

Martial Unity 61

Chapter 61: Epiphany

"It is unhealthy to spend this much time working, sir." A nurse chided the patient laying on the bed, only to receive a careless nod. She sighed at the sickly man with exasperation. His condition was poor, one need only glance at the various monitoring devices, tubes and needles attached to his body. Yet, despite his dismal condition, he was relentless with his work.

He stared at the laptop before him with great intensity, scrolling and typing occasionally. His expression grew more and more macabre and anxious every passing second.

Suddenly, his phone beeped with a message, drawing his attention.

[John, it's not working.] It read.

John scowled at that message, closing his phone and ignoring it, before receiving another message.

[I'm sorry but we've tried everything dude.]

John snorted at his colleague's pessimism.

[You do realize I can see that you've read my texts right? Stop ignoring me.]

...

[There's only little under the month before the deadline, our results aren't good enough and inevitably those funds won't be coming through without results.]

...

[Listen man, I'm sure Combat Sports Research will cancel the contract entirely.]

John's scowled intensified, but he had to admit there was truth to those words. He closed his phone and ignored the beeps, sighing melancholically.

"Is there nothing that can be done?"

He glanced at the data that his colleague had sent him that morning, the results were indeed despairing.

It wasn't pleasant to see a research project he'd been working on for nearly ten years to meet its demise.

He scrolled down to the report and summary that his colleagues had written almost fearfully, before braving himself to read it.

[The goal of this study was to verify the viability of the Project Water and the Variable Objective Inverse Deduction algorithm, VOID algorithm, as an applicable combat system. The prevailing hypothesis was that the VOID algorithm was too data intensive for a human to be able to learn and apply to achieve higher rates of success within a UFC setting. We set out to confirm or deny this hypothesis by gathering empirical data on the rate of growth of combat prowess as measured by the rate of growth of the mean number of victories(X) of a given normal distribution of 100 matches under UFC rules. We controlled for all metabolic and physical variables and have created a model for the probability of success of the application of the VOID algorithm in a UFC setting, after a three-year-period of data gathering, we concluded the study, compiled and processed the datasets, and have arrived at a conclusion.

The data is clear. The VOID algorithm is not a viable combat fighting style. We observed that the rate of growth in combat prowess in training with the VOID algorithm is inferior to the rate of growth in the average registered MMA gym, the existing data in the databank of the Combat Sports Research co. Further verifies our results for all parameters under all settings.

We can safely conclude that Project Water and the VOID algorithm are failures.]

He already knew what it would say before he even read it, but reading was excruciatingly painful. He felt his heart rip to shreds as his colleagues brutally described why his dreams had failed.

He shut the laptop down, unable to bear it any further. The stress and the despair he felt was triggering his asthma. He gasped for air as he looked at the picture of his idol; Bruce Lee that he had on the cupboard beside his table.

"I'm sorry... I guess... I couldn't Be Water after all." He murmured softly.

Project Water was his dream project of creating a systemized fighting style that embodied Bruce Lee's martial philosophy. He'd wanted to create a systematic and generalized fighting style that could adapt to any other fighting style. This was Project Water. This was his dream.

A few years ago, he had even made huge progress and significant breakthroughs. One of them was the VOID algorithm.

Variable Objective Inverse Deduction algorithm, or VOID algorithm for short. The VOID algorithm was a systemized approach through which a fighter could completely adapt to any fighting style and defeat it every time, in theory.

The algorithm had gone through various iterations and stages. The earliest application was simply having fighters learn to analyze balance and range to partially predict his opponent's intentions and moves ahead of time, and then choose a course of action that was best suited to countering said moves.

This was VOID mark I. A prototype intended to be proof of the concept. The initial algorithm was a success and was integrated into the UFC and MMA rather quickly. John Falken had gained a vast amount of prestige thanks to this groundbreaking breakthrough.

Still, it was not perfect, there were many, many holes and competitors eventually came up with tactics that could exploit its shortcomings to counter it.

Yet, the sheer success of the initial iteration and its high viability that allowed top MMA and UFC fighters to apply it was what gave John the courage and confidence to dedicate the rest of his life to creating a complete VOID algorithm that could viably be used by fighters.

The following iterations of the VOID algorithm became more and more sophisticated, accounting for more and more variables and parameters each time.

Mark II accounted for breathing.

Mark III accounted for line of sight

Mark IV accounted for and muscle twitches.

By Mark V the algorithm had become extremely complicated and sophisticated. It even accounted for physiological and movement patterns. It employed heavy pattern recognitions that allowed the VOID algorithm to recognize deep and multi-layered patterns to be able to predict the successive course of actions of the opponent.

The research was funding-intensive, but thankfully his initial success allowed him to sign a funding contract with the Combat Sports Research co. A world-renowned UFC and research and data analytics firm.

Thanks to this rich supply of funds, the research team of Project Water managed to successfully create a finalized version of the VOID algorithm that truly embodied Bruce Lee's martial philosophy.

There was only one final stage left; viability. The end goal was to allow humans to fight and win with this style.

Meaning humans would need to learn the VOID algorithm and apply it in a UFC setting.

This was what killed the project in the end.

The report he'd just read before basically confirmed that his project was doomed. It was not powerful for ordinary humans with their ordinary cognitive capacity to be able to master and apply this algorithm. The human mind was not powerful enough.

John never gave up on the Project, using every ounce his own personal wealth to sustain the Project until he died two years later due to his health condition.

Rui woke up with a jerk, gasping for air wildly.

He looked around confused, before remembering where he was.

('Sigh... To think I'd dream that memory.')

It was his second least favourite dream, after the dream of the day he was diagnosed with asthma.

Thinking back to the ambitions of his previous life made his heart ache. He also felt complicated, he was reborn in a world without the powerful information processing technology that existed back on Earth, furthermore he didn't have access to the sea of data his team had collected.

This meant researching the VOID algorithm the scientific way he did was impossible. Furthermore, he had already developed a new ambition.

The sight of the Martial Squire destroying a tree trunk with a single strike had etched itself deep in his heart. He was willing to sacrifice almost anything to becoming a Martial Artist and walking down his Martial Path and forging his Martial Art.

But it didn't feel good living with the memories of the failure of his past life.

"What can I do though?" he pessimistically muttered. "it's not like I can be both a scientist and a Martial Artist in this world. It's not like I can somehow focus my life on developing the VOID algorithm and developing my own Martial Ar-!!!"

His eyes flew wide open in shock as a thundering epiphany struck him. In his mind he had always separated research and Martial Art in two far away separate categories. This was the common sense on Earth, after all, it was impossible for a human on Earth to dedicate his life to combat sports and research at the same time.

"I cannot do both of those separately... But what if they were one and the same?" He murmured with wide-eyed shocked expression.

What if his research and Martial Art were the same?

What if the dream of his past life and the dream of his current life were the same?

What if... his Martial Path was Project Water?

Rui's heart shook as he began breathing heavy. The answer was so simple, but the strong divide between research and combat sports that his previous life had created, prevented him from realizing that they could be one and the same.

What was impossible on Earth may not be so on Gaea!

Rui glanced at his palms, before closing his eyes.

"It fits." He realized.

The sensations of certainty matched those that his instructors had told him about!

"This... is my Martial Path."

Chapter 62: Congratulations

Over the next few days. An unheard-of phenomenon occurred. The familiar sight of Rui Quarrier spending almost every ounce of his time training was nowhere to be seen.

