

Martial Unity 561

Chapter 561: Clash

Had Rui been there, he would have made deeper insights into the second round of the entrance exam. He would have immediately mentally plotted distribution graphs with classes of badge number, with a certain range, and the proportion of badges that fell within each of those classes, based on his observations, allowing him to figure out exactly how many applicants would need to be disqualified for the winners to win.

And he would have more or less correctly come to the conclusion that only twenty percent of the applicants could possibly pass the second round of the entrance exam. That was why the number 1500 was chosen when the average was 1026.

Max and Mana immediately had each other's back as the applicants around them increasingly began getting broiled in more intense conflict.

They were cognizant of the fact that their badge numbers were decisively below the required net number to pass the second round.

"What should we do?" Max asked urgently.

"We should target one applicant together," Mana responded.

Max nodded. "You're right! Big brother said that we should work together, just like we do in training!"

The two of them scoured their surroundings as they looked for a suitable target. They did not have any foolish thoughts of chivalry or honor, they knew that they were the underdogs and that were disadvantaged individually against pretty much all the applicants. Rui had drilled teamwork into their heads.

"There." Max pointed at a girl. "She looks about our age and although her badge number 538 isn't enough by itself, it's our best shot."

Mana followed his gaze, before nodding. "Good thinking."

The two of them watched their target, Crea.

She had been laying low as she herself had been looking for a target, yet suddenly she felt something approaching her. She turned, just barely in time to react to Max and Mana rushing towards her.

POW POW POW!

Max and Mana bull-rushed her with a quick flurry of jabs. Crea gritted her teeth as she just barely managed to square a guard up in time to defend against the siblings' attacks.

('Two on one...!') She cursed. Max and Mana had surrounded her as they began circling her, throwing attacks in her blind spot.

Yet to Max's and Mana's surprise, she was able to cope quite well. She managed to partially evade or block almost all of their attacks despite them leveraging their numeric advantage against her. They could even feel that her skill was better than theirs.

POW!

Max launched a right kick to her thigh, retreating his leg that she almost managed to catch and would have no doubt kneed to oblivion had she succeeded.

THWACK

A second kick landed on her shin, causing her spike of pain.

"RARGH!" Crea turned and swung her leg towards Mana swiftly, yet Mana had seen the attack coming from a mile away, avoiding it cleanly

POW!

BAM!

THWACK!

Crea kept defending against the external attacks, yet the light of determination never once faded from her eyes. A faint memory resurfaced even as she withstood all the attacks that her opponents bombarded her with, as she defended her badge.

"I can't avoid getting hit?" Crea asked Rui.

"No, you cannot." Rui shook his head. "The sheer chaos, the sheer numbers, not to mention your disadvantages, it is impossible to avoid taking a lot of punishment unless you're extremely lucky."

"Then can I just defend against all of them, right?"

"That's just as hard, I'm afraid," Rui replied, shaking his head. "At most, you can guard, but it won't help much in those circumstances"

"Well, then what can I do?" She scratched her head.

"What you can do... is make it count." Rui grinned.

"Make it count?" She tilted her head in confusion.

"Yep, make it count." Rui nodded. "Suppress your futile urge to evade or defend every attack, instead, take it and use the opportunity created by you not wasting your physical resources into futile defense and the opening created by an attack to launch a counterattack. If you're going to get hit, then make sure every strike they land on you is costly. That is the best way to prevent becoming a punching bag when you're at a disadvantage."

"Ohhh..." Crea nodded as she understood what Rui was trying to convey. "I see. I just have to make it count. I feel like I really like that tactic, for some reason."

POW!

A blow flew towards her shoulder, yet Crea hadn't bothered with trying to guard. Her arms lashed out toward his elbow and shoulder even as a painful impact assailed her right shoulder with pain. Yet she ignored it as she clasped him, before swiftly sweeping him off his feet and over her shoulder flat onto the ground.

BAM!

She immediately tried reaching for his badge, yet;

POW!

Crea blocked a powerful kick to the face, gritted her teeth as she ignored the pain in her guard.

"URGH!" Crea rushed in throwing a combo of blows toward Mana.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Mana stepped back as she managed to evade Crea's attacks. She was always the more mobile one out of the siblings. Yet it wasn't too long before Crea managed to gain an edge. Every time Mana attacked, she got hurt.

She threw a swift strike at Crea, yet the latter ignored the threat of damage as her elbow fell and her knee rose, crushing her forearm in between them mercilessly.

"ARGH!" Mana muffled a scream as she felt a sharp pain in her arm, as though it was broken.

"Sis!" Max rushed in as he rushed towards Crea, colliding with her.

BAM!

"URGH!" Crea gritted her teeth as she turned towards Max with a murderous expression.

Max threw a jab at her, yet Crea didn't even bother dodging or guarding, she opened her mouth, biting down hard at what was supposed to be a strike to the jaw.

"AH!" Max leaped back as he stared at his bleeding fist.

Crea spat out his blood, before turning towards him. "I made it count."

Chapter 562: Surprise

The three of them came to a momentary stand-off as Max quickly tended to his wound, while Crea and Mana caught their breaths and gathered their bearings. Despite being pounded by the two siblings, she felt amazing. The way of fighting that she had just engaged in was incredibly satisfying and fun. A strange feeling came from within her, she didn't really understand what it meant.

Attack to defend. Make it count.

These principles that Rui had imparted to her really resonated with her.

Why that was the case, she didn't know, but she decided to ride the wave. Making it her only principal way to engage with her opponent.

She had a fierce expression as Max and Mana regrouped, preparing another volley of attacks. Yet just as they leaped at her.

WHOOSH

"Waaaaah!" A boy went flying just between the siblings and Crea, surprising them. He landed a few meters away, groaning in pain. The three of them couldn't help but look in the opposite direction, wondering what launched him flying.

Their eyes widened as a faint aura crept over them, pressuring their minds. They stiffened as they gritted their teeth, their attentions had already been drawn away from each other.

The boy walked towards the three of them with a lazy grin, assessing them as they did him.

"Martial Apprentice..." Crea clenched her jaw as she whispered.

