

Martial Unity 521

Chapter 521: Engage

It was incredible that even his most powerful strikes were almost entirely ineffective against the Martial Squire's defensive prowess. Rui put all the effort and power into trying to damage his opponent, yet they all were almost entirely in vain as the man before him was entirely unharmed.

('This is the power of compatibility.') Rui sighed with a hint of envy, even as the two Martial Squires shuffled around each other.

Frankly, the Martial Squire before him did not strike Rui as a particularly powerful Martial Squire in the grand scheme of things. Rui broke through at an age that was uncharacteristically young, far below average. The Squire before him was just a few years older at most, thus it was unlikely that he had much experience in the Squire Realm, the fact that he was assigned to defending a very secure fort that did not have any Squire-level threats against it prior also likely meant that this Martial Squire was quite low on the totem pole.

The fact that he was still able to make a fool out of Rui's striking prowess showed that the power of compatibility was not something that could be underestimated. A Martial Artist with grade five techniques that they were extremely compatible with was probably much stronger than a Martial Artist with grade seven techniques that they were not much compatible with.

This added a whole new variable that was not prominent when he was a Martial Apprentice. Rui had received his first reality check upon discovering just how much compatibility mattered in the higher Realms.

('I'll have to ponder the matter deeply later on.') Rui sighed. ('For now, let's win.')

Despite the vain attempts at trying to pummel his way to victory, Rui was not intimidated. He had steadily been gathering as much data on the man as he could from the moment he laid eyes on him. That data was deposited into his Mind Palace, as he swiftly processed them through the systems of the VOID algorithm.

He had already come up with a partial prediction model based on many subconscious patterns in the movements of his opponent.

Less than a single second had passed since their last exchange, however, in the perception of time of the Martial Squires, it had been several minutes since their last exchange.

Evidently, his opponent lost patience with Rui, as he charged forward aggressively despite clearly being a defensive Martial Artist.

"RARGH!" He threw a powerful left hook at Rui.

WHOOSH

Rui seamlessly avoided it as he launched a swift elbow to the man's groin.

"ARGH!"

('You have a pattern of overcommitting every time you land a blow.') Rui mused.

This was a pattern he had identified with the predictive model and had correctly chosen the right response, to inflict as much damage as he could on his opponent.

It was evident that the man's testicles were not nearly as invincible as the rest of the body given how much he appeared to be in pain.

POW POW POW!

Rui bludgeoned him with more strikes as he collected more data on the man, trying to compute a way to take him down. His foremost means of offense had already been shown to be useless, he could not take them down the way he normally would strive to.

WHOOSH

Rui swiveled out of his path as he attacked several more times, taking his time. The battle between them was reaching a bit of an impasse since neither side could effectively damage the other for different reasons. Rui because he couldn't damage him meaningfully with his strikes, and his opponent because Rui's evasive maneuvering was too effective thanks to a combination of the VOID algorithm and Primordial Instinct. The accelerated autophagy also boosted his speed and agility to a certain degree.

Rui thought he could take his time to methodically and perfectly take him down in a manner that completely overwhelmed him and minimized the probability of his own defeat. It was exciting to finally exercise all of his capabilities against a worthy opponent.

Yet all of that changed when the Martial Squire snorted, before suddenly plummeting down back to the fort where the fierce battle between the two armies had commenced.

('Well shit, turns out he isn't a moron!') Rui cursed as he accelerated downwards at top speed.

It turns out his opponent wasn't a fool. He wasn't going to waste all of his energy pointlessly flailing around when it was entirely clear that Rui's evasive maneuvering was too impressive for him to overcome. The man had managed to remember that his duty was to protect the fort and the Britannian Battalion, not chase after an elusive Martial Squire who drew him away from his post.

Rui could not let him return to his position. He would immediately begin hunting the biggest threats of the rebel army; the Martial Apprentices. Even if Rui could easily evade him, they didn't stand a chance. Rui even felt a tinge of fury at the thought of Vemy dying at his hands due to Rui's negligence.

('This isn't going to happen. Not on my watch!') He accelerated at top speed plummeting downwards at a speed that far exceeded his opponent.

BAM!!

He managed a tremendous spinning kick fueled by his momentum that pushed him away from his original direction.

Yet the man had already realized that this was the only productive way to go about this. If Rui didn't let him go, then Rui would be forced to engage with him, and if Rui did let him then he would reign

destruction on the Rebel army. If Rui decided to attack the fort, then he would surely defend against the attack. Regardless of which of these happened, it was better than flailing around and trying to get a hit in on Rui.

The two began engaging in a furious back and forth as Rui intercepted every single attempt of his opponent to return back to the fort. Loud clashes could be heard on the ground as two figures clashed against each other in the sky.

Chapter 522: Strange

POW POW POW

The two of them clashed against each other midair, yet the directions they were facing were strange. The Britannian Martial Squire was lashing downwards towards the fort while Rui was facing him upwards in the exact opposite direction, with his back against the fort. The two of them slammed against each other, exchanging strikes. This was a particularly pleasant development to the Britannian Martial Squire since it meant that Rui could no longer evade him since he needed to clash with his opponent to prevent him from joining the battleground down below.

His opponent grinned, recognizing the benefits of this arrangement. He had finally managed to overcome the difficulty of landing a blow on Rui.

Yet, his smile disappeared very fast.

BOOM!!!

A tremendous impact blasted against him as they clashed with each other. Rui's elbow dug incredibly deep into his body.

"ACK!" The man grimaced in pain as he lumbered backward, pain and shock flashing across his face. He didn't understand, how did Rui overcome his tremendous defenses. He lashed downward again, preparing a strike as Rui intercepted him.

BAM!!!

His entire body trembled as the impact reverberated across him, causing him waves of pain across his body.

BANG!!

THWACK!!!

BOOM!!!

After the fifth exchange, Rui finally managed to drill past his stubborn mindset, causing him to stop.

"Hmph." Rui snorted. ('You really thought it would be that easy to out-strategize me?')