The instructors and the other Explorer students had all grown used to seeing Rui training somewhere or the other. Thus, when he didn't show up for almost forty-eight hours, they grew curious. What could

possibly cause this training junkie of an Explorer to ditch training? It's not that he had never taken breaks, but never two days straight.

"He's just been sitting around with an intense expression, super absorbed into his thoughts, but he seems fine." Cara, his roommate, told them.

The instructors sighed in relief; they had grown worried that his insane training schedule in the past five months since he joined the Academy had finally taken its toll. Of course, this possibility still existed, but at the very least there was no serious affliction.

Explorers possessed wide latitude in their schedule, so he could not be officially mandated or reprimanded, but two-day breaks were not good signs. Usually, this was a classic tell-tale sign that students were losing motivation.

Just as the Academy instructors were wondering how to intervene, the problem solved itself. Rui walked out one day.

He walked straight to the Explorer sparring arena with his sparring attire on. The Academy didn't mandate training for Explorers, but it did mandate certainly sparring session against fellow Explorers. Today was one of those days.

The sparring supervisor immediately noticed something off about him when Rui arrived.

Previously, Rui was extremely curious by nature. Part of it came from the explorative mindset and the uncertainty about his Martial Path.

Suddenly, almost all of that was gone.

The head supervisor sharpened his gaze at the sight. As a Martial Apprentice himself, he knew a phenomenon that could explain the change in Rui's aura.

('Is he...?') He wasn't sure, but he suspected Rui had crossed the barrier. Still, the fact that Rui hadn't said anything meant he was either wrong or...

('Or he wants understand how much he's grown by sparring against the people he's sparred against for months.')

Either way, the head supervisor was content not calling Rui out.

"Alright, divide yourselves equally into two lines. We'll begin now." He instructed. The sparring sessions had one half of students serve as defenders and the other half as challengers. The challengers would continuously the defenders until they won and replaced them.

The head supervisor purposely assigned the group that Rui was part of as defenders so that Rui would get to fight continuously.

He watched Rui taking the ring before facing his first challenger.

"Begin!" The referee announced.

the two of them shuffled around a bit, feeling each other out, before his opponent aggressively dashed at Rui.

Rui waited for him stoically.

Bam

Bam

Bam

His opponent threw short jabs that Rui casually blocked. The boy threw a powerful roundhouse kick which Rui avoided by stepping out of range.

FOOM

The boy quickly dashed towards Rui with the Balance Direction. The rush of speed allowed him to land a straight punch with his full weight and momentum behind it.

BAM.

Rui flew back exaggeratedly. Yet he landed on his feet, looking relatively unfazed.

('Damage Mitigation.')

The head supervisor noted.

"What's up? You're passive as fuck today." His opponent poked.

Rui smiled wryly. "Just getting used to this."

The boy tilted his head in confusion.

"But you're right, I should stop playing around."

Those words exerted a faint threat on the boy. It almost reminded him of the Apprentice instructors when they got mad.

DASH

Rui leapt at him with great speed using Balance Direction.

The boy hurriedly tried to intercept Rui with a punch, only to cleanly miss as Rui shifted out of the way.

The boy stepped back, wanting to open up the distance when suddenly, the world turned upside-down.

BAM

Rui had cleanly caught his wrist and converted his momentum into torque to smoothly execute a hip toss, before throwing a punch just one inch away from the boy's face.

"You're too careless when it comes to counterattacks, you should focus on that." Rui calmly advised.

The boy nodded, shocked. He'd fought Rui before, never had he been overwhelmed so easily.

The head supervisor was now certain of his suspicion. No one ever became strong enough to casually bully their peers and equals, merely due to a two-day break. If anything, at their level, such a break would make you a bit rusty and thus weaker.

But Rui had grown far superior to his peers, such that even little effort was enough to dominate the other students. This could only be caused by breakthrough to the Realm of Martial Apprentice. Discovering your Martial Path allowed you to use techniques in a manner that are part of your Martial Art, these are suited to you and thus you apply these techniques better than you would have without a Path. Your net efficiency spiked thanks to the Discovery of your Martial Path.

One after another, students challenged him.

And one after another Rui casually defeated them.

What surprised the head supervisor was that Rui didn't seem to have a set style. His style of combat was fluid, he changed it smoothly. It flowed from form to form taking on the shape that was better suited to handling particular opponents.

"This doesn't make sense." The head supervisor murmured. This was usually the opposite of what happened when one discovered their Martial Path. Usually, students who discovered their Martial Paths stuck rigidly to a style of fighting. Whether this style of fighting was centered around a particular field or a set of techniques or both, this was always happened. Martial Apprentices were those who discovered their Martial Path, and they stuck to it.

Yet Rui here defied that pattern.

Another thing that surprised him was how quickly Rui discovered his Martial Path. It wasn't about his age, in particular. Although fourteen was undoubtedly impressively young, it was not unheard of. Geniuses like Kane had discovered their Martial Path at the age of eleven!

What was rather shocking was that he discovered his Martial Path in two months after beginning the Exploration Stage.

Discovering your Martial path was an elaborate, time-consuming journey in and of itself. It usually took students at least a year of exploration and introspection for them to understand their heart's desire. Yet somehow Rui managed to finish it one-sixth the time.

"How long has this boy been chasing after his Martial Path?" He wondered.

This was the product of two lifetimes of dedicating his life to martial arts and Martial Art, unbeknownst to him.

When the sparring session a few hours later, Rui went straight to the head supervisor to inform him of his breakthrough only to realize that the supervisor was already aware of it.

"How long do you think I've been doing this job, kid?" He chuckled. "I've seen countless kids discovering their Martial Path in my career as a sparring supervisor for the Explorer students. Although your case is quite peculiar in many ways, admittedly."

"So, what now?" Rui asked curiously.

"The breakthrough to Martial Apprentice is verified by head instructors and supervisors, and we fill in the paperwork with some signatures from your end. Once the due process is over, you'll receive instructions and a new guidebook, the same ones that the Apprentices got during the Investiture Ceremony, and you'll be moved to the Apprentice dormitory." He explained. "After that the Martial Squire instructors and supervisors of the Apprentice students will take over."

"I see..." Rui grew absorbed in his thoughts.

"Ah, one last thing."

"Hm?" Rui perked up.

"Congratulations on becoming a Martial Artist. If there's anyone who deserves it, it's you." He smiled.

"Thank you!" Rui smiled back.

Chapter 63: Rematch

"You're a Martial Apprentice already??" Kane gaped in shock.

Rui laughed at his reaction. "That's an exaggerated reaction."

"No way, you just reached the Exploration Stage in two months! Finding your Martial Path is tough and tiring. You need to dedicate your everything to Martial Art for you to have a chance of discovering it. How did you skip all that?"

('Skip?') Rui mused inwardly. ('I did nothing but that for forty years.')

"Maybe I got lucky." Is what Rui actually replied.

Kane scoffed. "There is no such thing as luck when it comes to discovering your Martial Path. You either achieve it or you don't."

Rui shrugged. He had no intention of revealing the truth, Kane would have to settle with having unanswered questions.

"Anyways, I'm happy for you man. I know how much effort and energy you've dedicated and invested in Martial Art." Kane smiled. "Congratulations. You've begun your journey down your Martial Path."

"Thanks for that, and also for the help you've given me." Rui replied.

"Don't worry about it." Kane waved. "Ah, do you wanna spar?"

"Actually, I was about to ask you just that." Rui informed. "I'm curious about how well I stack up against you."

Kane nodded. "You free now?"

"Sure."

Rui hadn't yet transferred to the Apprentice dormitory. He had just finished the paperwork and had proceeded to head straight to Kane.