Just her luck, before she could even obtain the necessary badges, she was ambushed by two punks and now even a Martial Apprentice had taken note of them.

What was especially eye-drawing was the number of badges pinned across his clothes. There were many badges across his upper garbs. It was clear that he had accumulated more badges than he needed. The man was no longer just fighting to pass the second round, he was fighting for fun.

Crea would have ordinarily evaded him, but it was too late, his eyes were locked on them. Max and Mana could sense the same, as they faced him instead of each other.

He smiled, wordlessly, there was nothing to say at all, after all.

The three of them took their stances. Crea still held hope, she knew who the boy was. He was a talented heir in the Martial community who was part of the rare group of adolescents who had broken through to the Apprentice Realm prior to entering the Martial Academy or becoming an adult.

However, he had broken through very recently, and Crea was sure that he hadn't mastered any Apprentice-level techniques either. She could see a bruise or two on his face, which would be impossible if he had mastered even a single Apprentice-level technique.

The atmosphere tensed as the three of them faced him waiting.

But evidently, he was done waiting.

WHOOSH

POW!

In what seemed like an instant, he had crossed the gap between them, and launched a kick at Max, launching him several meters backward.

"Max!" Mana cried out, yet she made the blunder of losing track of her opponent in the middle of combat.

POW!

A single strike across the jaw caused her to crumple down like a puppet with cut strings.

Crea growled as she adopted a highly closed stance. Her eyes were bloodshot, she loosened her jaw a bit, ready to use her brand-new bite intercept attack.

POW!

"RRGH!"

A low kick to the ankle brought her down to one knee. It was too fast for and too difficult otherwise to be able to counterattack upon. The boy scoffed lightly, before launching a swift kick to her face.

POW!

Crea spun backward, collapsing to the ground.

DRIP DRIP DRIP

A sharp pain flew up his foot, startling him as he looked down.

"ARGH!" He kneeled down cradling his bleeding toe.

"Heh.... hehe..." Crea stood up like a zombie as she chuckled unsteadily.

Something had snapped inside her. A switch had turned on, a door had opened. Inside her head. It was a path that extended deep beyond her fathoming. A path that she had taken a single step down.

"PTHOO!"

She spat before him, amidst her saliva was a human toenail.

"You fucking bitch!" He got up, ignoring the pain and bleeding as he charged at her at full speed. He threw his full weight behind a strike. Yet what she did shocked him.

Instead of moving away, she charged toward him and his attack.

POW!

BAM!

His strike struck her shoulder, clearly dislocating it, yet her elbow buried itself in his throat, forming a deep indentation.

"ACK!" His eyes watered as he fell flat to the ground, cradling his throat, trying to breathe.

BAM!

Crea soccer kicked him in the head, but he managed to mitigate the impact by shifting just enough, getting up to his feet.

"YOU'RE DEAD!" He screeched. "FUCKING DEAD. DEAD! YOU HEAR M-" "Shut up."

He froze as he felt a tremendous amount of pressure on him. Crea was a mess, she was bruised up and bloody. Yet her piercing eyes made him shiver. There was no way a normal human could make him feel like that.

('That's right!') He gritted his teeth. ('She's still weak. Only way I could feel this threatened is if she was a...')

His eyes widened.

He took a good look at her, growing more shocked by the second.

('She discovered her Martial Path... She's a fucking Martial Apprentice.')

She walked towards him with a fierce expression, completely unperturbed. He clenched his jaw with a tense expression.

The two Martial Apprentices exerted a tremendous amount of pressure on the other applicants, the rest of them had already moved away from them, flinching. The two of them exerted a maelstrom of pressure on everybody else, together it was above the pressure that the applicants faced in the first round.

Everybody stayed as far away from them, returning back to combat only after they were confident they wouldn't get caught in the crossfire.

The two of them lashed out at each other, charging at top speed without any restraint.

Chapter 563: Outcome

"Ack...!" The boy crawled away bleeding profusely from his mouth. "Rgh."

He puked out some more blood.

STEP

Crea stepped over him.

"Get away from me!" He cried in fear.

Crea looked like something out of a low-budget horror film.

She turned him over.

"S-Stop!"

She plucked a badge out of his garb, pinning it on hers, before walking away. Soon after, an announcement drew everybody's attention.

"The second round of the entrance exam has come to an end." The proctor announced.

All the applicants paused. Some sighed in relief, some broke out in celebration. But most were disappointed.

"Huff..." Mana exhaled, trying to compose herself as she tended to her broken jaw.

"Fuck!" Max cursed as he gently caressed his broken ribs. "We're disqualified."

His expression grew more severe as he thought about Rui. "He's gonna be disappointed in us."

Mana shook her head. "Not unless we didn't give it our best. The ones who are truly disappointed should be... us."

"Big brother is kind." Max choked up a little before stifling his urge to break down in tears before his sister. "Next year."

His expression grew fiercer. "Next year. We'll definitely get through next year."

Mana nodded as she furrowed her eyebrows, wiping away a single tear, ignoring her throbbing jaw. She turned towards the distant figure of Crea, healed up after drinking a healing potion. She was surrounded by many proctors and other individuals wearing garbs with the emblem of the Martial Academy.

"She became a Martial Apprentice in the middle of the exam." Mana gasped in disbelief. "That's impossible."

"Whoever she is, she's fucking amazing," Max grunted. "Damn, I wish I broke through in the middle of the exam in a moment of hopeless despair! Urgh."

He grimaced in pain, caressing his ribs.

"Careful." Mana chided him.

A team of nurses came over to them, examining them.

"Here." One of them handed them potions. "This should heal everything, we'll give you stronger potions if not."

Thankfully, although their injuries had been too debilitating to allow them to pass the round, a potion had been enough to heal them each. The two of them thanked the nurses before leaving the Martial Academy.

Mana sighed after messaging Rui to come to pick them up, having retained their belongings. She didn't need to mention whether they had passed or failed. Rui instantly guessed that they had failed, they came out far too early to have passed.

The two of them simply stared at the Martial Academy, yet, only a minute later, the ground rumbled and the air danced.