Rui quickly turned around the tables as he conjured up a way to hurt his opponent despite his solid defenses. Earlier, Rui had used all of his power to try and inflict as much damage on his opponent as he could, yet he was too weak to do so.

But, what if the impacts of his strikes were powered by not just one Martial Squire but two of them?

Both of them generated a significant amount of momentum every time they charged each for a strike. Rui simply placed and timed his attacks such that the impact would be empowered by both his own power as well as that of his opponent.

His opponent was effectively running headfirst into a punch with all his power each time, causing himself damage alongside the inherent power of the punch.

Of course, this required perfect timing and placement from Rui. He needed to ensure that the vectors of their bullrushes were perfectly aligned with the vector of his own attack to maximize the impact of the strike landing on his opponent.

Ordinarily, this was an extremely difficult task, especially in three-dimensional combat, a form of combat that Rui had almost zero experience with!

To perform the necessary calculations within the span of milliseconds to achieve the correct timing and placement of his movements in aerial combat was something that could generally only be accomplished with experience.

Or much more rarely; brilliance.

Rui rushed to launch another attack, yet even before he could reach his opponent, Primordial Instinct warned him of an attack, much to his confusion.

BAM!!

Rui grimaced in pain and shock as he beheld his opponent's arm stretching far beyond its limits. He quickly centered himself as he took note of what was happening. This wasn't the first time he had seen such an attack. He had run into it once in the preliminary contest of the Martial Academy more than two years ago.

It turned out his opponent was holding back such a trump card!

('Why didn't he use this earlier?') Rui wondered, suddenly his eyes widened as he saw something that shocked him. His opponent launched several more whip attacks, yet this time Rui was more prepared.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Rui watched in amazement as he made a shocking discovery.

('It's not just his skin and flesh that are stretching, his bones are stretching too!') Rui gasped. ('His entire body is elastic in nature.')

Rui watched with amazement as he witnessed the most bizarre Martial body that he had ever come across at this point. To think it was possible to evolve the body of the human body in such a bizarre direction, Rui's worldview of what was possible had broadened in light of what he had just come across.

His opponent on the other hand was infuriated. He seemed especially angry that Rui had managed to thrash his defenses to such a degree. His arms and legs turned into whips that lashed across the air within a certain range. His striking range was ten meters, they whipped around forming an unassailable sphere with a radius of twenty meters within which any unsuspecting objecting would turn into a merciless target.

The whips managed to gain so much tangential velocity that the end of his limbs would have been blurringly fast even for a Martial Squire. The sheer wind currents all of his whips created were tremendous, he was affecting the environmental parameters of the local atmosphere with all of his movements!

Yet despite all of that, Rui grinned.

WHOOSH

He dove towards him as he cleanly evaded all the whips, much to his opponent's shock. Thanks to his enhanced cognition due to the Mindmirror brain as well as Primordial Instinct and the increasingly growing predictive model on his whips, Rui accomplished a feat that should have been beyond a Martial Squire of his power and inexperience. He wasn't able to avoid all of them, but even the ones that did strike him were adequately defended against, he didn't get away unscathed, but the damage was well within tolerable limits.

He rushed towards the martial Squire's body, doing everything he could to get close.

BAM! BAM! BAM!

Rui grimaced as powerful whips struck him in the gap. But-

('I've got you now.') he latched onto the man's body, wrangling him in the sky. The whips were long-range attacks, they were ineffective in full-contact combat! Rui forced himself to withstand attacks that

he ordinarily could have stepped away from in order to continue getting as close to his opponent as possible

The man's limbs returned to normal as the two of them tumbled across the air together.

Chapter 523: Rough

CLASP

Rui managed to get hold of his opponent from the back. The two were flailing around in the air as Rui desperately tried to get a chokehold on his opponent. His opponent, on the other hand, recognized the gravity of the situation.

His rubbery physique and corresponding defensive techniques were only useful against striking-based attacks and other collisions. They were not useful against strangling-based attacks. Furthermore, at this range, his whip attacks were also not able to serve as a viable defense. He realized that Rui had purposely endured raw damage from his attacks that he normally would have dodged in order to ensure that he would not have to deter from his path.

Yet his panic set in only once Rui successfully maneuvered behind him and managed to latch his arms around his opponent's neck and head. Rui gritted his teeth as he exerted a tremendous amount of force on his opponent with Outer Convergence. His left arm was wrapped around his opponent's neck while his right arm pushed down on his opponent's head. He squeezed as though his life depended on it.

His opponent struggled like a madman. He turned away, facing Rui who was on his back to the ground, and charged straight downwards. The two of them were fighting in what was effectively in the troposphere, several kilometers above the ground. His opponent continuously used Sky Walking to push the both of them increasingly faster straight downwards.

('Shit, this is going to be rough.') Rui gritted his teeth.

Considering the altitude that they were at, the impact, when they hit the ground, would be tremendous!

('Furthermore, I'm going to be the one to take all the damage!')

His opponent was highly resistant to collisions. Even if he crashed into the ground plummeting downwards at top speed from the clouds, he would most likely be fine enough. Especially since Rui would be the one hitting the ground and serving as a cushion for his opponent since he was the one facing the ground with his opponent above him.

('Just faint already!') Rui urged.

Unfortunately, things weren't that easy. The normal human body could maintain consciousness for several seconds to minutes depending on how perfectly executed the chokehold was. This was even longer for a Martial Squire thanks to their evolved constitution. Meaning Rui was going to have to hold him for quite some time in real-time.

Furthermore, Martial Squires perceived time to be flowing much slower thanks to their superhuman cognition and speed, they were effectively slowing down time from their perspective. One second was a few minutes.

Meaning, Rui would have to hold out for a long time from both of their perspective of time!

Rui gritted his teeth as he prepared Inner Divergence for the incoming impact. They were just a few seconds from crashing into the ground.

BOOM!!!