"My paperwork is not yet submitted." Rui noted. "I wonder if we can still spar in the Apprentice sparring centre."

"It shouldn't be too much of an issue."

When they inquired the Martial Squire instructor in the facility, she acquiesced.

"I've been notified of your breakthrough, Rui Quarrier." She spoke. "Although it isn't official, it's not an issue. You can begin using the Apprentice facilities and resources right away."

"Thank you instructor Kyrie!" Kane exclaimed.

"Thank you, instructor." Rui followed. He recognized her, she was the same instructor the Apprentices fought against the other day.

She nodded, before walking away.

Rui and Kane warmed up a bit before entering the ring.

"Alright, you ready?" Kane asked with a smirk. "I won't use Apprentice level techniques unless I'm forced to, to be fair."

Rui nodded, taking his stance. "Let's begin."

As soon as the supervisors began the spar, Rui dashed against Kane with Balance Direction, hoping to close the distance as much as possible. He knew exactly how slippery Kane was. He threw several jabs once he reached striking distance of Kane. Who cleanly avoided them, before throwing a kick of his own.

To his greatest surprise, Rui cleanly and confidently avoided the kick almost as Kane had even launched it closing the distance. He was caught off-guard.

FOOM

Kane just barely managed to dodge a powerful straight punch from Rui, leaping back a few steps.

He glanced at Rui in surprise.

"How did you do that?" Kane asked, surprised. "Is this your Martial Path?"

Rui smirked. He was merely partially applying the range/balance system of prediction and countering moves. This was the Mark I VOID algorithm.

"Yeah, this is my Martial Path."

Rui dashed at Kane again, determined in getting a clean hit. He used both Balance Direction and Harmonic Breathing to maximize his speed.

Once he reached striking range, he threw a flurry of jabs with Collision Optimization. Kane dodged all of those with remarkable agility. He had grown wary of how Rui casually avoided his strike and almost managed to land a strike on him. This was a bit of a blow to his pride as an evasive maneuverer. He decided to stop holding back, and used multiple Exploration level maneuvering techniques.

Each and every single strike Rui threw missed Kane.

('He's going almost all out asides from the Apprentice level techniques') Rui marveled as he observed Kane. He had even recognized several of those techniques, having run into them as he browsed the Apprentice database.

In addition to Balance Direction, Kane was using Feint Shift and Axis Oscillation. The former was a maneuvering technique that improved the quality of feints using realistic shifts in center of gravity, while the latter was a technique that allowed the user to avoid strikes without being pushed back by shifting the axis of the center of gravity by as little as could be managed to evade the strike while returning to the original position.

These in combination allowed Kane to cleanly avoid every strike while not allowing Rui to push him back and corner him.

BAM

Rui grimaced, Kane had managed to exploit an opening in the position and launched a kick to the gut while evading Rui's strikes

The limitations of the Mark I VOID algorithm were not small, experienced evaders like Kane could overwhelm his style of fighting by sheer proficiency and utility of even Exploration techniques, let alone Apprentice level techniques. Another important thing was that Rui had only known these techniques for two months, he hadn't been using the Mark I algorithm for much longer either. He wasn't used to using either sets of techniques, whereas Kane had been using them for years now. The gap in experience could not be overcome easily. Not even with his potent Martial Path.

However, the nature of the VOID algorithm was to allow the user adapt and evolve. Although Rui was rough and inexperienced. He was still able to improve his timing as he got more and more used to and comfortable against Kane's fighting style.

BAM

FOOM

THWACK

WOOSH

A flurry of attacks and maneuvers peppered the ring, many bystanders grew absorbed by the intense eye-drawing battle. The intensity of the fight had escalated as an hour passed by. Rui's timing, coordination and response time was improving, while Kane grew more and more serious, using every ounce of his speed and skill. Neither side was willing to lose.

Strike

Dodge

Kick

Parry

Dodge

For a period of time, it was difficult for onlookers to understand who had the upper hand. Kane's biggest advantages were his superior speed, agility and maneuvering. Yet, for some strange reason, despite possessing inferior speed and mobility; Rui was somehow vaguely keeping up! The onlookers were unable to put their fingers on it. Even the Martial Squire, Kyrie, frowned at the sight. The placement and

timing of Rui's movements, the accuracy of his decision and tactical approach were somehow so well chosen to suit the situation that they largely alleviated the advantage Kane inherently possessed.

('Kane's movements are faster... But Rui's movements are... better placed and better timed.')

She focused her eyes on Rui. She could see every time Kane moved, Rui moved almost immediately after Kane moved and moved in manner that correctly dealt with Kane's movements. If Kane began attack, Rui would begin to dodge almost immediately after Kane began his attack.

('He's not reacting to the attacks as they come... He's partially predicting them before Kane launches them, allowing him to react earlier.')

She realized.

('But this level of foresight should be impossible in someone who just reached Apprentice level.')

She didn't understand how Rui was able to execute such high-level decision making.

Furthermore, she could see that his tactical course of actions was changing, not in sharp intervals, but almost... smoothly. Every minute he would make slight changes to the manner in which he fought; these changes made his course of actions more suited to handling Kane. She could almost see his fighting style smoothly shaping and flowing to a greater and more suited style of combat to counter Kane.

('Almost like... water.')

The intensity of the fight had peaked. The tension in the air was so taut, one could almost cut it with a knife. The two boys were intensely focused. Every ounce of their mind was consumed into their fight. Their fight had cast a spell on those who beheld it, enrapturing them, they almost wished it would never end,

Yet, all good things came to an end in this cosmos.

BAM

Kane landed a powerful strike against Rui's diaphragm. He had smoothly ducked right under Rui's punch and launched his most powerful attack on the latter's abdomen.

Rui collapsed, gasping for air as his diaphragm froze for a few seconds out of shock, before returning to normal.

Both of them were sweating and panting. Yet the winner was clear.

"Let's... *pant*... call it a day." Rui panted. "As expected, you're still ridiculously strong even without Apprentice level techniques." Rui laughed shakily, still gathering his breath.

Kane shook his head. "Your rate of growth is ridiculous, seriously, you're amazing. I'm gonna be honest with you, I didn't think you could push me this far man." Kane sincerely complimented.

"You didn't use any Apprentice level techniques though." Rui chuckled.

"I swear I came damn near close to. I dunno what you did, but you scared the shit out of me at times."

"Thanks man." Rui valued those words, especially when they came from Kane.

"Your style of fighting shifted a lot from the start to end... Is this related to your Martial Path?" Kane asked with great curiosity.

Rui nodded. "Help me up, I'll tell you all about it on the way back."

Chapter 64: Apprentice intrigues

"Adaptive evolution?" Kane tilted his head in confusion.

"Yeah, my Martial Art adapts and evolves to counter my opponent's Martial Art." Rui explained.

"A Martial Art that adapts to all other Martial Art? That sounds difficult as hell, is that even possible?" Kane asked.

Rui remained silent at that question.

"Possible or not, it is my path. I will traverse it as far as I can."

Kane remained silent at those words. He realized how much resolve it must have taken to fully dedicate himself down a path that may end in a dead-end. No wonder Rui took two days to think about his Martial Path and his Martial Art. It was probably the most important decision in his life, and it wasn't something that could be done lightly.

"Well, good luck."

"Hah, thanks."

They bantered a bit before splitting ways. Rui headed to the administration room to receive a guidebook and his room number and keys.

"Rui Quarrier? One minute." A staff member reached to grab a box. "Here you go."