STEP

Rui appeared out of thin air, stepping down gracefully before them. He took a good look at them. For a moment, none of them said anything.

"Big brother..." Max squeezed out.

"The future is more important than the past." Rui blankly stated. "What's happened has happened."

He looked at both of them. "That being said, only the past can teach you how to forge the future you want. Do not let this failure drag you down, instead, turn it into fuel that will propel you to even greater heights."

"Don't worry, brother," Mana told him with serene, yet sharp, piercing eyes.

"I'll get into the Martial Academy next year even if it fucking kills me." Max's eyes blazed with barely restrained determination.

The two of them were consumed in their own thoughts, they didn't notice the smallest of smiles crack at Rui's mouth.

('Perfect.') Rui nodded inwardly. ('I'm glad they lost, in hindsight.')

It's not that Rui wished ill on them, of course not. It was the exact opposite. Prior to the exam, Max and Mana had been passionate, curious, excited, and a whole other slew of generally positive emotions. There was nothing wrong with this, of course.

('But it's not enough.') Rui sighed inwardly.

He didn't sense a fire in them. Burning willpower that would drive them forward no matter what. That was the difference between them and Crea in his mind. Her determination and perseverance were strong beyond her years. In comparison, Max and Mana were much tamer.

('This is different from the first round of the entrance exam.') Rui noted. ('That test can be trained for, prepared for, because ultimately it is a highly controlled and superficial impediment to the mind, and the mind knows that. Over time, it can be taught to power through the subconscious fear generated by the immense sense of danger and risk that it knows aren't truly real.')

However, when that certainty of safety and superficiality disappeared, that was when the heart was truly tested. If Max and Mana had fragile hearts before, they didn't anymore. This outcome alone made the failure inconsequential in his mind. He grew even more certain, instinctually, that they would not only crack the entrance exam but also open the door to their Martial Paths.

Of course, he still put on a solemn demeanor. He didn't want them to feel this way, it was their failure, and they needed to feel the frustration.

He nodded. "It seems I wasted my breath. Hah. Truly, I'm proud of you."

"How do you want to get home?" Rui asked. "Rickshaw? Sky walking? Or-"

"Let's just... walk... slowly," Mana suggested softly, interjecting, earning a nod from Max.

"Well. Walking it is, then." He turned around, sauntering in the direction of the Quarrier Orphanage.

The three of them trudged quietly to the Quarrier Orphanage, wordlessly. Rui didn't try to start a conversation forcefully, he could see that the two of them needed and wanted solitude for a bit. They knew that they wouldn't get quiet for a while when they returned home. Alice would undoubtedly leap at them and smother them to death.

Once they left the town of Hajin, their surroundings grew quiet, having left the bustling commercial and industrial districts of the town of the Hajin.

Max sighed exaggeratedly as he inhaled deeply.

"Feeling better?" Rui quizzed lightly.

"Yeah... Much better, honestly." Max was surprised.

Rui nodded, that was a good sign, it meant that they weren't holding on too strongly to the past.

Chapter 564: Shock

"Don't you want to know what happened, big brother?" Mana raised an eyebrow.

"The details don't matter as much, but yes." Rui nodded. "Whenever you want to."

Mana paused for a moment, before sighing. "We ran into a Martial Apprentice. He broke my jaw and Max's ribs."

That was about as strong as any justification for a loss one could have. Of course, that didn't make things better, a loss was still a loss.

"By the time we could even gather ourselves, it was already over." Max gritted his teeth. "That girl, Crea Jenken? She broke through to the Apprentice Realm and wiped the floor with that other Martial Apprentice. Damn, I wish I was li-"

"Wait." Rui paused abruptly, trying to conceal his shock with a mind mask. "You're telling me a girl broke through?"

"Yeah." Max nodded.

"Her name was Crea Jenken? You're sure?" He asked in an unassuming tone.

"Pretty sure that's what they called her when they passed her." Max scratched his head.

The two would have noticed something odd in his demeanor had they been in a normal state of mind, but they were too consumed by themselves to do so.

"Mmm..." Rui nonchalantly nodded.

Inside, though...

('What the fuck...?') Rui was truly shocked. ('No, what the actual fuck??')

He had no idea how Crea broke through to the Apprentice Realm so soon and in the middle of the entrance exam. He was sure that she was still very far away from becoming a Martial Apprentice, yet she threw his consideration out of the window and began traversing her Martial Path.

('But how?? Nothing has changed since three months ago in her life except...')

His eyes widened a bit. ('...Me.')

He considered the implications that could potentially be inferred.

('The discovery of the Martial Path is fundamentally about self-awareness...') Rui noted as he came to a realization. ('In the past three months, I have been systematically increasing her awareness and

cognizance of her patterns, her strengths and weaknesses, and other things dramatically... Could it be that...?')

Could it be that the VOID algorithm could be applied to aid with the self-exploration process needed to gain the degree of self-awareness to discover one's Martial Path?

('Have I discovered a way to increase the rate at which people break through?')

A shiver crept down his spine.

"Are you ok, big brother?" Mana asked, noticing it.

"Haha, it's just a little cold today."

"But you're sweating."

"It's humid, after all."

('If the Martial Union finds out...')

He didn't even want to consider what would happen if they found out about his strong suspicions. He would be the golden goose that could accelerate the journey to breaking through to the Apprentice Realm.

Such a capability was game-changing, it was revolutionary. It could change the standstill political struggle between the Martial Union and the Royal Family. It could allow Martial Art to truly overrun the world and become the most powerful force on the continent.

Of course, these were highly fanciful extrapolations, and the situation was infinitely more complex and nuanced than that. However, there were many more considerations that flew into his head that were perhaps more relevant to him.

The various Martial Sects and factions would very well wage a civil war to get their hands on the method of facilitating breakthroughs at a higher rate. If any stakeholder got their hands on him, they would force him to spit out the method to increase the rate of breakthroughs of Martial Artists and get him to pass it on. Naturally, this would be difficult because not anyone can learn the VOID algorithm and apply it as well as he does.