RUMBLE

The very earth beneath them shook as a crater of unparalleled proportions was formed from the impact. The sheer energy in the collision was so great that a minor Richter-one Earthquake reverberated through the ground into the forest, disrupting the natural wildlife that existed in the environment.

"ARGH!" Rui grimaced as he gritted his teeth, never once easing up on his grip. The moment he let go, all of his progress would be undone while the damage his opponent exerted would not be going anywhere

for a while. Even though Rui had a respectable healing factor, the damage would very likely be just enough to turn the tables around.

His opponent continued thrashing on the ground, his arms stretched back as he did everything he could. He ripped at Rui's hair, clawed at his skin, and even tried gauging his eyes. Yet Rui mitigated all of his attempts as best as he could while still maintaining a tremendously strong hold on his opponent.

Both Martial Squires grew extremely desperate as the critical decisive point of the match was soon going to arrive. If his opponent could break free of the stranglehold, then Rui could most likely forget about winning. Although Rui was still confident of surviving, he will likely have lost too much to be able to guarantee to win against his opponent, who was almost entirely unharmed, unlikely Rui.

The Zurtun Rebel Group was as good as dead if that happened, the Martial Squire would return once Rui would inevitably be forced to retreat. He could clearly imagine the onslaught that would occur. The Martial Squire would have zero difficulties whatsoever in annihilating the Zurtun Rebel army. Rui would also face the blemish of having failed his first Squire-level mission, which would break any hopes of having a perfect record in the Squire Realm.

Yet, even as these thoughts faintly passed away, he didn't immediately notice the increasingly weakening resistance from his opponent. His attempts to pull Rui's arm away grew softer, and his attempts to inflict upon Rui as much damage as he could grew feebler.

Until they finally ceased.

THUD

His limbs collapsed as his body buckled and fell loose, weight down on Rui's body. Yet Rui didn't let go, he didn't dare to even take that risk. He could sense that his heart was still beating, he had merely lost consciousness because his brain finally shut down due to the lack of supply of oxygen.

It was nearly two minutes later that even his heart decided to call it a day and stopped beating as well. Only then did Rui have the certainty of his victory, letting him go.

"Huff... Huff... Huff..." He panted heavily as he evaluated his own condition.

He was hemorrhaging somewhere inside, having coughed up blood. He had also probably broken a rib in that earlier collision that produced a deep crater a dozen meters wide. Even his body could not take such a devastating impact without significant damage.

Rui quickly consumed a potion as he sighed under the tremendous relief that spread through his body. It was a rough battle, yet he couldn't help but feel a great sense of accomplishment after having won it.

Chapter 524: Clarity

His first genuine battle in the Squire Realm.

His first victory in the Squire Realm.

His spar against Squire Kyrie did not even remotely count as a proper battle, that was so elementary that Kyrie had even withheld from sky-walking in combat which would have allowed her to dominate Rui with her superior experience. She held back to allow Rui to express and test himself against her and gain a better understanding of what he had and what he was missing before mopping the floor with him.

The training spars against his two Squire habilitators were even more meaningless. He had still been mastering his power back then and hadn't mastered a single technique at that point.

He felt like he had finally gotten a good grasp of what he could achieve in combat and what he couldn't. He was no longer as dominating in combat as he used to be in the Apprentice Realm. Of course, he had grown far stronger than when he was a Martial Apprentice, but his competition had grown even fiercer.

This battle had shown him he shouldn't be as satisfied with himself as he was. He had run into an opponent in the same age group as him who possessed a defense that made a fool of his offensive techniques and possessed combat speed with his whip techniques that also significantly surpassed that of Rui.

All of this came with the power of synergy and compatibility. His Martial body and techniques must have been born for each other. Or at the very least, that was the impression that Rui got.

Ultimately, Rui did manage to win. But this victory cleared his head of the fog that had recently been occupying his vision. Now that he had successfully become a Martial Squire, he lacked clarity on the path forward. Before breaking through to the Squire Realm, he had extremely concrete and clear goals that made it exceedingly simple to know what he ought to do, he had lost some of that when he became a Martial Squire.

Of course, he still had very long-term goals such as fixing the incompatibility of the VOID algorithm with the Martial Art of this world. But that was exactly that; a long-term goal, something that may very well take his entire life to fix considering how difficult it was. It was a goal whose path to achieving was not very clear, at this point in time.

Another long-term goal was to become a Martial Senior. This was yet another goal that he naturally looked at now that he successfully became a Martial Squire, but again, the path to Martial Senior was not something that was very clear to him. He hadn't even met one thus far.

But now that he actually fought against another Marital Squire, he could see one path forward.

"To align my Martial Art with myself, and against everything else."

It sounded like a meaningless statement, but it succinctly encompassed the truth. He needed to harness the power of synergy between Martial Art and Martial Body to move forward, while also increasing the synergy of the VOID algorithm against all opponents. He decided he was going to dedicate his all to these two goals and go all out into accomplishing them.

These were two conditions he could be certain would help in progressing his Martial Art to a higher level.

When he opened his eyes, they were no longer searching. They were fixated on the future, and on his goals. His approach to training and growth would have to fundamentally change from when he was a Martial Apprentice.

"Huff..." He sighed, getting up as he stretched his body, glancing at that of his opponent.

('You were strong.') Rui thought to himself sincerely. ('Thank you for what you have given me. Sorry, but I won't be able to give your body a burial. I'm sure the Martial Union will be pleased to obtain your body and gauge its secrets.')

It was possible that the Kandrian Martial Union would be able to obtain intelligence on the Britannian Empire from the objects that he was carrying, as well as his Martial Body. After all, the nations did not necessarily have identical evolution processes. His body would serve as a valuable avenue for research for the Martial Union.

('But first, I need to finish my mission.')

Rui glanced over to the right where Mt Zurtun was situated. Rui was grateful that the battlefield was such an unmissable landmark because without it he would have no clue where he was. They had migrated pretty far from the battlefield by sky-walking.