She rattled off some instructions and information before he left. It was only after he reached his room and sat down to go through the guidebook that he realized how different things worked for Apprentices.

"Damn, we get our own rooms? That's lit." He'd remarked prior as he looked around. It was definitely more comfortable than his previous dormitory room. It wasn't just the lodgings that worked differently. Apprentices trained differently. For starters, the biggest surprise he received as he went through the Apprentice guidebook, was that Apprentice level techniques weren't free!

The foundational techniques of the Foundation stage were the absolute bare basics of basics. To call them techniques was almost an insult. The Exploration Stage had more valuable techniques, but they were still not too significant to the Academy or the Martial Union, apparently.

However, the Apprentice level techniques were different. They actually held value and utility such that a majority required one to amass merits! These techniques were true Martial Art techniques even if they were of the lowest Martial Realm. The Martial Academy, and the Martial Union by extension, was not willing to give them away for free.

The only way an Apprentice could earn merits was make contributions or complete Apprentice level missions. There were mandatory missions to give Apprentices experience anyway. However, the mandatory missions did not yield merits, only by voluntary undertaking and completing missions outside of curricular activity would yield merits that could then be exchanged for techniques. Meaning students had to go out of their comfort zone if they wanted more techniques.

Of course, the Martial Academy wasn't stupid. It realized that brand new Apprentices would not be able to complete Apprentice level missions without Apprentice level techniques. Thus, a set of foundational Apprentice level techniques in all fields were given to Apprentices free of cost.

"These must be the same foundational Apprentice level techniques Kane told me about when we first sparred." Rui recalled.

According to the guidebook, higher-ranked techniques above the foundations would require students to complete missions.

Rui could immediately see the multiple reasons for this system. Besides from Apprentice level techniques being too valuable to give away for free, the Martial Academy could also complete the many Apprentice-level missions that it received on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the end goal of the Martial Academy was to produce Martial Artists that were able to competently complete missions.

Giving the Martial Apprentices of the Academy some real experience and a glimpse of what the career of a Martial Artist was like would ultimately greatly aid in this end goal.

It was a policy that killed multiple birds with a single stone.

"Most of these missions are probably going to be really small-scale matters with low risk." Rui inferred.

The Martial Academy would probably not place students in extremely important or risky missions. This would be counter-productive in the long run. He suspected that the missions would likely be insignificant grunt work type missions.

Furthermore, these missions would probably be the domestic type, as well. They would likely be missions in the Mantian region.

There were several other interesting things that the guidebook went in-depth into, as well.

The Martial Union had developed a system of categorizing Martial Art. There many, many kinds of Martial Art. It was easier to divide Martial Art into categories, this helped in mission assignment. Ensuring missions were completed by Martial Artists who actually possessed the relevant and necessary tools to complete them. A hunting mission would be better suited to be completed by a Martial Artist with a lot of stealth and sensory techniques. An offense mission would be better suited to be completed by Assaulters with an offensive Martial Art. Although it wasn't impossible for Martial Artists of other types of Martial Art to also complete such missions, it wasn't optimal, and ultimately reduced the probability of success.

Thus, the Martial Union had developed a system of categorization for Martial Art;

Type I Martial Art: All-rounder Martial Art fell into this category.

Type II Martial Art: Offense-oriented Martial Art fell into this category.

Type III Martial Art: Defense-oriented Martial Art fell into this category.

Type IV Martial Art: Maneuvering-oriented Martial Art fell into this category.

Type V Martial Art: Supplementary techniques-oriented Martial Art fell into this category.

Type VI Martial Art: Martial Art that were largely centered around a particular physical attribute or parameter like strength, speed, durability, endurance, stamina etc, fell into this category.

Type VII Martial Art: Martial Art that were centered around one or very few particular techniques or sets of techniques or principles or systems fell into this category.

Type VIII Martial Art: Martial Art structured and built for covert operations and missions.

Type IX Martial Art: Martial Art specifically designed for specific environments.

Type X Martial Art: Irregular Martial Art that cannot be grouped into any of the prior groups due to failing to satisfy the conditions to be grouped into them.

('Interesting...') Rui pondered. ('So my Martial Art would probably be categorized as Type I?')

These classifications were decided by the Academy, and later the Martial Union. Which made sense to Rui, after all, it was only useful as long as the system was used accurately by set standards.

He skimmed a few pages ahead, until he reached something unexpected.

"An inter-academy Martial Games?" Rui read with curiosity.

Apparently, the Martial Academy held an annual Martial Art contest at the Apprentice level between all sixteen Academies in the entire Empire. The event held multiple contests for different fields with different structures and systems.

('What an exciting event!')

Rui grew more and more absorbed into the guidebook and the many intrigues that it offered.

Chapter 65: Library

A day had passed since Rui had moved to a different dormitory; the process was smooth since he had very few belongings in the first place. He had quickly tried to familiarize himself with his environment and some of his peers to some degree, it didn't hurt to make some friends who could help him out, like Kane did.

He tightened his sparring attire. It was a two-piece attire, consisting of a light jacket-like top and a pant that were bound together by a belt.

The attire was knitted out of a very light, yet durable and flexible fabric, allowing Martial Apprentices to go all-out and fully exert themselves without having to worry about tearing apart their sparring attire to shreds.

Today would be Rui's first time entering the Apprentice library, he intended to get his hands on foundational Apprentice level techniques.

One of the things the guidebook explained to him was how techniques were classified and categorized. Techniques were categorized in three different ways:

The first system of categorization was by field. Whether a technique is offensive or defensive, or maneuvering oriented or supplementary. This system of categorization was for the sake of convenience and clarity. This was categorization by their function.

The second system of categorization was by Realm pre-requisite. A technique of a certain Realm meant that it could not be learnt by Martial Artists below that Realm. Apprentice level techniques were techniques that only Martial Apprentices and above could use, they could not be mastered by novices. This was because normal human beings did not possess the focused psyche needed to learn Apprentice level techniques, which required a superhuman level of focus and fortitude to learn. Those who had discovered their Martial Path underwent a subconscious psychological shift, their minds were hyper-focused on their Martial Path, allowing them to learn power and difficult Apprentice level techniques. This was categorization by the necessary pre-requisite condition to even begin to learn these techniques.

The third system of categorization was efficiency. This was related to the actual quality of a technique. Techniques were a set of actions that produced a desired physical result. Generally, each technique required physical energy, for the physical movements, and mental energy for executing them accurately and precisely. Techniques with greater efficiency produced greater results for the same amount of

effort. The efficiency of techniques were indicated by grades. Low-grade techniques had low efficiency, mid-grade techniques had medium efficiency, and high-grade techniques had high efficiency.

An Apprentice-level offensive high-grade technique was a technique whose utility was offensive in nature, could only be used by Martial Artists of Apprentice Realm or higher, and whose efficiency was high.

Rui found the categorization to be aptly sophisticated. Back on Earth in his previous life, martial arts techniques did not have such sophistication in their categorization. There many reasons for this, for starters, Martial Artists Realms did not exist. This bluntly cut away the second system of categorization. Another reason was that techniques did not have vastly differing levels of efficiency inherently, their effectivity depended on how they were applied only, as well as a lot of luck.

Although techniques on Earth could be divided by field, there were no meaningful named techniques for defense or maneuvering. Those were simply considered skills that needed practice and experience. The concept of supplementary techniques; techniques that could supplement, aid, or augment a physical attribute or other techniques, did not exist.

This was why martial arts techniques were uncategorized, there was simply no point in doing so.

Rui already knew what kind of techniques he was looking for even before he entered the library.