He would forever be embroiled in all kinds of entities interested in harnessing such a capability.

Such a future was highly undesirable. The logical decision to be made from such a conclusion would be to never divulge it and never let anyone figure out the truth.

('Wait.') He sighed inwardly, pausing his overexcited self. ('I don't know for sure that my suspicions are true. I have only one test subject, meaning only one data point to observe, that is far from enough objective evidence to be confident that there is a correlation between my training and the probability of breakthrough.'))

His inner scientist quickly restored his rationality that had been momentarily dispelled by paranoia and shock. He needed more data to make sure he wasn't dreaming up something out of thin air. It would be really embarrassing if all of this was just wrong, and Crea broke through because of her own latent talent and some good luck.

But he had a very strong feeling that he was onto something here. He just needed more empirical data.

He glanced at the crestfallen Max and Mana with a glint of interest. Unlike Crea, he knew these two very well, he had known them their entire lives practically, which meant that the effects of long-term VOID algorithm training were something that he could verify more thoroughly in the cases of these two. There would be less uncertainty whether he made a meaningful concrete impact on their breakthrough than there currently was with Crea.

('I'll have to spend more time with them.') Rui noted.

Thankfully, Crea had broken through and gone to the Martial Academy, meaning he didn't need to train her anymore since the objective had been fulfilled.

He originally wanted to relax his schedule a bit, but it was clear that he needed to get to the bottom of this, thus it seemed that his busy life in the past three months wouldn't get any easier in the meantime.

('Should I consult Julian about this?') Rui wondered.

It was extremely tempting, Julian had studied breakthrough to the Apprentice Realm extensively and, given his sharp insight, would certainly be able to help Rui out in some way or the other. But, given the sensitivity of the topic, he decided to abstain from revealing it to him for the time being. He could revisit the decision if he had any trouble regarding the matter.

Chapter 565: Meet

STEP

Rui landed before the Jenken residence gently, facing the guards. Though his commission from Colonel Geringan had ended, the guards opened the gate for him immediately.

"Hahaha! Look who's here!" Colonel Geringan's voice was uncharacteristically boisterous. "If it isn't the man who helped my daughter become a Martial Artist!"

He shook Rui's hand vigorously with a wide grin.

"I merely offered guidance." Rui smiled modestly. "She is ultimately responsible for breaking through her limits, that too in the middle of a crisis, from what I hear."

Rui played down his contribution and impact on her growth. He didn't want to accept credit that could land him in hot water that he was not equipped to handle. If he truly did contribute to her breaking through, then he did not want people to know that.

Funnily enough, if he was sure that he didn't actually contribute anything, then taking credit looked more attractive.

"Have a seat." Colonel Geringan told Rui as he sat down himself. "Crea will be here soon enough, she's just preoccupied with a few matters."

"It seems to breaking through has put a lot on her plate." Rui chuckled.

"You have no idea." Geringan laughed. "Just entertaining our various acquaintances, in the Martial community and otherwise, who called in to congratulate us alone has taken up hours of her free time, she has been quite cranky because of that."

"That does sound like a pain." Rui smiled wryly. "When I broke through, I only had to deal with my family, thankfully."

"It was actually the same for me." Colonel Geringan nodded. "What little I had of a family back then, anyways."

That implied he wasn't part of the Martial community when he broke through. Rui did recall reading that the Jenken family wasn't part of the Martial community, or even a Martial family before Colonel Geringan.

What that meant was that all of the success, power, money, and prestige that Colonel Geringan had today was earned by Colonel Geringan himself. Rui's respect for him had grown knowing that. The fact that he was a Martial Colonel despite only being a Martial Senior was rather impressive, for the rank was normally given only to Martial Masters, from Rui's understanding.

It was among the special rank hierarchy of the army given to Martial Artists. It conveyed authority without much of the management and leadership responsibilities and duties that normally came along with the normal equivalent of those ranks in the regular Kandrian military hierarchy.

Martial Apprentices were usually promoted to the Martial corporal rank.

Martial Squires were usually promoted to the Martial sergeant rank.

Martial Seniors were usually promoted to the Martial major rank.

Martial Masters were usually promoted to the Martial colonel rank.

The fact that Geringan Jenken was a Martial colonel despite only being a Martial Senior meant that he had likely accrued a large number of merits in his time in the military allowing him to be promoted to a higher rank.

Just then, another individual entered the room.

"Teacher Rui!" Crea exclaimed as she arrived, rushing towards him.

"Alright, take it easy." Rui laughed as he caught her dive at him. "Congratulations on becoming a Martial Artist, Crea."

"It's all thanks to your training," Crea replied with a grateful tone.

Rui shook his head. "I may have helped, but that is what I was brought here to do. The actual effort, among other things, that one needs to put to break through is something only you could have put."

"Hehe..." Crea accepted his praise with a beaming smile.

"So, tell me about your Martial Path." Rui casually said. He hadn't yet gotten any details from colonel Geringan, probably because he wanted to let his daughter be the one to explain it to Rui.

Crea nodded. "My Martial Path is counter-offensive deterrence. My greatest defense is sacrificing defense but using that opportunity to inflict more pain and harm than my opponents do on me."

She explained the details with a sadistic smile.

"Interesting..." Rui replied with a measured tone once she finished explaining the details.

He had come across counter-offensive Martial Artists before, many of them. In his time serving as a representative fighter, in other missions, and also in the preliminary tournament of the Martial Academy. Yet he was relatively certain he had never seen a counter-offensive Martial Art this extreme. This Martial Art truly took counter-offense to its most extreme interpretation.

A Martial Art that abandoned defense and scared away attacks with even more lethal attacks that made use of the spontaneous holes in opponent's defenses when the latter attacked? That was verging on insanity.

In fact, Rui could see the anxiety hidden behind colonel Geringan's joyful expression. Such a Martial Art was very mutually destructive and was such that she was guaranteed to get really hurt every time she fought.

Frankly, Rui was worried too, for the same reason. Although this was just a job, he had grown to have attachments to Crea in the past three months. He did not want any harm befalling her.

