

## **Martial Unity 961**

### Chapter 961: Impedance

In the western port, the many travelers entering and exiting the nation grew surprised as swarms of Martial Artists entered the various wings of the transit port facility, scouring the various travelers. They even began questioning the various travelers, trying to get some eyewitness testimony for where Rui and Kane might have gone in the vast facility.

None of the travelers had any idea that this was an active manhunt for the infamous Voider!

Back in the main branch office of Deacon Industries, things weren't going so well.

"Sir, the Border Patrol Agency has informed us that they cannot abide by your instructions."

"We have received a similar response from the transit security team."

"Transit port management team has also issued their refusal to your commands."

"What?!" Chairman Deacon gritted his teeth.

"They have informed us that your commands have been overruled," His secretary informed him.

"On whose authority?!"

"Guildmaster Bradt, sir," His secretary replied with a grim expression.

"DAMN IT!" He banged his table hard. "I'M GOING TO KILL HIM!"

It meant that Guildmaster Bradt was aware of what was going on and was protecting the Voider.

This lent that much more credence to those two being the real Rui and Kane.

"It's fine, we still have our Martial Artists," Chairman Deacon growled. "Have them search for those two manually. Find them at all costs!"

"Sir," The deputy director interjected. "I've just received a report that their identities were registered at the check-out counter. They've officially exited the nation!"

"Don't let them get away. Have our men scan every carriage that leaves the Shionel Confederation!"

There were arrays of carriages that left the Shionel Confederation, many of them were commercial transport vehicles, while others carried goods and services traveling to other nations. Their targets could have either chosen to leave on foot as Martial Artists often did. Or they could take a commercial transport vehicle.

Chairman Deacon had enough power to stop and search ordinary commercial transport carriages, and he was fully prepared to do just that.

In the meantime, Chairman Deacon couldn't help but grow concerned about the fact that Rui and Kane had shown themselves at all. He knew for a fact that the two of them possessed remarkable stealth, the fact that they showed up at all was a bit suspicious. There were two possibilities, if they truly were not aware that he knew their identities, then he could understand their choices being more logical.

However, if they were aware that he knew their true identities, then this was either a blunder, a diversion, or a trap of some sort.

However, what he didn't understand was why they would need to bother with traps or diversions if they knew that he knew of their identities. Why not just leave the country covertly using their stealth prowess among other things?

He wasn't sure. That's why he was growing more and more convinced of the possibility that the two of them were not entirely aware of the deep shit that they were in. They must have tried to leave the Shionel Confederation peacefully, unaware that he knew who they were. And if not for Guildmaster Bradt's timely intervention, they would have already been in his hands by now.

"Sir..." His director drew his attention with a stunned expression.

"What is it?" Chairman Deacon growled, narrowing his eyes.

"Our Martial Artists arrived at the carriage bay, but..."

"But what?!" Chairman Deacon snarled.

"Almost all of the carriages present in the bay are of the Bradt Distribution Service!"

"DAMN!" He cursed.

The Bradt Distribution Service was one of the few companies that he couldn't bully. However, considering that they hadn't spotted Rui and Kane simply running or sky-walking away, it meant that Rui and Kane were likely occupying one of the carriages that belonged to the Bradt Distribution Service.

"How many carriages are there?" Chairman Deacon gritted his teeth.

"Many thousands, sir," The deputy director grimaced. "And the worst part of it all is that they're all heading towards the Kandrian Empire according to our sources in the transit log department."

"Have all our Martial Squires scan the carriages looking for two individuals," Chairman Deacon refused to give up.

"Sir, it appears that..." The deputy director took a moment to gather his courage. "That all of the carriages are reinforced with anti-espionage esoteric technology. Our Martial Squires report being only able to sense hazes within."

Chairman Deacon felt like he was losing his mind. Such a simple and easy task of apprehending Martial Squires at the transit port had grown more complicated at first because Guildmaster Bradt overruled his

authority and influence. Then the man actively sabotaged his investigation with preparations that made it difficult for his Martial Artists to conduct their investigation and mission.

He couldn't just bust down those carriages when they belonged to Guildmaster Bradt. The man was far too powerful at the moment, arguably more powerful than he had ever been. Having just entered a new guildmaster cycle, he could not afford to give Guildmaster Bradt any excuse to pick an open fight with Chairman Deacon.

"What do we do sir...?" The deputy director asked Chairman Deacon.

"Deploy Senior Verman on a covert mission," Chairman Deacon announced.

"And... what exactly will be the objective of this mission?"

"The annihilation of all of the carriages of Bradt Distribution Services," Chairman Deacon replied with a determined expression.

"Sir," His intelligence deputy director's eyes widened. "That's... treason. If you're caught, it will be the end."