Rui picked left the corpse at that location, they were in a rather remote location in the forest and it was unlikely that anybody would take it. He did take the liberty of covering it up with soil lest it is consumed by some creature.

('Alright then, let's get back.')

Rui pulled out his accouter to verify how much time he had left for the mission.

"Huh???" He froze as he read a new message on his accouter.

[Your ongoing mission, mission code number HJN23SPR40053, has been canceled by the client Fushin Hunfer. Please terminate your operation and fulfill the relevant post-mission protocols.]

"But the Hlorn hasn't been destro-" His eyes widened as he finally realized what was happening.

"That bastard..." Rui murmured. "His goal was for me to fight the Martial Squire, not the weapon. The reason he canceled the mission must be because the battle is going well."

His goal was never to destroy the weapon, he wanted to commandeer it and make it his own! That was the only logical explanation for why he would cancel the mission. The destruction of the weapon was now against his interests.

"As for why he commissioned the mission in the first place. He must have gotten the intelligence of a Martial Squire being deployed by the Britannian Empire to reinforce Fort Zurtun extremely recently from some proprietary source from within the fort itself, likely some secret spy that had managed to squiggle into a place where they could learn classified intel and pass it on to Fushin remotely." Rui realized.

Chapter 525: Bizarre

The spy, or whatever the source of the leak was, was probably a native of the Zurtun town who probably managed to squiggle his way into a place where he could learn important information and relay it back to Fushin.

This would explain why the Kandrian Martial Union did not possess any intelligence on the Britannian Martial Squire that Rui ended up facing and killing. While the Kandrian Martial Union no doubt had a powerful intelligence department that had plenty of means of gathering information with a gigantic network of intelligence sources over a large geographic area, it probably didn't have access to more information about Fort Zurtun than Fushin himself did due to his unique position and sources and intimate familiarity with the fort.

As much as Rui wanted to, he couldn't fault the Martial Union too much here. It was a bit unreasonable to expect them to know about a Martial Squire who had covertly been deployed to the fort extremely recently. The Martial royalty contract that Martial Artists signed with the Martial Union stated that intelligence could not be guaranteed to be entirely accurate always. That was not how the intelligence sector worked, and he was cognizant of that fact.

But frankly, he didn't feel as though he had been done wrong.

('If anything...') Rui grinned. ('This was the perfect set of events for me.')

He got to fight a Martial Squire well ahead of when he would normally have gotten to do so had it been a normal grade three mission, after all. Furthermore, he beat his opponent. This would effectively force

the Martial Union to concede what was already obvious that he was ready for missions of a higher grade because of his qualifications, accelerating what would otherwise have taken longer.

Everything was fine, except...

('I got outplayed by the old man.') Rui sighed, with a resigned expression. He had mixed feelings on the issue. On one hand, the general's actions had inadvertently done a lot of good for Rui, on the other hand, he got played.

Perhaps others would have been able to shake this off considering all the benefits, but not Rui.

Perhaps that was a little vain of him, but Rui took pride in his mind and intelligence. His mind was extraordinary, and his intelligence was easily in the genius-level territory. That was why he felt affronted having been outplayed by the old man in their little mind game that the two played against each other. He did not like the idea of being outwitted. He was a sore loser when it came to this.

Of course, they weren't exactly competing on a level field. The old man was intelligent, no doubt, but more importantly, he was extremely experienced. He had served a lifetime in the field of strategies and tactics in conflicts of all sorts, according to his background. Rui was intelligent but had zero meaningful experience in this field, he was effectively competing against the old man's wit and vast experience with sheer deductive intelligence alone.

Furthermore, he was clearly at an information disadvantage, making it difficult for him to not be exploited when he didn't even know that such a thing was a possibility at all. Furthermore, he was constrained by the mission rules and guidelines as well, since he was in the middle of a mission. Reneging on an accepted mission for unjustifiable reasons was an ugly stain on his record that would be publicly visible. Ensuring that didn't happen was more important than trying to win a mind game against an old fox, even Rui was rational enough to recognize that.

('My only consolation is that the Martial Union does not refund, and canceling a mission without justification requires a fee, and also reduced the trustworthiness of Fushin as a client, meaning missions will be more expensive for him because of this.') Rui mused.

The Martial Union was cognizant of the loopholes that came with the ability to cancel a mission at any time. Thus, several rules, conditions, and penalties had been placed to discourage frivolous or malicious usage of the mission cancellation facility.

('Anyways, putting that matter aside, I guess my business here is done.') Rui sighed, as he grabbed a hold of the corpse of his opponent before skywalking away. He had no intention of returning to Fort Zurtun now that the mission had been canceled. He simply wished the rebels good luck in his heart.

He felt a little bad at the prospect of not seeing Vemy again but didn't have any emotional connection to her. They were just strangers that spent the night together. He wasn't going to delay his return to the Kandrian Empire to bid her an awkward goodbye or delay his return to the Kandrian Empire to spend another night with her. At most he could bid her and the Martial Apprentices good luck on the battle and their Martial Paths.

('Maybe I should pay the old man a visit before I leave.') Rui pondered the thought, before shaking his head. ('Nah, fuck it. I'm in a good mood, why needlessly irk myself over the old man?')

He simply pedaled away into the sky with the corpse in his hand as he headed back in the direction of the Kandrian Empire carrying the corpse with him. He had already extracted a healing and rejuvenation potion from it, among some other things.

('What a strange physiology.') Rui thought to himself as he could feel that his body did not have the rigidity to structure that clearly came with having solid bones and rigid flesh bound together by fascia, the connective tissue within the body that ensured everything stayed in place.

This opened his eyes to the possibilities of other kinds of bizarre Martial bodies. As time passed, he might come across similarly absurd things. He had a feeling his reaction to these various Martial bodies was going to be no different from his initial incredulous reactions to the many bizarre Apprentice-level techniques he had come across in his life.

Chapter 526: Grade

"And you're saying as you headed to destroy the objective of the mission, you were confronted with a hostile Martial Squire?"