('Maybe... I can get her to learn the Autophagy Mind Switch technique that I created.') Rui noted inwardly. It would be particularly useful to her when the time came, though he didn't need to take that measure for now.

He also wanted some more empirical data on that technique as well, so that he could extract maximum value with all the proof he gained of its effectiveness from the Martial Artists that were going to master it. Though for now, she didn't need it.

"Well, I'm looking forward to how you're going to develop your Martial Art." Rui had many thoughts, but he kept them to himself, it seemed that colonel Geringan was also doing the same, the man clearly withheld the many thoughts he had regarding what he believed she ought to do.

This was because Martial Artists of higher Realms ought not to interfere with the Martial journeys of lower Realms, this was a philosophy that was well upheld in the Martial Academy.

Chapter 566: Matters

In the Martial Academy, Martial Apprentices were given an immense amount of freedom on how they wanted to spend their time and what and how they wanted to train. The Squire instructors merely took the roles of guides, rather than teachers. This had done the Martial Apprentices well, and without it, they likely would not make as much progress with the individuality and maturity of their Martial Art, thereby reducing the number of Martial Apprentices that achieved Squire candidacy.

If Rui were her, he would immediately begin arming himself with many lethal offensive techniques that could inflict greater damage with every attack. Of course, this alone was going to be a long and difficult journey that would likely take Crea several years to truly complete. In his opinion, she ought to also increase her passive defense and endurance.

If she was going to abandon active defense and go all out on offense every time her opponent attacked, then she needed to ensure that her skin, flesh, muscles, and bones were all tough. Otherwise, she might very well lose the fight in one exchange.

He also felt that she ought to purchase endurance techniques that allow her to mitigate the damage she ended up suffering.

But he didn't mention any of these recommendations, he was pretty sure colonel Geringan would not be pleased even if he did try.

They conversed for some more time before another matter interrupted them.

"Young miss Crea." An employee of the family addressed her, bowing.

"Hm?" She turned towards him, knitting her eyebrows.

"I'm afraid you need to begin preparing for your evening appointment now, or else you will not be able to make it in time."

Her expression drooped. "Later."

"Crea." Geringan gave her a measured look.

"Tsk. Fine." She rolled her eyes before looking back at Rui. "Bye-bye teacher. Thanks for everything. I will never forget how much you helped me."

She turned around and ran before Rui could even respond. "Well, there she goes."

"Indeed." Rui sighed. "Well, then I ought to take my leave."

He got up, prompting Geringan to do the same.

"Ah, one more thing." Geringan paused. "I'm holding a party to celebrate Crea breaking through. I'm inviting you to it, as her trainer."

Rui caught his intentions, he was pretty sure that there would be a heavy presence of members of the Merger faction.

"Ah... Unfortunately, I'm extremely busy actually." Rui smiled apologetically. "And I also have to look after the training of my two siblings as well, they didn't manage to clear the exam, unfortunately."

The colonel was actually aware of this, which is why he avoided asking about it. "That's a shame, but it can't be helped. Once again, thank you for your phenomenal service. If you ever need anything, be sure to give me a call."

"Thank you, that's generous of you." Rui smiled.

The two bade each other goodbye, as Rui left the residence. However, he didn't head in the direction of the Orphanage when he took off into the air. He headed straight for the Martial Union.

('Time to grind through and finish those two techniques as soon as possible.') Rui noted.

He felt a sense of urgency because his source of income; training Crea was now gone. Of course, colonel Geringan had been more than generous with the proposed hourly remuneration rate, allowing Rui to accumulate enough wealth to sustain his expenditure for some time without needing another source of income. He intended to finish the two techniques that he had purchased from the Martial Union before that happened, which would get rid of one of his biggest liabilities and would allow him to develop Project Bounce and Project Sniper peacefully.

Once he learned the two techniques, he didn't need the Martial Union anymore. He could do most of the work by himself just like he was currently doing with Project Bounce.

('Everything is going well.') Rui nodded.

He was pleased with the progress he made with both projects, especially Project Bounce. Soon, he would be able to almost entirely absorb the power of the incoming attack and turn it into kinetic energy of his entire body harmlessly.

Once that occurred, he would immediately move on to the second phase; Getting rid of all the accumulated kinetic energy harmlessly.

He had given this part a lot of thought, and he had come up with potential solutions.

('I need to somehow discharge the inherited kinetic energy into the environment; either the land or the air. There is no realistic way of getting rid of it otherwise.') Rui sighed.

He had considered harnessing that power and using it to empower his own attacks, but that was no longer an objective as much as it was a magical pipe dream. He wasn't even sure if such a thing was physically possible at all. For now, he discarded the idea.

The most straightforward way to get rid of energy and impart it to the ground was through friction. That was how most people got rid of their kinetic energy when they wanted to slow down or stop. There was only one problem with that.

('Friction has limits, it cannot bleed away all my power before I have already moved more than a hundred meters from my original position.')

The friction of an object experienced on any given surface was entirely dependent on the roughness of the surface and object, measured by the coefficient of friction, and the weight of the object pushing down on said surface. The product of these two quantities determined the maximum amount of frictional force that there could be between the object and the surface.

Thus, friction was not a viable solution.

('Another potential solution is through an inelastic collision with the ground.') Rui noted. ('If I can somehow channel that energy and ground it, or release it into the atmosphere through a hard enough collision where I pass on the kinetic energy in the same that my opponent's power was passed onto me, then I might be able to harmlessly get rid of all that energy on the spot.')

Chapter 567: ODA

Rui inhaled deeply, closing his eyes. His skin tingled as he carefully felt atmospheric fluctuations pressing against his senses. He could feel the air currents and shifts in the atmosphere all around him like watching the surface of the ocean fluctuating about.

However, he wasn't just limited to that, he could do much more once he 'read' the atmospheric fluctuations. Instantly, a three-dimensional omnidirectional image of the world around him appeared in his mind. He could perceive the fauna and flora in the natural environment around him in the forest through their atmospheric signatures and sonic radiation. He could perceive them with great detail, right down to the last bit of fur on the back of a squirrel dozens of meters away.