"I am aware of the risks," Chairman Deacon replied with a cold tone. "Equip him with the state-of-the-art anti-sensory technology on his person so that his identity cannot be traced. Of course, Guildmaster Bradt will know who it is, but if he doesn't have proof, then it doesn't mean anything."

"Understood, sir."

Chairman Deacon had made up his mind to not let Rui go even if it meant crossing a line and acting against the nation. He couldn't do anything to Rui at the port where any attempt to destroy all the carriages would not only not be hidden from the country, but the border patrol force would intervene to combat his Martial Senior.

Thousands of carriages took off, leaving the Shionel Confederation behind as they traveled forth toward the Kandrian Empire. They stuck to pre-established paths, picking up on speed as they accelerated further and further.

They traveled much faster than any domestic carriage that frequented the roads of nations and were pulled by powerful domesticated Apprentice-level creatures, powered by esoteric engines, or a combination of both.

How else could relatively quick travel occur between nations that were separated by gigantic distances?

The carriages would reach the Kandrian Empire in just a matter of days.

That was also why Chairman Deacon was a lot more confident with the execution of destroying all the carriages en route due to how far away the carriages would be from the Shionel Confederation.

Soon enough, the day had arrived.

A veiled figure stood high in the sky as he observed the convoy of carriages speeding through the international carriage paths.

One moment he was standing still, the next moment, he dove down toward the convoy of carriages balling his fists as he tensed his body.

Every sentient lifeform in the region quivered at that moment. The very seemed to begin boiling as the sky seemingly darkened.

The surrounding world had changed.

The animals pulling the carriages stopped in their paths as they froze in primal terror. Almost every single sapient being felt was paralyzed in fear and despair.

Almost.

Just before he reached them, ready to launch his attack, a second aura enveloped the entire convoy, soothing their addled hearts within the span of a microsecond. A woman leaped out of one of the carriages of the convoy as her body lit up with glowing red lines streaking across her body, she dashed upwards, racing to clash against the plummeting veiled figure.

BOOM!!!!

A devastatingly titanic shockwave emerged from their collision!

In an instant, the blast wave expanded ten kilometers, threatening to annihilate everything in that radius!

Yet, that was not to be.

She narrowed her eyes as she deftly manipulated the very sky with her Senior-level breathing technique!

The shockwave simply disappeared before it could touch the carriages that she had been tasked with protecting.

The veiled Martial Senior widened his eyes in shock. He recognized her, she was one of the Martial Seniors that was employed by the Bradt Distribution Services.

Patroning a Martial Senior was far more expensive than doing the same for a Martial Squire, only the Cabinet Merchants possessed the ability to patron them, and only the richest cabinet merchants could afford to deploy them on such trivial operations, seemingly.

He hadn't expected there to be a Martial Senior protecting the convoy. This was not what Chairman Deacon had informed him.

('The intelligence may be wrong but...') His eyes narrowed as he grew serious, radiating a skyrocketing sense of peril. ('That isn't enough to stop me.')

What happened next caught him off-guard.

A second Martial Senior appeared out of nowhere.

BOOM!!!

A thundering bolt of lightning crashed into his shoulder, instantly knocking him more than a dozen kilometers away! The sheer speed at which the impact blew him away ignited the very air.

Yet he couldn't feel the pain from being electrocuted as he was overwhelmed with bewilderment.

He recognized both of them.

The burly woman who gave one the impression of an unshakeable mountain was one of the most powerful defensive Martial Seniors of the Shionel Confederation. Her Martial Art, the Landborn Armor Style was a Martial Art that employed the power of muscle defensively at the point of collision to withstand impacts.

The man who had struck him just a moment ago was a powerful close-range striking-oriented whose Thundering Lance style harnessed the power of lightning in its attacks!

Both of them were part of the Bradt Distribution Service. They were both quite prominent in the Shionel Confederation, which was precisely why he was so surprised by their surprise appearance.

('The Thundering Sovereign and the Earthen Empress were both deployed to protect a measly Martial Squire?!') He couldn't believe what he was seeing.

As a Martial Senior, he had never been bought into the hype of the Voider. No matter how strong, smart, or incredible a Martial Squire is, at the end of the day, they were still a Martial Squire. The Voider's disproportionate value and importance were tied to the Shionel Dungeon because it only tolerated Martial Squires. That was the only reason that he momentarily gained more infamy and value

than even Martial Seniors, now that the whole debacle surrounding the Shionel Dungeon had come to an end, and the Voider was fleeing, he was no different from any other Martial Squire weakling.

That was why he couldn't fathom the idea of protecting two Martial Squires, no matter how promising, with two Martial Seniors. The cost-benefit analysis didn't make any sense at the moment, the Voider should have lost all value, or so he thought.