"Yes, commissioner," Rui replied. "I straightforwardly headed for the target of the mission because I wanted to get it over with, but unfortunately the Martial Squire landed in front of me as I dashed towards it, blocking my path. At that point, it had become evidently clear to me that I would not be able to get away with a fight."

"I see. And prior to your victory over your opponent, your client canceled the mission at some point in the middle of the combat."

"Yes." Rui nodded.

"I see." The man before him nodded simply. "It is all a rather unfortunate turn of events, but you made the best of them. Not only did you defeat your very first Martial Squire opponent in combat, but you also brought his body back in a remarkable condition. Congratulations, Squire Quarrier, it appears your tendency to overachieve has persisted."

Rui had long since returned to the Martial Union and handed over the body of the Martial Squire to the Martial Union once he finished all the post-mission protocols. However, he had been summoned for a meeting by the Martial Union once they processed his report.

"Thank you," Rui replied simply. "Is there anything else that needs to be discussed?"

"Just a few small matters." The commissioner smiled. "For one, the Martial Union is quite pleased with what you have brought back. You made the right choice, in exchange for your gift, we have decided to triple your commission payments. As a token of gratitude as well as an apology for the inaccurate difficulty evaluation of the mission."

Rui raised an eyebrow, that was not a light concession. It was more likely that the Martial Union was trying to get rid of any negative impression he had of them.

"I see," Rui replied with a brief smile. "I appreciate that."

"You're welcome. Another matter that we've wanted to inform you was that your Martial Apprentice grade has been upgraded to grade four." The commissioner informed him. "The Martial Union fully recognizes that any concerns of your youth in the Squire Realm are unwarranted, you have proven you

are capable of undertaking a mission that poses a threat to even Martial Squires like yourself. Congratulations, you are actually the quickest Martial Squire to reach grade four after having broken through to the Squire Realm."

Rui raised an eyebrow. It had been nine months since he broke through to the Squire Realm and he had already reached grade four. That was quite fast all things considered.

Rui shrugged. "I'm just progressing with my Martial Art."

"Yes, you're progressing a remarkably powerful high-grade Martial Art remarkably quickly." The man noted, smiling.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he latched onto part of the statement. "High-grade Martial Art?"

Martial Art had grades?

He was aware that Martial Artists had grades based on their power, but he had never heard of Martial Art being graded.

"Yes, one of the highest we have ever seen." The commissioner replied. "Martial Art are graded by their potency, which is defined as the strength that Martial Art inherently possesses, outside of techniques."

"As in, the intrinsic strength that a Martial Art would possess if one were to strip away its techniques, or equalize the technique with other Martial Art?" Rui asked, curious.

"Correct." The man nodded. "It is an extraordinarily rare sight for a Martial Art to possess the kind of power that yours does. It is almost unheard of for a Martial Squire to be as strong as you currently are for the techniques that you possess."

"I see..." Rui knitted his eyebrows as he pondered the matter. "Why have I never heard about the concept before?"

"Martial Apprentices are generally too immature. Informing them about the concepts of grades of Martial Art may influence them, especially negatively." The commissioner explained. "Only once a Martial Apprentice accomplishes Squire candidacy are they qualified to learn about the Martial Art grading system. Even then, we don't bring it necessarily have to bring it up, it is not important for the personal development of a Martial Artist, it is merely an attribute that the Martial Union keeps a track of for the purpose of research and development."

"How does the Martial Union evaluate how much inherent power a Martial Art possesses? The only time that Martial Squires do not possess any techniques is during the Squire habilitation phase." Rui noted. "Does the martial Union compile empirical data on the combat prowess of a Martial Artist during this phase and evaluates the Martial Art grade based on that? Or does the Martial Union perform a comparison of the Martial Artist's combat prowess relative to the predicted combat prowess based on the techniques mastered?"

The man's eyebrows rose, he was evidently impressed. "You really are as shrewd as they say. To answer your question, the Martial Union does both. I'm surprised you hit the mark without any prompting."

"Mmm..." Rui nodded absentmindedly as he considered the matter. In reality, it was a rather trivial matter to predict given his background in statistics.

"We have evaluated your Martial Art grade on the basis of the data obtained during your Squire habilitation phase as well as your most recent mission. Defeating a rising star Martial Squire of the Britannian Empire, who is older than you and possesses more techniques not to mention a remarkable Martial Art himself, is quite impressive."

"The Martial Union has identified him, has it?" Rui inquired.

"We have. The Martial Union keeps track of the Martial Artists of other nations, especially the super-nations. The higher the Realm, the more attention we dedicate. Your opponent was a distinguished scion of a family of the Britannian Empire. His Martial Path was elastic dynamics, a Martial Art that used elasticity in offensive but especially defensive measures. Certainly not a trivial Martial Art."

"I see..." Rui digested that information as he gave it some more thought.

"The Martial Union is interested in seeing you develop your Martial Art for more than one reason, Squire, we hope you elevate your Martial Art as high as possible."

Chapter 527: Offer

"I see. Well, the Martial Union doesn't have anything to worry about." Rui told the commissioner.

"Almost everything I do, I do to progress my Martial Art. I am extremely motivated and recently have gained clarity on how I want to proceed with that."

"That is great to hear, Squire Quarrier." The man nodded. "The Martial Art has a vested interest in your Martial Art for more than just strengthening the Martial Union with another Martial Artist. One of our interests is actually analyzing what makes your Martial Art and opening up the opportunity for the next generation of Martial Artists to obtain a piece of that power in the form of techniques."

Rui's eyebrows rose at the commissioner's statement. "Hmmm... I don't know how I feel about that."

"Of course, the Martial Union never coerces its Martial Artists to divulge anything." The commissioner chuckled. "We cannot claim to be a haven for Martial Artists if we're constantly attempting to rob a Martial Artist of their Martial Art. The Martial Union offers much in return for valuable contributions. These include unpublicized techniques, resources, appropriate aid and advice from Martial Artists much stronger and elder than yourself, power and influence."