His first decision was to once again balance the techniques he chose evenly among all the fields. In order to adapt to his opponents properly, he needed a good grasp over not just all fields but also all ranges. He also needed diversity of techniques within each field.

This was a tall task and it would take him a long time before he truly achieved this.

Another decision he made due to this was to choose flexible techniques that could be useful in all situations. His Martial Art was adaptation, it was practically a necessity that at the very least his foundation of techniques needed to be flexible. He was willing to sacrifice efficiency for flexibility. He would rather have a foundation of lower efficiency techniques but with great flexibility and versatility than have a higher efficiency technique but with very low flexibility, something that could only be used in a handful of ways and situations.

('I guess I have my work cut out for me.') Rui thought. He intended to work harder than he ever had in order to build a foundation of Apprentice level techniques. Currently, although he was indeed an Apprentice, his combat prowess had yet to touch that level. Apprentice level techniques were far superior to Exploration level techniques. He remembered the Apprentice level techniques Kane had showed him, they were truly surpassing the bounds of human limits! Kane would have utterly mopped the floor with him had he used Apprentice-level techniques in their spar.

Until he built a foundation of Apprentice level techniques he would feel uncomfortable calling himself an Apprentice.

What kind of an Apprentice couldn't hold a candle against any other Apprentice?

He shook his head, putting aside such thoughts having reached the library.

The moment he walked in; he could already see the Apprentice library was much vaster than the Explorer library. The section dedicated to each field were larger than those of the Explorer library, further each field section had many, many sub-sections.

('As expected of the library dedicated to an actual Martial Art Realm, it's comprehensive and vast.')

He looked around, taking in the sheer size.

('Where do I even begin?') He sighed.

There was just so much. He wasn't sure how to approach all of this in a time-saving manner.

('Thankfully, a decent proportion of the techniques are marked with a price of merits.') Rui sighed.

He could avoid these techniques and head straight to the free techniques.

He grasped the first technique he ran into.

('Alright, let's begin.')

Chapter 66: Apprentice Foundation

The process took Rui longer than he had expected. For one, he couldn't help but browse through a large portion of priced techniques. But for another, the simple variety of techniques was far greater than what he had imagined. They were definitely far greater than anything Earth held.

On Earth offensive techniques were limited to striking and grappling.

Here there were was a wide repository of techniques that inflicted damage outside of these elementary principles.

Force Permeation to target internal organs.

Vitals targeting based techniques.

Vibration based techniques.

Temperature based techniques.

Nerve striking techniques.

Even techniques as ridiculous as poison techniques!

Rui gaped at the sight. He almost wanted to laugh.

"Poison? You can poison people through Martial Art? Hahaha!" He mirthfully exclaimed. He found the whole notion to be simultaneously absurd and yet so fascinating.

Even defensive techniques were far vaster than anything he had conceptualized. Back on Earth, one merely had to practice learning how to guard against strikes and learning how to get hit to minimize the impact.

Here, there were whole systems of principles and mechanisms by which techniques amplified defense.

Higher levels of the Damage Mitigation that used even more potent principles such as impact softening, inelastic recoil and other mechanism beyond just guarding existed. Rui was surprised by how something that used to be relatively straightforward and mundane was immensely various in this world.

The same was true for maneuvering and supplementary fields of Martial Art.

After hours of exploring, Rui finally made a decision in regards to all the techniques he would choose to begin mastering.

He glanced down at the scrolls he had picked. He had picked six of them. The reason he had chosen a total of six different techniques was because four of them were Apprentice level versions of the techniques he had already learnt prior. Harmonic Breathing, Damage Mitigation, Collision Optimization and Balance Direction each had an Apprentice level version to them, however, he expected to master them quickly after going through the techniques and their training sessions. Thus, he had decided to choose an additional four more technique to begin immediately after.

"The Apprentice level versions of these techniques are quite impressive." Rui muttered as he went through them, some even had different names

"The Apprentice level versions of Damage Mitigation and Collision Optimization are Elastic Shift and Vital Pressure. How fitting."

Damage Mitigation and Elastic Shift were techniques that aimed to reduce the impact of strikes by moving with the strikes, this caused the collision to be more elastic in nature, a collision where the opponent's attack power was not converted to damage when the attack struck due to the user moving with the strikes rather than stopping them, was an elastic collision. It was the same as when baseball players caught balls by moving their hands with the ball while catching it to reduce the impact.

Elastic Shift encapsulated the technique's functioning quite well.

Vital Pressure and Collision Optimization-I were techniques that worked by administering greater damage by striking vitals

[Parallel Walk]

This was the technique Kane had showed him when they sparred together the first time Rui had gone to his home.

It was a technique that eliminated the wasteful torque caused by swinging your arms and also rotating your body opposite to the legs, thereby decreasing the energy wasted and increasing maneuvering speed.

This allowed his travelling speed to increase dramatically.

[Acute Edge]

This was a low-grade defensive technique that focused on mitigating damage by making the angle between the surface of the body that contacts the opponent's strike and the opponent's strike to below and acute, turning into a nick and a slip, rather than a full-on collision.

This allowed the user to avoid enduring the brunt of the force by enduring only a portion of the power, by getting hit at an angle.

Rui nodded, satisfied with these choices. These were reasonable balanced and flexible choices and options, which was conducive to Adaptive Evolution.

He intended to grind harder than he ever had. Pushing himself to the limits with potions to master these techniques.

He wanted to join the other Apprentices in completing missions, he knew Kane, Fae and the others had already begun doing so, and for good reason.

He looked around him in the library, there were so many techniques that required merits he could hardly believe it.

('How many missions will it take for me to purchase these techniques?') He wondered solemnly.

The answer couldn't possibly be a small number.

On one hand he was a bit unhappy about the time it would take for him to purchase the techniques. The number of techniques he had now were sorely insufficient for proper adaptive evolution. He needed a vast variety of techniques of all kinds, the more he had, the better he would be able to adapt to all kinds of Martial Art.

On the other hand, he was looking forward to completing missions. This was what it meant to be a Martial Artist! He looked forward to diving into different kinds of missions and understand what it was like to be a Martial Artist, as well as what kind of Martial Artists he wanted to be.

He also needed time and techniques to modify expand the VOID algorithm to be able to account for the Martial Art techniques of this world.

The VOID algorithm was designed to handle the MMA of Earth, it could not be straightforwardly applied to the Martial Art of the Panama continent. The vastness and potency of the techniques were much greater than that of Earth, there were several new parameters and variables that needed to be accounted for by the Algorithm such as the strange principle and mechanisms of these techniques and also the efficiency of techniques. Only after expanding it to include these factors would it perform as well as it did back on Earth.

Furthermore, he still had the final obstacle to overcome. The same obstacle he failed to overcome back on Earth.

BAM

Rui flew back, groaning in pain, just barely managing to stay on his feet.

"Good, your Elastic Shift was well timed this time." Fae told him.

Today was a sparring session between the Apprentices. Rui and Fae had taken it upon themselves to spar with each other.

"It's not easy to nail the timing." Rui muttered.

"It usually takes a lot of experience to completely learn it." Fae reassured. "Actually, it's a bit intimidating you're already at this level of proficiency."

Rui shrugged, before taking his stance. "It's not fast enough, as far as I'm concerned."

Fae took an open-palmed stance as well. "My, what's the hurry?"

"There is a limited amount of time in this world, I don't want to waste an ounce of it." He replied, before taking the initiative to dash at her.