This was the world perceived through the Tempestuous Feel technique when fully mastered

Rui then focused on Seismic Mapping as well, overlapping the sensory information both techniques supplied him. Together, the two techniques provided a more holistic, accurate, and precise image of the world to Rui.

And a greater sensory range that went beyond just the sum of the parts. Rui could sense truly far with these two techniques combined.

Rui inhaled deeply, before opening his mouth.

WHOOM!

A potent sonic bullet escaped his mouth, traveling incredibly fast and far, knocking down many dozens of trees before its momentum had finally bled out.

Rui exhaled, nodding. "Finally, it's time, to begin with the actual development of Project Sniper."

Two months had passed since the Martial entrance exam, and Rui had very recently mastered both the techniques that he had bought from the Martial Union. Mastering Tempestuous Feel and Sonic Bullet were merely Rui procuring the necessary tools to fulfill Project Sniper. Now that he had obtained those tools, he intended to go all out and succeed.

He looked at a tree dozens of meters away, before launching a Sonic Bullet at it.

WHOOM!

The sound bullet flew before striking the tree accurately. He repeated the exercise, but this time, with a tree more than a hundred meters away.

WHOOM!

"Tsk. Missed." Rui tutted.

He had already known that his accuracy was nowhere near adequate. There were two reasons.

The first, of course, was his own imperfect aim. Beyond a certain distance, it was clearly evident that his aim was shit.

However, he had already come up with a potential solution.

('Marksmanship skill isn't my forte. So I just need to rely on what I am good at rather than what I am not good at.')

He intended to create a systematic way to aim the Sonic Bullet techniques at any given target. This was the first mini-phase of Project Sniper; increasing his accuracy.

The question was how he ought to go about it.

('The underlying condition for perfect aim is ensuring the trajectory of the attack overlaps with the target. What are the further underlying conditions to achieving that in the context of the Sonic Bullet?') Rui wondered as he gave it deep thought, before arriving at an answer.

In order to systematically and scientifically aim at a target accurately, he needed to figure out what the launch conditions for hitting the target accurately were. Launch conditions were the parameters of the launch of the projectile that decided its trajectory; like the angle of his head, the intensity of the sound bullet etc.

In order to find out the necessary launch condition to hit a particular target properly, he needed to know the equations of the trajectory of the wavefront. If he knew the necessary equations that described the trajectory that would hit the target, he could figure out the launch conditions needed to get a perfect hit.

In order to figure out the equations describing the trajectory that would hit the target, he needed to know the distance between himself and the target, the direction of gravity relative to them, and the inclination and angle of his body relative to the target.

And that was where Tempestuous Feel and Seismic Mapping came in.

These two techniques could provide him with those variables, which would allow him to calculate the equation of the trajectory of the Sonic Bullet needed to hit his target, which would allow him to calculate the launch conditions, which would allow him to know exactly how he should launch his attack to get a perfect hit.

It was a complicated and tedious set of steps, however, if he could master this system, then he could achieve using science to aim instead of pure skill.

Of course, it would still require very accurate hand-eye coordination. Even if he figured out, in his head, how exactly he ought to launch the Sonic Bullet to get a perfect hit, he also needed to actually execute a completely accurate and perfect replication of the image that he had developed in his mind or on paper.

This would most likely require sustained practice over a long period of time. Until he managed to execute the outputs from his systemized aiming system, he would not be able to make much use of the many innovations that would be going into this project.

('I also should come up with a name for this new system.') Rui thought inwardly. ('Hm... How about the Objectively Derived Accuracy system, or the ODA System? Has a nice ring to it.')

Developing and mastering the ODA system was the most important step he had to take, but he was confident he could do it. ('The VOID algorithm is far more complex and more difficult to master than the ODA system, but I managed to pull that off.')

Of course, he spent more than one lifetime on the former before he succeeded, but he conveniently left that part out.

('The ODA system also needs to take into account atmospheric factors that could influence the trajectory of the Sonic Bullet and throw it off.') Rui recalled. ('Otherwise, the bullet will miss the target over truly long distances, which does increase the complexity and difficulty of the task, although still nowhere near that of the VOID algorithm.')

He immediately began working on it, he had his work cut out for him.

Chapter 568: Concept

The basic ODA system that focused purely on aim was complicated enough already, but taking into account the influence of air currents, winds and breeze, temperature, and drag on the trajectory of his attack among other things to ensure an absolutely accurate hit on the target made things much more difficult.

He had yet to come up with a way to account for that. This was perhaps even more difficult than the base ODA system.

('I only need to account for the atmospheric condition whenever and wherever the Sonic Bullet is along its trajectory.') Rui noted.

Only the atmospheric pocket immediately outside of the Sonic bullet could influence the sound pulse projectile at any given time, anything that was never going to come into contact with the Sonic Bullet would not be able to directly influence it.

('In order to fully account for the impact of the atmospheric conditions on the Sound Bullet, I need to know the precise atmospheric conditions that the bullet will face after it leaves my mouth.') Rui noted. ('However, how can I know the precise atmospheric conditions that my attack will face in the future after it leaves my mouth, before they happen?')

He would effectively need to predict the future to accomplish such a feat. This was a nigh-impossible task for any Martial Artist, they were not prophets, after all.

However, this didn't necessarily affect Rui.

('Temperature for any given area is a constant gradient within short intervals of time, that's not the issue.')

The issue was accounting for the forces of drag, pressure, and currents that would influence the trajectory of the projectile. Predicting that was much harder.

Thankfully, it wasn't impossible.

('All of these factors obey the laws of physics, particularly, they are completely predictable through the classical wave equation and the equations of superposition and resonance.')

All he needed was ample enough data on the initial conditions, and he could predict the manner and way in which the system of waves in the atmosphere would evolve. If he knew how it would evolve, then he could predict the influence that it would have on the particular trajectory involved, then he could account for those influences and alter the trajectory and his launch appropriately.

The equations were the easy part, although it had been a long time since he had finished his degree in physics, he still recalled the core of each of the subjects that he had studied, especially when his mind had grown more powerful in his second life.