"Hm..." Rui considered the matter, before shaking his head. "I do not like relying on others unless I genuinely have an absolute necessity to. Unfortunately, I'm not particularly attracted to what the Martial Union offers in return at this point in time. Techniques would have been an attractive offer had I been a Martial Apprentice, but as a Martial Squire I have recently resolved to pursue a path where I develop my Martial Art with individuality to progress it and make it stronger through the intrinsic synergy that comes with techniques customized for myself."

Rui wasn't particularly interested much in the other things that the commissioner offered in return. Power and influence? He had never given a damn about such things, in this life or his previous one. As long as he had the power to do what he wanted, he didn't care. Resources were also not too attractive, although they could be useless. Rui didn't have a burning need or desire to acquire any particular kind of resource.

One thing that did somewhat interest him was the aid from elder Martial Artists. That was certainly valuable and useful, but not necessary. Ultimately Rui was an extremely pure Martial Artist. He pursued Martial Art truly and purely for his love of Martial Art. Much to his surprise, this wasn't a particularly common sentiment based on his experience as a Martial Artist among other Martial Artists. When he first joined the Martial Academy, he had a very pure and idealistic image of Martial Artists, one where Martial Artists immersed themselves in their Martial Art purely and entirely out of love for it.

But reality had shown him otherwise. Most Martial Artists were far from purists like himself. Kane pursued Martial Art to be free of his shackles with his own power. Fae pursued Martial Art for the prestige that it brought her Martial Family. Even people like Nel pursued Martial Art out of their love for fighting and battle, rather than his Martial Art itself. Fiona was just mundanely going with the flow that came with being a prodigious genius. Every Martial Artists he had come across had motivations and goals outside Martial Art.

This was a little disappointing, but it was realistic. The kind of Martial Artists he had seen in fiction was just that; fiction. In reality, Martial Art was simply power. That too truly individualistic and personal power held by Martial Art that originated from themselves. People chased after power, and thus people chased after Martial Art and the many other things it brought to those who succeeded in pursuing it to a certain extent.

"An admirable resolution." the commissioner smiled. "You have correctly identified an important element in the progression of one's Martial Art. Still, the Martial Union is also most certainly aware of this. There are ways in which we can aid you in the personal development of your Martial Art."

"Perhaps," Rui admitted. "However, as I said, I do not like developing a reliance on others. Perhaps if I come across a barrier that is difficult to surmount, I may consider this option, but I certainly do not need to rely on others when it comes to progressing my Martial Art otherwise."

He doubted the degree to which the Martial Union could aid him in the further development of the VOID algorithm. It would be nearly impossible for the organization to aid him with something they do not understand. When it came to developing individualized techniques, it was almost even more fruitless. If he relied too much on others to develop his own techniques, then could they truly be said to from him? Accepting too much aid was also counterproductive in his opinion.

Of course, that didn't mean any and all aid or cooperation was bad. If there was a time when he wanted more reliable data or measurements while developing a technique, there was no harm in accepting the help of the Martial Union to perform the measurements and convey the data to him. It would be purely acting in an assistant role, and nothing more.

However, these services could be procured by Martial Squires in exchange for Martial credits, he did not need to sell the VOID algorithm to obtain such services.

The Martial commissioner smiled, as though approving Rui's statement. "We understand, Squire Quarrier. Please feel free to contact us if you're interested in engaging in an exchange with us. We always welcome contributions and innovations."

"Will do." Rui nodded. "I fully appreciate the offer of the Martial Union and am grateful for the privilege. The reason I reject it today is due to who I am as a Martial Artist. That being said, if there ever comes a day when I do decide to accept your offer, I will let the Union know immediately."

"We appreciate your sincerity, Squire Quarrier." The commissioner smiled.

Chapter 528: Joy

"For an important conversation, it sure felt trivial," Rui muttered as he headed back home.

After the revelations and clarity that he had obtained from his last mission, he no longer felt a burning drive to immediately jump into another mission, even if it was a grade-four mission that would actually pose some danger to him. Of course, he would definitely dive into a grade four mission in due time, he had just finished speedrunning four missions back-to-back, and he was willing to slow down a bit and process his gains.

For now, he was focused on the conversation he had just had with a commissioner from the Martial Union.

('They were quite friendly even when I rejected them straightforwardly. He didn't even try to apply pressure on me.') Rui frowned.

Was that truly how the Martial Union operated?

Rui had the feeling that part of why he was receiving such good treatment was because the Martial Union did not want him to develop even a hint of a bad or hostile impression of them. That would explain why the commissioner was remarkably polite and pleasant. Even the compensation of tripling his reward as a token of gratitude and regret was a bit unnecessary, as far as rules and agreements went.

('They weren't being overboard with showering goodwill, that would be counterproductive. They maintained their dignity as the Martial overlord while also giving me my due.') Rui noted. ('This must mean they value me more than I had expected.')

Rui expected that the Martial Union might be a bit more heavy-handed if he was just another Martial Squire, at the very least, they wouldn't be treating him as an honored guest.

('At least they were straightforward with their intentions.') He shrugged as he pondered about what the commissioner had told him.

('Wanting to analyze and dissect the core of my Martial Art and disseminate it to other Martial Artists in the form of techniques huh...?') Rui pondered. ('What a fascinating objective.')

It's not that Rui was particularly averse to others inheriting a part of the VOID algorithm, it's just he couldn't explain how he came up with it. Talent alone couldn't justify it, he wasn't sure if the Martial Union would buy him developing it because he was oh-so-smart.

Furthermore, he didn't think the Martial union could succeed in disseminating his Martial Art to others, even if partially. The only reason his usage of the VOID algorithm was viable and proficient was because of his mind, his absolute familiarity and understanding of it, the Mind Palace technique, and the Mindmirror brain.

Without any of these, he would not be able to apply the VOID algorithm the way he did. Even if the Martial Union did manage to derive the VOID algorithm through some kind of reverse engineering, he did not think they would be able to make it mass-viable for Martial Artists.