He launched a powerful front kick, throwing all his bodyweight and momentum behind it while using Vital Pressure to inflict more damage. He wouldn't fight like this against Kane, Kane was too agile for something as long-winded and slow as full-body kicks, he would effortlessly dodge it and exploit the opening created by the kick and put Rui down. However, Fae was not as agile or mobile as Kane was, furthermore her defense was solid, he would need to use every ounce of his power.

BAM

Yet she handily guarded with a double arm guard, before pushing aside his leg while launching a powerful palm attack to his abdomen.

Rui just barely managed to evade it with a combination of Parallel Walk and Balance Direction, yet Fae aggressively dashed after him with equally powerful maneuvering techniques, not allowing him to catch a break.

This was yet another difference between Fae and Kane, Kane fought passively and counter-offensively whereas Fae was aggressively offensive.

She quickly caught up to him before launching barrage of palm attacks, that pummeled him across his upper body.

Rui held on for dear life behind his guard as only a combination of his two defensive techniques; Elastic Shift and Acute Edge prevented him from losing consciousness.

But ultimately, they weren't enough.

Fae broke past his guard, stopping a palm attack just an inch away from his face.

"Good fight." She held out an open hand.

"Yeah, good fight." He grasped her hand standing up.

"It's really remarkable how far you've come with these techniques in merely a month and a half, or so." Fae shook her head with a rare hint of surprise flashing her facial features.

"It may be fast compared to others, but my Martial Art has greater needs." Rui shook his head.

"Your Martial Path is strange, usually, people have somewhat of a defined fighting style that is rigid to some degree, the core never changes." She explained, before turning to Rui. "Yet I couldn't sense that with your Martial Art, your combat style did not have an underlying core like every Martial Art normally does, it was constantly changing and strangely had no definition to it. A very odd feeling." She noted, before continuing.

"Even all-rounder Martial Art aren't constantly in flux like yours, being an all-rounder simply means you use all fields equally in combat, yet even that was constantly changing for you."

"That is related to the nature of my Martial Art." Rui hinted, he hadn't told her what his Martial Path was, just yet. He didn't feel the confidence and security to reveal to people what it was just yet, not until he developed it more and gained more proof of its viability as a Martial Art.

Fae nodded without pushing any deeper, A Martial Artist's Martial Art was extremely personal, it wasn't appropriate to push them to open about it.

"You've gotten even stronger." Rui sighed, recalling her fight against the Martial Squire.

She shrugged. "Everyone has, we're all working hard to get stronger."

Rui nodded. "But with how strong you are, you must be close to reaching Martial Squire, no?"

"I'm not sure, unfortunately. I haven't been told about the condition to become a Martial Squire by the Academy or my family yet."

Rui frowned, Kane said something similar too. Both of them were family of Martial Sages. Their families obviously knew exactly what it took to become a Martial Artist. So why were they and the Academy so adamant on not telling the Apprentices about the realms above them?

"Indeed, it is strange." She remarked, noticing his confusion. "But I have a lot of faith in my grandmother, I do not believe she would withhold such information unless it was truly to my interests that I do not learn it right now."

"Hmmm..." It was hard not to trust the judgement of a Martial Sage, not just one, but two of them, on all Martial matters. Especially when he was no more than a meagre Apprentice fledgling who had just discovered his Martial Path.

Martial Sages were among the greatest authorities on Martial Art, barring Martial Transcendents. It was an absurd notion they would be wrong about the matters of the lower Martial Realms.

He shrugged. He would find out one day, as long as he grew enough and expanded his Martial Art enough. As long as he did this, he had no doubt whatsoever that he would become a mighty Martial Squire!

Still, he was quite some ways away from that stage. He had only just discovered his Martial Path and had begun the Expansion Stage that all Martial Apprentices underwent in the Martial Academy.

He clenched his fists when he thought about the sheer number of techniques needed to achieve the versatility that was generally needed for the VOID algorithm.

In order to be able to adapt to any Martial Art, you had to be able to partially replicate every Martial Art, because every Martial Art was countered by some other Martial Art. Although the truth was a bit more complex and nuanced, the point still remained. The more building tools and ingredients he had access to, the easier and better he would be able to build a Martial Art that were adapted to counter his opponent's Martial Art.

Chapter 68: Fae vs Kane

The Apprentice sparring session worked the same way the Explorer sparring sessions did. Meaning half the Apprentices were challengers while the remaining half were defenders. Challengers constantly challenged defenders to spars until they won, then they would switch roles, the challenger would become a defender and the defender would become a challenger.

Rui lost to Fae, so he quickly got off the stage for the next challenger.

"You got your ass kicked." Kane chuckled lightly, as he entered the ring. "Don't worry, I'll avenge you."

"You're going up against her next?" Rui asked, surprised.

"Yep."

"I see, well, good luck."

Rui was quite exhausted. He had initially intended to consume a rejuvenation potion before resuming the challenger process. But a fight between Kane and Fae was worth postponing that.

He watched closely as Kane entered the stage.

"My, so you're my next challenger?" Fae smirked. "I was considering consuming a potion, but if it's just little old you, then there shouldn't be much of a problem." She mocked.

"Don't worry, by the time I'm done with you, you'll be needing more than a single measly little rejuvenation to get back on your feet." He retorted.

They both exchanged no more words, quickly taking their stances. Kane's stance was low, crouched, this allowed him to dash and reach top speed quicker. His hands were open and sharp, his arms were aligned with his legs.

('That stance allows him to use Parallel Walk without any delay.') Rui keenly observed. Parallel Walk was a maneuvering technique that relied on arms and upper body swinging inline, rather opposite to the legs. Keeping his arms and legs inline meant, he would not have to waste any time when the match began, and could immediately moving.

('He intends to close the distance quickly.') Rui realized.

On the other hand, Fae adopted a rather unusual stance. Her left leg was forward, while her right leg was bit further behind, both slightly crouched. Her left arm was straight, pointing at Kane, with her open palm facing him. Her right palm was upside down, tucked at her waist like a coiled serpent waiting to lash out.

Rui could feel the tension escalating as both fighters grew more and more focused on their opponent.

"Begin!" The supervisor declared, beginning the match.

Kane moved blurringly fast, his figure even briefly disappeared as Rui's eyes could barely keep up with the abrupt acceleration to Kane's superhuman top speed.

In an instant Fae and Kane were face-to-face.

Kane launched a blindingly-fast punch, while Fae launched a fearsome palm.

Just as the strikes were about to launch, Kane suddenly cancelled his attack and avoided Fae's Palm, leaping back.

This drew some murmurs from onlookers. "Looks like Fae is stronger."

Rui shook his head. ('No, he made the right choice.')

If Kane had continued the mutual attack, he definitely would have suffered more damage. As far as power-per-strike went, Fae was almost unmatched in their batch of Apprentices. On the other hand, Kane's striking power was not quite as good.

Meaning if they exchanged blows head-on, Kane would undoubtedly take much more damage.

Kane realized this in the last moment and avoided this undesirable outcome.

('You're an evasive maneuverer Kane, you need to exploit that to the absolute maximum if want to win this fight.') Rui mused.

Kane dashed at Fae, dodging her attacks narrowly, before leaping back.

He dashed from another angle, dodged her counter and leapt back.

He dashed from yet another angle, and dodged her counter, leaping back.

He dashed, dodged, and leapt back.

Again.

And again.

And again.

He began repeating this course of action over and over.

"Tsk, he's just buzzing around her like a fly. Is he really the son of the legendary Devil?" A Martial Apprentice mocked, disregarding Kane's status.

His fighting drew scorn from the onlookers, all except one.