The hard part was inputting all the relevant data from the Tempestuous Feel and the Seismic Mapping techniques into the relevant equations and computing the results in the briefest of moments. This was an incredibly difficult task even for Rui who was very confident in his mental math.

('That is where the Mental Embed technique will save my ass.') Rui sighed.

This was the technique that involved embedding the mental and cognitive processes that occurred in the brain when executing a technique, into the Mindmirror Brain, allowing the latter to aid the former in a parallel processing fashion. Even to this day, the Mindmirror Brain aided Rui with the processing of the VOID algorithm primarily, and the other techniques secondarily.

His confidence in mastering the ODA system to the point where it became practical to apply it in long-range battles and long-range attacks was high thanks to the Mental Embed technique and the Mindmirror Brain.

And with that, the conceptual basis of the accuracy issue of the Sniper Project was completely solved. All he needed to do was begin executing the concept and bringing it to life.

The first step was optimizing the ODA system's algorithmic protocols. The protocols would decide the manner in which Rui would obtain the desired outputs. Optimizing this was necessary because Rui didn't want to work with an inefficient process that would increase the time period and effort needed for him to ultimately obtain the desired results. Thus he needed to simplify the equations, and find as many functional shortcuts as possible in the math to ensure that the process was as simple as possible.

This approach was very common in engineering. Referring to the purely theoretical basis of any given field that they were trying to apply was something that was tedious and inefficient. Engineers cut away all the useless redundancies that the theoretical physics nerds came up with, and extracted the very distilled essence of theoretical science that was needed to apply the science in practical applications. This left them with much simpler practical equations that would become the basis of their algorithms and programs of their development projects.

Rui was effectively doing the exact same thing, but with Martial Art instead.

He spent several hours developing the relevant and necessary simplified algorithmic protocols for the ODA System, he had been very careful and thorough, checking and rechecking his work over and over. The end product was two-phase which was still quite complicated despite his best efforts. The first phase focused purely on accuracy disregarding the effects of the atmosphere, and the second part dealt with atmospheric conditions. The second phase of protocols was completed in his mind, he needed to execute them.

After all, he couldn't predict that deep into the future, in fact, it was very limited. He could only calculate a few seconds at the very most. This meant that the sonic bullet could only travel for a handful of seconds before it crossed the degree to which Rui could predict it.

Of course, a few seconds was still a lot considering that the Sonic Bullet could cover a kilometer in that distance.

Meaning, if everything went according to plan, then Rui could accurately snipe his opponents or targets from an enormous distance away!

Most long-range techniques did not go anywhere near as far as Rui suspected Project Sniper could, largely due to range and accuracy constraints, but Rui had ways of bypassing both. As long as everything went according to plan, of course.

Chapter 569: Attempt

Although there were always more ways he could increase the accuracy of the technique, he ultimately gave up on it. The problem was that the principle of diminishing returns made it simply not worth the investment. He would have to spend an incredible amount of effort in overcoming many obstacles for benefits that were simply too insignificant to justify the efforts.

In fact, the second phase of the ODA System was almost verging over the limit, however, it was because Rui was quite keen on extending his maximum distance at which his aim was fully accurate well beyond the norm. After all, the first phase of the ODA System would merely give him accuracy of the best marksman.

Of course, this was still a great boon and an incredible development, however, Rui was not satisfied with this alone knowing he could go much further, thus he had resolved himself to push himself further to obtain even more extraordinary results.

If he was not wrong, then it was quite likely that no Martial Squire possessed the long-range accuracy that he did!

Hell, he wouldn't be surprised if this extended even to the Martial Senior Realm, though he didn't dare to have confidence in that possibility.

Time passed as he worked on the Sniper Project, refining the ODA system and field testing the protocols to gain some data. The best way to test whether something was functioning as desired was to simply physically test and gain data that would clearly indicate if it was functioning as desired or not.

Rui spent time in various kinds of environments, testing whether his predictions and extrapolations of atmospheric conditions were accurate to reality or not. Each time he noticed certain deviations, he identified the problem and corrected it, trying it over and over until the result was satisfactory.

In the meantime, Project Bounce had made a lot of progress as well.

Some great distance away from the Quarrier Orphanage in an uninhabited part of the Mantian Region, Squire Casen wound her right arm all the way back, clenching her fist rock hard. A tremendous amount of potential energy had gathered, brimming in her taught muscles.

Standing right before her was Rui, with arms in an extended stance, waiting to intercept the strike.

Casen swung her fist as her upper body twisted. The very atmosphere rippled, and the ground rumbled in shock as the unadulterated might of a Martial Squire crashed into his palm.

Yet Rui was ready.

His eyes narrowed as his palm intercepted the strike, moving with it as it increased its resonance the further it was pushed back, just like a spring. By the time Squire Casen had finished the strike, Rui had already been launched into the air.

The sheer velocity at which Rui had been launched far surpassed the speed of sound as his body cleaved through the air, leaving numerous sonic booms behind.

BOOM!!

In just an instant, he had landed more than a kilometer away from his original position!

"...Holy fuck!" Rui laughed. "That's the tenth one hundred percent elastic collision in a row!"

Ten in a row with different kinds of attacks was definitely a sign that he had mastered it to a satisfactory extent. It would be more productive to move on with the next phase rather than become caught up with trying to refine the first phase even more, the issue with diminishing returns would certainly apply here as well.

"Another round?" Squire Casen asked as she sky-walked to his location.

In the past five months, she had helped Rui perfect and refine the first phase extensively and had grown accustomed to their training sessions.

"Yes, though you'll have to scale down your strikes back to how elementary they were when we first began, you can't go all out like you have been doing recently. I'm going to be trying something new."

Her eyebrows rose in surprise. It seemed that Rui was finally satisfied with what he had been trying to accomplish for quite some time now. She was curious about what he would be trying to do next. Rui still hadn't told her about the point of the technique, or what he was trying to accomplish at the end of the day. She had her own guesses, of course.

Her biggest suspicion was that Rui was trying to create an escape technique that was fueled by his opponent's power. Perhaps the point of the technique was that it allowed you instantly get away right in the middle of combat.