As fascinating as the sight of many different Martial Artists applying the VOID algorithm, partially or entirely, was, it was just too unlikely. He had spent his entire previous life trying to make it viable for normal people and he had failed.

He had succeeded in making it viable for himself, but he was far removed from any semblance of ordinary. He was satisfied with making it viable for only himself in this life.

He shook his head. ('The Martial Union's goal is not relevant to me, it's interesting, but it doesn't matter.')

His thoughts immediately returned to his own Martial Path.

('I have some ideas...') Rui's eyes lit up in interest.

He had been considering the way to make progress forward, and he had already conceived of some ideas on how to go forward with developing his Martial Art.

('My techniques need to be compatible with both my Marial body and the VOID algorithm. Furthermore, these techniques need to be individualistic; they need to originate significantly from me and have significantly unique.')

These were the conditions that Rui would need to fulfill when developing his Martial Art. They were significantly stricter than the conditions for growing stronger back when he was a Martial Apprentice. Back then he simply needed to find something that would make him stronger and had decent compatibility with him.

Now he needed to derive a technique or create one entirely from scratch that possessed extreme synergy with his Martial Art and body that also deviated from the existing base of techniques. The ones that he knew of, at least.

Yet despite the difficulty of this challenge, Rui grinned. He had to control himself from acting stupid out of excitement, but it was entirely evident regardless.

He would be truly forging his Martial Art from this point forth!

Prior he had been taking existing blocks and building his Martial Art from them, barring a handful of exceptions here and there. But now, he needed to construct even the blocks that he would use to further develop his Martial Art himself!

He truly looked forward to this immensely personal process. Just the thought of developing his own solutions to further his Martial Art was so exciting he could hardly wait to begin. He was no longer satisfied with the dull process of walking into the Squire-level library and mundanely picking whatever techniques sounded good. That had already grown mind-numbingly boring and dreary, and it was also weaker than creating one's own techniques.

Someone who did the latter would be able to perform better due to compatible synergetic techniques that made much better use of the Martial Artist and were better used by the Martial Artist. Furthermore, their individuality would bring them closer to the higher Realm in the long run. It was superior in every single way possible.

Rui breathed deeply as he opened his eyes to the world around him. Even the air felt refreshing and invigorating. The Sun's shine was beautiful while its warmth was gentle. The wind danced as though rejoicing. It was almost as if the world was rejoicing alongside him.

Chapter 529: Idea

Rui found himself meditating on a large rock in the forests near the Quarrier Orphanage, absorbed deep in thought. He had recently obtained clarity about his path forward in the Squire Realm and had even fleshed out some of the conditions that he would need to keep in mind when developing his Martial Art from this point forth.

All he had to do was take the first step concretely.

('What are my most immediate needs?') Rui asked himself.

Although developing the VOID algorithm to be able to counter all Martial Art in the world was certainly important, it was much more of a lifelong ambition than an immediate objective. He thought back to his battle against the Britannian Martial Squire, analyzing his shortcomings, weaknesses, and faults.

('My lack of ability to hurt him was a pain in the ass.') Rui sighed emphatically.

Rui had been able to react to, outmaneuver, predict, and counter his opponent just fine. The only reason the fight had extended for as long as it did was that he had trouble inflicting any meaningful damage on his opponent.

('My higher-end lethality is shit.') Rui sighed.

His offense was mostly centered around Outer Convergence, which allowed him to employ power from all muscle groups at any given point in time as well as Reverberating Lance, which employed vibrations to permeate the impact of his strike deeper into the body of his target allowing him to inflict damage in the more vulnerable parts of the human body.

However, against Martial Artists that were highly resistant to impacts, he may as well have no offensive capabilities at all. He didn't always have this problem, when he was a Martial Apprentice he had a versatile offense that allowed him to inflict all forms of damage against his opponent.

However, while he was vastly stronger as a Martial Squire than he was a Martial Apprentice, he did not possess the same kind of versatility that he did back then.

('That is something I need to fix.') Rui sighed.

His Flowing Void style needed to possess a wide array of tools in order to counter a wide array of Martial Art and opponents.

('I should note down all the primary avenues that my Martial Art is lacking the most.')

He needed to increase his lethality. This was especially needed against defensive opponents with a tendency to be able to resist ordinary attacks to a significant degree, such as the opponent he fought against at Fort Zurtun.

('The simplest way to increase my lethality is to obtain piercing attacks.')

In the past, as a Martial Apprentice, he had faced a similar issue, his solution back then was to obtain a piercing attack that allowed him to inflict flesh wounds on his opponent. Purchasing the Stinger technique had increased his lethality to a satisfactory degree.

Ordinarily, he would have been satisfied with remastering the technique as a Martial Squire, but that no longer was the case.

('The technique isn't as compatible with me as I'd like. Furthermore, it has zero individuality since it isn't something I created.') Rui sighed.

The Stinger was useful, but it wasn't nearly as flexible as Rui would have liked. While it was true that his toe had effectively become a bullet that he could puncture his opponent with, it was also true that it required a tremendous amount of momentum to do so. Every time he needed to use it, he needed to use all his offense-supplementary techniques, and strike as hard as he could with as powerful a kick as he could.

This added all kinds of limitations and restrictions on the number of scenarios he could comfortably use it in.

('Furthermore, the Stinger is a bit obsolete in the Squire Realm,') Rui sighed.

The reason for this was that Martial bodies were vastly superhuman in their ability to withstand pressure and their ability to cope with wounds. The Stinger could potentially land critical wounds on his opponent if Rui aimed well or got lucky and hit a blood vessel, but the same could not be said for Martial Squires. Puncturing them was disproportionately harder, and punctures were no longer that critical of a wound unless in vital areas. Martial bodies bled less to flesh wounds and were hampered to a lesser degree by such wounds.

