian Empire.

Once in the Kandrian Empire, he could sky-walk without any problems at all. It was only when he was outside the Empire that the risk of taking to the skies and making yourself an open target was a risky move.

"Ahhhh..." He sighed as he treaded through the atmosphere. He couldn't get over just how pleasant it was to freely traverse the skies. One of the most primal desires of man was to fly, after all. It was that desire for freedom that led to the birth of the plane.

The ability of Martial Squires and Martial Artists of higher Realms to be able to accomplish that with raw physicality alone dampened the marvel of that feat in this world. However, there did indeed exist means of traveling through the sky via esoteric technology. Of course, he had never seen such means of transport himself. What were the principles and mechanics by which this technology operated?

Such thoughts centering topics that intrigued him flashed around in his mind all throughout his return to the Mantian Region and the town of Hajin.

Eventually, he reached, descending to the Quarrier Orphanage. There were several figures in the garden.

"Max, Mana." He called out. "How's it going?"

"Big brother!" They cooed when they saw him descending from the air. "You can fly?!"

Rui chuckled, recalling he hadn't yet told them that Martial Squires could sky-walk. "Just a trick."

"Why don't you teach us how to do that?" Max asked innocently.

"Maybe when you're older," Rui suggested with a wry smile.

"Are you going to overlook our training?" Mana asked.

"While I am here, of course." Rui turned to the third figure in the backyard. "I trust their training has gone well?"

"Yes, of course, Squire Quarrier." The Martial Apprentice bowed, expressing respect. "They certainly have potential, as well as the drive."

Rui had commissioned a Martial Apprentice with training experience to overlook their training while he was gone. The entrance exam for the Martial Academy was half a year away and he wanted to increase the intensity and quality of their training. It was especially necessary to hone their mental fortitude which required a Martial Artist.

That was one of the core responsibilities that the Apprentice trainer was burdened with. She was to train and build the mental fortitude of the siblings by exposing them to greater mental strain as time passed, among other things.

Rui quickly scanned their bodies, observing the changes they had undergone in the past few months. Their muscle tone had increased to what Rui would consider an optimal level. It wasn't too little where the power they generated as well as their durability were both too low, nor too much where their flexibility and agility suffered too much.

They had the bodies of fighters.

"Hm..." Rui nodded.

Of course, this was just the bare minimum.

"Let's see how much progress you've made," Rui told them. "Come."

The two children grew excited as they adopted their stances. Mana adopted a lighter stance with her center of gravity localized and close, hopping and bobbing on her feet. Max, on the other hand, planted himself on the ground, positioning his legs to maximize the amount of power they could generate.

Rui smiled. "How scary. Looks like I might not be able to hold back."

"We're going to make you fight hard, big brother!"

They charged at him together.

Chapter 490: Reunion

Mana was an agile and flexible fighter while Max leaned more toward power and durability. Their approaches in combat reflected that. Mana reached Rui the quickest before throwing a flurry of quick and light jabs, testing Rui's reaction to them.

Rui lightly blocked them, redirecting them away. He was planning on limiting himself to human-level power, about what one would expect from an ordinary seventeen-year-old boy.

Max followed through quickly, throwing a powerful blow.

WHOOSH

Rui simply avoided the blow as he sidestepped, spiraling out of the way.

The two of them lashed out after Rui, attacking together. What impressed Rui was the fact that the two of them could not only attack him simultaneously but do so in a manner that did not detract from each of them individually.

They either utilized as much space as they needed around Rui to be able to simultaneously attack without getting in the way of the other to any degree. Other times, they would attack from the same direction but time their attacks rapidly after each other's, making it more difficult to defend against the relentless onslaught that they generated.

They had developed a respectable degree of coordination, just as Rui had hoped.

One of the things Rui had hoped was that by developing a good degree of coordination with each other, they would have a higher chance of cracking the entrance exam of the Martial Academy. Individually, they would have a very hard time, it was very rare that someone their age applied for the Martial Exam and even rarer that they would successfully pass.

The only thirteen-year-olds who had passed in their batch were Kane, who was already a Martial Apprentice by then, and Rui, who was... well, Rui. Both of them were far from the norm without a doubt.

Rui carefully analyzed their combined combat strength as they tried their best to take him down. While it was true that they had good teamwork, that alone wasn't particularly special. It wasn't like teaming up to crack the entrance exam was unheard of. Hell, Rui himself had teamed up with Kane in the second round of the entrance exam.

He intended to harden their training as time passed. Particularly, he wanted to ensure that their defensive and evasive prowess was solid, it would lower their chances of suffering grave injury or, in the worst-case scenario, death. He didn't particularly care too much if they didn't manage to crack the entrance exam, they had five more attempts as they progressively grew older and stronger.

A few hours later, the two of them were flat on the ground, entirely exhausted and drained.

"Man, in the end, we couldn't even properly attack a single attack on him!" Max complained.

"It was to be expected, he's a Martial Squire." Mana sighed.

"The two of you did quite well for your age," Rui told them. "Keep training hard, you two."

He turned to the Apprentice trainer that had been spectating the training spar. "Please look after their training."

"Of course, Squire Quarrier." She bowed respectfully.

He nodded before heading back in.

"RUIII!" Alice greeted him first, as always, yet this time she wasn't too happy. "You've been home for hours yet you didn't come to greet us! Hmph!"

Rui smiled wryly as he scratched his head awkwardly. "My bad. I'll greet all of you immediately next time."

"As you should!"

He spent a few days hanging about with his family. It was always a good break mentally when he could spend time with them, a natural soother and relaxer. If not for his family, he would have no speed breaks that forced him to slow down and appreciate the finer aspects of life.

A few days later, he returned to the town of Hajin. However, it wasn't to pick another mission, not immediately, at least.

"Show off," Kane grumbled as Rui sky walked down to them.

"Sky Walking is always a sight to see." Fae sighed, earning a nod from the others. Hever, Dalen, Milliana, and Nel were present as well.

Rui smiled at his friends. "It's been quite some time all of you, nearly a year."

It wasn't easy meeting them because everybody was busy, consumed in training or completing missions. Right after he broke through to the Squire Realm, he needed to immediately dive into Squire habilitation to get accustomed to his power. He hadn't been able to meet his friends after due to conflicting schedules. Most of them had been away on a mission while the rest had been in the middle of training.

Immediately after that, Rui spent half a year in training and had undertaken his first Squire-level mission soon after. He was grateful that they had finally gotten together after that long.

"So, how's it all been going?" He asked.

Kane shrugged. "It's been going good. Good enough, honestly."

"How's living truly independently been working out for you?" Rui asked. He had, of course, been exchanging messages with Kane, so he knew that his plan had been successful enough. Joining the Wind Sect within the Lightning Sect had given him the power to be able to live independently. With the sheer talent that he undoubtedly possessed, he was quite a valuable asset to any Martial Sect. He had leveraged his value to be able to resist the Arrancar Family's claim over him.

The Arrancar Family was led by a vaunted Martial Sage, leader of the Fire Sect. It was no longer as simple a matter for the family to reclaim him, and the Lightning Sect was a Martial Sect of equal power and influence as that of the Fire Sect. It could not allow the Fire Sect to blatantly steal one of its most valuable Martial Apprentice assets not only because it would violate the only condition that Kane had provided to them, but it would also make them look weak, hurting their prestige and their ability to recruit Martial Artists.

"Better than I expected." Kane grinned. "The Martial Academy was alright, but this is way better!"