In which case Rui will have already mastered that technique, but he evidently hadn't thus she could only conclude that her suspicions were incomplete or straight up wrong.

"Alright," Rui took his stance. "Let's go, keep it nice and easy. We can increase the difficulty as time passes."

"Ok..."

She didn't even wind her attack back, she intended to begin with a jab.

Rui on the other hand, increased his concentration to the max. He was going to be trying something new that he hadn't developed the muscle memory for, after all. His conscious mind needed to pull all the weight.

She threw a solid jab at him.

Rui tried not only converting the power to kinetic energy, but this time also tried directing it downwards into the Earth.

POW

THUD!

He failed as he instead was sent tumbling across the ground in a spectacular failure.

"Tsk." He tutted as he dusted himself.

He didn't experience much pain at all thanks to the Adamant Reforging conditioning training that made his skin and flesh quite resilient.

He was trying to test out one of the possible solutions to accomplishing phase two of the Bounce Project, which was getting rid of the inherited kinetic energy. He had tried directing it to the ground in an inelastic collision where all of it would get converted into damage into the ground, but his timing was terrible, and he mostly lost control of the kinetic energy.

Of course, he didn't expect to succeed on the first try in the first place.

Chapter 570: Epiphany

He planned to see how viable grounding the kinetic energy that he absorbed from his opponent's attack to get rid of it, the same way one did electricity, was. However, his initial failure wasn't an indication that the option was not viable. He just messed up the execution of the plan.

"Again."

Once again, she threw a solid jab at him. This time, he managed to absorb and channel more of it downwards than before.

SKRRRRR...

He skidded heavily, and deeply into the ground. By the time he stopped, he was a hundred meters away and waist-deep into the ground.

"That was better." Rui's eyes glinted with interest. "However, there might a problem I hadn't foreseen."

When he tried to direct his kinetic energy downwards, he was essentially trying to make himself move downwards instead of flying away like he normally did. He hoped that by directing the inherited momentum and kinetic energy down, he could dispel it into the land without any issue.

However, he now realizes that there were likely issues with that plan as well. When he directed his inherited momentum and kinetic energy downwards, it meant that his body was moving fast down, which meant that he was essentially crashing into the ground.

('That's why my body dug in so deeply.') Rui frowned as he looked at how below the surface he had dug into as he skidded across the ground.

Furthermore, this was just with partial success, if he did succeed in diverting all of his momentum down, how deep would he go?

('Shit.') Rui felt a pang of anxiety. ('This issue isn't light, it might make the project unviable if I don't find a solution.')

He spent most of the rest of the session trying to divert one hundred percent of the inherited energy downwards, yet when he did succeed, he was quite displeased.

"Are you okay?" Squire Casen asked as she gazed down the deep hole that Rui had created and pushed himself down.

The hole extended down more than a hundred meters. Yet Rui easily sky-walked out of it without any issue.

"Just fine." Rui sighed. "Let's take a break."

She nodded. "What exactly is it that you're trying to achieve with all of this?"

This was the first time she had asked so straightforwardly. They had grown more familiar with each other over five months. She felt comfortable asking a direct question.

"I'm trying to efficiently pass on my momentum to my surroundings without getting hurt." He turned towards the deep hole he made. "And without that happening."

She threw a confused look at him.

"It's like when you strike, say, a rock," Rui explained. "Your fist inevitably digs in, right?"

She nodded.

"That's what's happening here, I'm digging into the ground because I'm effectively striking it with my body," Rui explained, before sighing.

"So you're looking for a way to strike the ground without digging into it, while still passing the energy on to the ground?" She wondered. "If there's no difference between you striking the ground with a body or a fist, then doesn't that make it very similar to a striking technique?"

"Sort of." Rui shrugged half-heartedly. "I want to strike without causing surface damage like digging in, it's a shame that it seems impossi-")

Rui suddenly froze as his eyes widened.

Striking without causing surface-level damage?

Didn't he have a technique just like that?

('What if I use Reverberating Lance to dispel all the energy to the ground?') Rui grew excited. ('This way I can permeate the energy deeper into the ground without causing myself to dig into it!')

Reverberating Lance used vibration to permeate the damage of the impact of a collision deeper into the target, past the surface. This principle was the same principle that was used in modern medicine back on Earth to deal with kidney stones.

His current issue was that he was causing too much damage to the ground, the surface of the land when he tried to impact against it with his body to pass on energy.

What if instead of straightforwardly directing his inherited kinetic energy to the ground with an impact, he used the Reverberating Lance technique to permeate the impact beyond the surface? If the energy was permeated deeper into the land through vibrations rather than through the surface, then Rui could theoretically avoid digging deeper into the ground!

Just like how the Reverberating Lance allowed Rui to hurt his opponent on the inside without necessarily damaging the outside, he could pass on the inherited kinetic energy of Project Bounce deeper into the land without necessarily digging through the surface as he did before!

He grew giddy with excitement as he stood up abruptly, startling Squire Casen, who looked at him strangely.

"Alright, break's over, we need to get back to practice right now."

It had only been fifteen seconds since the break began, yet she obliged, she was being paid, after all. She was also curious about what Rui wanted to try since it was quite evident that he had just gotten a new idea.

"Alright, same as before, no changes, okay?"

She nodded, before throwing an identical straight right jab. Rui intercepted, carefully absorbing the energy of the attack as it automatically converted into harmless kinetic energy, he strained himself as he pushed down, crouching and bracing for the impact.

RUMBLE

The ground shook as Rui immediately applied Reverberating Lance downwards to its absolute maximum. The shaking continued for a moment, before subsiding.

"...This is great!" Rui exclaimed.

He had only gone down knee-deep, standing in the same spot. When he did the same thing prior, he had gone a hundred meters deep. The difference made by the Reverberating Lance was tremendous, getting

rid of almost all of the piercing and digging through the ground. However, considering that this was his very first attempt at the technique, it was very promising!

"This is the solution!" Rui exclaimed. "This has to be it."

He intended to grind it out until Project Bounce was effectively a complete success!