('Unless I try to aim for a grade-eight or higher technique, it's not going to be nearly as effective as I'd like. But I do not possess the compatibility with extreme piercing-oriented techniques, thus I'd rather avoid going more powerful and extreme techniques that I probably would not be able to master as much as I'd like.') Rui analyzed. ('Thus, the solution is not piercing, or at the very least, it is not piercing alone.')

Maybe he could derive or create a technique that possesses more than just piercing, or two separate lethal techniques based on two different mechanisms that worked well together.

('It would be nice to add another element to a piercing technique. Something that is synergetic with piercing and can work well together with it.') Rui pondered the different possibilities. ('Heat maybe?')

Heat was a very niche and esoteric field in Martial Art, but it would certainly go well with a piercing technique and increase the degree to which the attack damages his opponent.

('But heat also cauterizes wounds.') Rui sighed as he shrewdly detected a drawback of this idea. If heat cauterized the wound, it would bleed less, removing one of the primary lethal elements of piercing attacks. ('Also, heat is no doubt extremely difficult to master. Probably more so than a powerful piercing attack. I need something with greater synergy and less impedance.')

His mind scoured through several problems as he finally came up with a potential solution.

('Should I... include a poison element?') Rui wondered as he opened his eyes.

Incorporating poison into the technique would most certainly increase its lethality as poison was especially effective when administered directly into the body as it would in the case of a piercing attack.

Chapter 530: Ambitious

It was an intriguing idea, one that was definitely worth seriously considering. Poison would allow him to capitalize the most on an open wound, more than almost any other offensive field. He pictured something such as conditioning the part of his body that would be piercing into his target with a powerful toxin. Doing so would allow him to incapacitate, hamper, or even kill his opponent depending on what kind of poison he chose and how potent it was.

('The only problem is the matter of how compatible I am with poison.') Rui sighed.

Poison was a niche field, perhaps not to the same extent as something like heat was, but it certainly was very much divorced from the mainstream fields of techniques that Martial Artists most dabbled in.

Rui recalled a conversation he had with headmaster Aronian regarding the Unorthodox Sect and why they had been dubbed as such. Fields such as poison and heat were not inherent natural applications of the human body. The proportion of Martial Art and Martial Paths centered around these fields was low due to this very reason. The same applied to compatibility, the compatibility of the average martial Artist with these fields was low.

That was Rui was somewhat unsure of whether he was qualified to incorporate any potent poison into his technique.

('But it doesn't necessarily need to be potent.') Rui noted.

As long as the poison accomplished some meaningful difference, it was worth pursuing. Furthermore, unless Rui was, for some reason, especially horribly incompatible with poison, it was unlikely that he would be unable to obtain something of some utility.

('This would have been an easy decision had I still been in the Apprentice Realm, but it gets more complicated now that I'm in the Squire Realm.') Rui sighed.

Squires were not easily susceptible to poison. Martial Apprentices were physically human, unless they had gone out of their way to master some defensive resistance training techniques against poison, they were as vulnerable to poison as other normal humans were.

The same could not be said for Martial Squires, Martial Squires possessed far more resistance to invasive substances that were detrimental to the human body. What would kill even the most resistant Martial Apprentices was something that most Martial Squires would be able to resist. The question was whether Rui would be able to master Squire-level poison techniques that were required to affect Martial Squires to a meaningful degree.

('Hm...') Rui narrowed his eyes, deep in thought. ('I might need to learn more about the poison-oriented techniques from the Martial Union before I can make a decision on this matter. It is always best to be informed about the subjects that are important to you.')

It was in these avenues that Rui was willing to obtain some help from the Martial Union; purely distant aid that did not overreach.

('Well, until I get to that, I have to consider my other options as well. Another option that comes to mind is friction-oriented elements.')

He recalled that one of the Martial representatives of the Martial Contest had a Martial Path that was centered around friction. The man's very touch wrenched and ground against the flesh, causing excruciating flesh wounds.

('What if I incorporate friction into the sides of whatever part of my body pierces into my opponent?') Rui wondered with intrigue in his eyes. ('Then, as I penetrate my opponent, I will be inflicted damage to the sides of the wound due to sheer friction.')

It could be likened to a knife with a blade with many tiny spikes on its blade surfaces. If someone was stabbed with a knife, both the actual sharp blade and the tiny spikes on its side would cause tremendous amounts of damage and pain to its target.

('Wait... What if I combine piercing, friction, and poison?') Rui's eyes widened.

What if the knife that had many tiny spikes on its side was also covered in poison?

Such a technique would have devastating lethality. Any technique that incorporated meaningful amounts of each of the three fields would be no different from a lethal assassination technique that could potentially kill its opponent with a single attack!

('Is such a thing even possible?') Rui began to wonder with excitement.

He didn't know. To be more precise, he didn't know if he possessed the qualifications to master such a technique.

('I need to learn more about this.') Rui nodded, seriously. ('Oh, I should also consult Julian. He definitely knows a lot about the scientific side of the Martial Art in this world.')

In a way, so did Rui. The difference between them was that Rui had gone to extremely far lengths in his previous life in the martial arts and combat sports of Earth while the scientists of this world tapped into the more supernatural side of Martial Art.

Sometimes Rui felt the need to learn more about the esoteric sciences of the world of Gaia. It was in times like these, as well as the time when he obtained the research data of the Squire breakthrough process from the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana. Thankfully, in both this and that situation, he had his reliable older brother who was always willing to help him out.

('I just don't have enough time.') Rui shook his head.

Even though Earth's understanding and application of natural reality were far greater than that of the human civilization on the Panama continent, he did not underestimate how difficult learning esoteric in-depth most likely was. Mastering it was probably extremely difficult all things considered. If Julian needed many years of education and experience to be qualified to become a full-fledged scholar, Rui did not think he would be able to complete it in a flash.

('Well, that wraps my thoughts on one project.') Rui opened his eyes. ('I'll have to do more research when I get back, but I don't think I need to limit myself to only a single Martial Art technique development project if I can help it.')