Rui eyed those around him, before tutting. ('Tsk, clueless fools.')

He turned back to the fight with a knowing smile. Although to the casual layman, it may have looked like Kane was too scared to engage Fae, but Rui had realized what Kane was going for a long time ago.

He nodded. ('It's a rough plan, not the best course of action but it has a solid chance of working.')

Kane knew that getting into a frontal exchange of blows with Fae would be bad for him, that was where she was at her strongest. Furthermore, unlike when he fought Rui, Kane couldn't simply try to squirm past narrow openings to launch strikes on Fae.

Fae's body was tough, thanks to body conditioning. She could simply ignore his attack and allow it to hit her. Rather than blocking or dodging, she would simply strike him.

Although Kane was much faster than her, it was impossible for him to cross one meter, land a strike and then jump out of range, all before Fae could launch even a single strike. He would be need to be exponentially faster than her to achieve such a feat. And Fae was not slow by means.

Thus, Kane decided to try something else.

('He intends to force Fae to launch her formidable palm strikes over and over until her stamina is drained. Although Parallel Walk, Balance Direction and his other maneuvering techniques still consume less energy than Fae's immense explosive power.') Rui analyzed.

The power of Fae's palm attacks was extremely high. Not only did she regularly use highly power consuming techniques like Outer Convergence, which she used against him in the Entrance Exam, she used several other medium-high-grade techniques that allowed her to exert massive amounts of energy with every strike.

The power consumption was extremely high. Fae's Martial Art was an offensive Martial Art that was meant to pummel down her opponents quickly, it was not suited in these kinds of extended battles. She would simply fizz out of energy.

('Which is exactly what is slowly happening.') Rui noted the profuse sweat on Fae's face.

Her palm strikes were draining her energy, especially because they all missed Kane cleanly. Kane was still extraordinarily fast, she had no hope of tagging him with ordinary attacks.

('At this rate, you'll win this Kane!') Rui cheered him on.

Chapter 69: Shocking Conclusion

WHOOSH

Kane avoided a palm attack, back-flipping out of the way cleanly. He quickly opened the distance before studying Fae immediately.

"Huff... Huff..." She panted, her sparring attire drenched in sweat.

('Heh, this is actually working. Spending time with that Martial nerd has done me good, I don't know if I would've thought of this had I not met him.') Kane mirthfully mused.

Sparring and spending time with Rui had taught Kane the importance of tactics and strategy. His personal tutors had always hammered the importance of tactics and strategy, but he had always thought no tactic could overcome a skill or power gap. He had always beaten those weaker than him, and had always lost to those stronger than him. He wasn't averse to tactics, but he believed techniques and physical prowess mattered far, far more.

It was only after he had met Rui had he learn how wrong he was. Rui's mind was beyond unfathomable to him. Every time he sparred with Rui, it became more and more difficult to beat him. Even though Rui's techniques or body hadn't grown stronger, every time they sparred, Kane realized he needed to spend more and more effort to beat Rui, every single time.

This was part of that 'adaptive evolution' thing Rui told him about; his Martial Path. Rui said it was essentially 'choosing the right move at the right time'. To choose the correct specific course of actions and tactics that best dealt with his opponent.

Mastering powerful techniques was not nearly enough, tactically using these techniques correctly across the entire battle was just as important!

DASH

Kane closed the distance instantly, forcing Fae to launch a palm strike, which he cleanly swerved out of the way of simultaneously launching a spinning kick, Fae was forced yet again to launch a palm attack which Kane quickly dodged cleanly yet again.

She was almost gasping for air at this point, her stance was slack with fatigue.

('Close.') Kane huffed. This strategy was not easy for him. Although this strategy exhausted Fae, it also exhausted him, just to a lesser degree. Even he could not keep up such a power-consuming tactical approach for too long.

('It's time.')

Kane exhaled, before taking a new stance. He put both hands on the ground in front of him and stretched out his right leg back, firmly planting it on the ground. He bent his left leg, tucking it under his chest.

It was an odd stance that resembled the starting crouched position of hundred-meters sprinters back on Earth.

('This is the final clash.') Rui quickly realized. ('This will decide the outcome of the fight.')

Fae's defense had grown progressively sloppier and sloppier, her fatigue had accumulated too much. Not only had Kane drained her stamina almost entirely. She had already spent a decent portion of her stamina even before Kane challenged her.

('These two are basically at the same level, even a small gap in stamina will be decisive.') Rui noted.

Suddenly, the weight of the atmosphere escalated.

"Fuuuu..." Kane exhaled deeply. Ridding every single superfluous thought from his mind. He sharpened his focus.

Fae realized what was happening, she mustered as much energy as she could, preparing herself for one final clash.

Kane's body grew taught with power, vibrating with sheer amount of potential energy he had gathered.

For a moment the entire facility was dead silent.

Every Apprentice, Squire and staff member were frozen silence. Enraptured. Spellbound.

Suddenly.

"Now." Rui whispered.

BOOM

Kane disappeared.

One moment, there he was.

The next moment, gone.

What was once left in his place was a sonic boom!

Kane had moved so abysmally fast that he had surpassed the speed of sound!

What happened next surpassed Rui's cognition.

His mind was simply not fast enough to keep up.

Kane had simple disappeared from Rui's eyes, and reappeared behind Fae!

"Argh!" Kane fell to down to one knee, clutching his right shoulder in pain.

('She landed a palm strike on him?! In the middle of that blitz?')

"You're a monster alright." Kane laughed, eying Fae behind him.

('Damn! Is Fae gonna win?') Rui cursed.

THUD

Rui looked up in shock.

One moment Fae was standing tall and strong, yet, the very next moment...

"She collapsed..." Rui murmured, shocked.

Fae had fallen unconscious! Her figure had crumpled to the ground like a puppet whose strings were cut.

The entire facility froze at that sight. Rui sharpened his eyes, taking a closer look at her.

('He landed a knockout blow to her chin!') He quickly realized, looking at the deep bruise below her mouth.

"You're a monster alright..." Kane stood up, smirking. "...But I won."

"W-Winner; Kane Arrancar." The supervisor declared, after breaking out of his enraptured stupor.

A paramedic team came along and placed Fae onto a stretcher, carting her away.

Rui was still stunned. He glanced at Kane who smirked at him with a thumbs-up. Rui had to admit, he was truly impressed by Kane's fight. He didn't just blindly jump in and rely purely on speed, agility and maneuvering to attack dodge and attack her. He pulled off a clever strategy that allowed him to win in those circumstances. In the past few months, Kane had grown more and more flexible, with his fighting style, fighting smarter and cleverer rather than just banking heavily on his raw speed. Rui approved, of course, he also couldn't help but feel he was responsible for this change.

Still, what truly shocked him was the final clash. Kane displayed a level of speed Rui had never seen before. The sheer speed at which he moved was incredible! Rui hadn't known it was physically possible for a human to move that fast. He was also quite impressed that Fae had managed to throw in a palm attack in such a brief period. Although she was moving slower than Kane, who moved his entire body across the distance between them in the time she launched a palm strike, it was still impressive given her condition as well as the fact that speed wasn't her forte.

Both of them performed incredibly, as far as Rui was concerned.

Chapter 70: Resumption

Rui quickly consumed a rejuvenation potion himself. He had wasted enough time watching Kane's match against Fae, he needed to engage in sparring with others himself. Watching Kane's sparring match against Fae had inspired him, he felt strongly motivated to reach that level of power himself as soon as possible.

('Both Fae and Kane are way ahead of me in so far as the expansion and development of their Martial Art goes.') Rui reminded himself.

Unlike him, who had only just barely learnt six Apprentice-level techniques, they had learnt enough number of techniques for their Martial Art to be considered actual Martial Art.

On the other hand, he was still quite far away from this level. He glanced at the nearest ring, looking for a defender to challenge.

('Milliana, huh?') Rui recalled meeting her several times. She was a stamina-oriented Martial Artist, fighting her was truly a test of perseverance. Stamina-oriented Martial Arts were a type VI Martial Art; A Martial Art centered around a physical attribute or parameter.

He immediately chose to challenge her.

There were several reasons for his decision. Firstly, Stamina-oriented Martial Arts did not possess any overwhelming advantage over other Martial Arts besides from the longevity it granted the Martial Artist. Meaning it was quite likely that Milliana did not possess any overwhelming advantage over her in regards to any physical attribute or parameter like strength, speed, or durability, she likely did not

possess any overwhelming advantage in so far as Martial Art techniques went; Be it offensive, defensive or maneuvering.

What this ultimately meant that before Rui tired out, there was a high chance they would be roughly equal.

Furthermore, he was aware that Milliana's Martial Art was also a Type I Martial Art in addition to being a Type VI Martial Art. She was an all-rounder after she was a stamina-oriented Martial Art. This was a valuable opportunity to Rui, because Rui rarely had a chance to fight a stamina-oriented Martial Artist like Milliana. After Rui became a Martial Artist, he quickly learnt that most Martial Art had strong flavor to them that pushed them away from being well-rounded. Usually most Martial Apprentices had strong affinity to some field or physical attribute, making a vast majority of them be of Type II to Type VII Martial Art.

One reason Rui wanted to find an all-rounder was, of course for the experience, but also because all-rounders were the most challenging to the VOID algorithm.

The reason was simple; all-rounder Martial Art possessed no obvious weakness.

The VOID algorithm worked by adapting to the opponent's fighting style. Naturally, this was easier if the opponent's fighting style had straightforward and obvious shortcomings

Offense-oriented Martial Art generally weren't as good as good at defense. Defense-oriented Martial Art generally lacked strong offense. Grappling Martial Art lacked range, and striking-type Martial Art were not good at full-contact combat or grappling etc. These usually couldn't be considered a great weakness, but they were, without a doubt, shortcomings and areas of higher vulnerability.

The VOID algorithm loved these openings and shortcomings, it made the adaptive evolutionary process much more straightforward and simpler.

However, all-rounders lacked such obvious and straightforward shortcomings, thus the adaptive evolutionary process of the VOID algorithm for such styles was much more complex and long-winded.

This was what Rui wanted. He needed to push his Martial Art to the limit in order to improve it. The VOID algorithm was a system by which one could develop a style of fighting statistically most suited to obtain victory. However, the framework was based on the martial arts of Earth. Martial Art in Gaea was much more convoluted and far more parameters and variables. It was not equipped to deal with the fantastical and supernatural Martial Art techniques of Gaea.

This was one of the two biggest hurdles of developing his Martial Art and traversing his Martial Path. He could not perform the rigorous empirical research he did in his previous life, so there really was only way to completely expand the VOID algorithm to completely suit Gaea as far as Rui could see;

Sheer, raw experience!

('How much experience will it take for me to complete the upgradation of the VOID algorithm?') Rui wondered as he got onto the ring.

He looked up at Milliana, who nodded in response, she was a girl of very few words, she let her Martial Art do the talking.

('And boy can it talk.')

"Take your stance." The supervisor instructed.

Milliana balled her fists and brought her arms close to her abdomen in a guarded stance, balancing her weight between both legs equally.

('A conservative but ultimately flexible fighting stance.')

Rui noted. He adopted a similar stance, but one that was more committed to attacking. Left arm and left leg forward, right arm and right leg back. He kept his weight mostly on his left leg, freeing up his right leg, allowing him to launch kicks with it.

In this stance the left arm was able to launch speed jabs in quick succession while the right arm was able to launch powerful blows that could knock a person down if well-landed.

"Begin!" The supervisor declared the match started.

Rui rapidly shuffled over to Milliana, feeling out her movements and responses to his weight shifts.

('She's always moving with the intent of reducing energy consumption.') Rui realized. By constantly maintaining as low an energy consumption possible, she could outlast her opponent.

('Not on my watch.')

POW POW POW

Rui threw a few quick jabs that she promptly blocked with a stiff guard. She threw a pushing kick that served as a check, opening up the distance.

Rui decided to go all out and use Vital Pressure, launching a flurry of strikes to specific points and angles along her joints.

This was one way by which he could apply pressure on her. The continuous damage which eventually weaken her defense. This was the best utility of Vital Pressure.

Suddenly, she abruptly shifted her weight to her left leg.

('A kic-!') Rui barely realized, before;

BAM

Her right foot slammed into his side. Rui mitigated the damage with both Elastic Shift and Acute Edge, having foreseen an attack, but just barely. He quickly followed up with a high kick

WHOOSH

The powerful attack swept through empty air as Milliana crouched to avoid it.

She attempted a takedown from her position, only to narrowly move out of the way of an axe kick from Rui. He had foreseen the possibility and forced her to abandon the attack with a powerful axe-kick. He immediately rushed in after her.

POW POW POW

Launching a flurry of strikes with Vital Pressure, looking for an opening, but he never could find one.

Milliana was incredibly good at maintaining a stalemate. She never tried to make too much progress with her offense, but she never allowed her opponent to make much progress either.

Block

Parry

Dodge

Shift

Check

These were her mantras.

Rui backed away, putting some distance between her. The VOID algorithm worked best when there were even the tiniest openings or shortcomings to exploit. However, when someone turtled up as much as she did, it was hard to exploit any glaring openings, those were mostly created by attacks or some offensive maneuver.

('This can't continue.') Rui established. ('I'll just tire myself out and she'll only begin her offense after I've burnt my primary stamina reserve.')

He needed to find a hole in her stalemating fighting style, but nothing came to mind.

('There has to be some effective approach that can work here.') The problem was, he didn't know what that was. ('Her greatest strength is that her defense pursues minimalistic energy consumption... Not only does it prolong her stamina, but I'm sure it's easy for her to maintain this mentally. She probably doesn't need to think much, since there is usually only one or few ways of movements in any situation to minimize energy-consumpt-!') Rui paused eyes-wide as an epiphany struck his mind.

In any given situation, there were really only a few options that truly minimize energy consumption; the minimum motion needed to block the attack, the minimum motion needed to dodge the attack, the minimum motion needed to parry or redirect the attack.

('Since she always aims to minimize energy consumption... that restricts her options to a few solutions! And if her options are restricted...') Rui directed a measured gaze at her. ('...Then her choices become more predictable, and that is a weakness I can exploit.')

It had taken him a while to realize this because combat sports on Earth didn't really have the concept of "hyper-minimalistic energy consumption". One either fought hard and won, or fought too passively and got knocked out, those were the only two outcomes. Milliana's fighting style would have fallen in the latter back on Earth.

But in Gaea, Martial Art turned what was a losing strategy in his previous world into a formidable fighting style!

He hadn't fully transitioned to from the mindset of his previous life, it was hard to, but he had taken another step in the middle of this match.

('I need to move in a manner that creates predictable minimal-energy counters, and then exploit the tiny brief opening when she's performing the counter to launch a swift but powerful attack.')

"Fuuuu..." Rui exhaled, adopting a new stance. A new wave of determination saturated his figure!