He quickly put aside such thoughts as his mind returned to the battle considering the prospects of the fight momentarily. Fighting a close-range defensive Martial Squire and a close-range offensive Martial Artist as a close-range maneuvering-oriented Martial Artist was definitely not something that he should consider doing rashly.

Frankly, it appeared that neither of them intended to actively pursue him. They stood their ground as they waited for him to make his choice. Each of them was aware of what they had to do, and what the other was considering doing.

('Retreat it is,') He shrugged inwardly, sky-walking away at tremendous speeds. The intelligence that he had been briefed with on the mission was fundamentally wrong and egregiously wrong. The difference between standard protection, and being protected by two Martial Seniors was incredibly large, and he was well within his right to avoid fulfilling the mission.

Ten minutes later, he had already returned back to the Shionel Confederation at lightning speeds, covertly entering the nation through the channels maintained by Chairman Deacon, before heading back to the main branch office of Deacon Industries to report to Chairman Deacon.

Chapter 963: Diverging Path

"WHAT?!"

Chairman Deacon's angry voice reverberated through the main branch office. If Senior Verman didn't know better, he would have thought the man was using a breathing technique.

"TWO MARTIAL SENIORS?!" Chairman Deacon roared with shocked rage. "TWO? TWO!!!"



"Correct," Senior Verman simply replied.

"That..." The deputy director of the intelligence department couldn't help but be shocked. "That definitely proves that sightings we made were the real deal. Guildmaster Bradt would not deploy two Martial Seniors as a prank, those two really were Rui Quarrier and Kane Arrancar, most likely. The hypothesis that they made some deal with Guildmaster Bradt, likely using the colossal revenue made by Esosale Suppliers to purchase the highest level of protection that one could in order to get him safely back to the Kandrian Empire is the most likely possibility at the moment. However, within this theory, they seem to have most likely not realized that we knew of their true identities, otherwise, they would have never left so openly and through the official channels of departure. If not for Guildmaster Bradt's timely interruptions, they would have been caught."

"That fits all the available information" Chairman Deacon murmured. "The presence of the convoy of carriages armed with anti-espionage technology, as well as two Martial Seniors for protection. That fits the cautious nature of the Voider that we have built, but their lack of knowledge on the exposure of their identity to us is likely why they let their guards down."

The two of them grew increasingly, albeit tentatively, certain that the real Rui Quarrier and Kane Arrancar were on one of those carriages. It simply made too much sense.

Chairman Deacon narrowed his eyes as he considered his options.

Letting Rui go and live a peaceful life with the money made from the Shionel Dungeon was not an option. The very thought of that repulsed Chairman Deacon right down to his gonads. He would rather castrate himself than allow for such a thing to happen.

However, accomplishing it was not as straightforward as he expected.

Normally, killing a Martial Squire was easy. With his power, it was no different from squating a fly. However, Rui evidently possessed the power to move powers much greater than himself. Foiling elite Squire-level operatives, and obtaining the protection of two Martial Seniors was far beyond what he would be capable of with his own power.

That was the annoying and troubling part with him.

"Order our Martial Artists and our agents to undertake surveillance missions at the port of entry that the carriages will be entering, I want eyes everywhere. I want to detailed descriptions of everybody exiting the carriages. Deploy a Martial Senior to track the carriages and make sure that there isn't any opportunity for Rui Quarrier and Kane Arrancar to split away from the convoy before they reach the Kandrian Empire. Make sure nothing goes wrong. Once they exit the carriages and enter the nation, I want the most scrupulously rigorous tracking of his every location every second."

"Yes sir!"

Chairman Deacon had already formulated multiple short, medium, and long-term plans into accomplishing his goal. It was quite likely that Rui Quarrier and Kane Arrancar had now become aware of the exposure of their identities, and the acute threat that he represented towards them.

There were a number of possibilities that could unfold. Putting aside Kane Arrancar who belonged to a family that could easily withstand any attack that Chairman Deacon mounted on the, Rui Quarrier's position was not quite as safe and secure. He had used his wealth to protect himself and his family.

However, that would not last forever. Eventually, that protection would run out, and eventually, there would come a day when he would lower his guard.

('I'll be waiting for that moment,') Chairman Deacon's eyes blazed with fury. ('You should have never come to the Shionel Confederation. I will strangle the life out of you while I watch the light leave your eyes.')

He clenched his fist. ('If a Martial Senior is what it takes to kill you and your family, then I'll do that as well, no matter what it takes. You will die at my hands. That is my oath.')

His expression softened as his eyes fell on a portrait of him and his late son.

The very next moment, it hardened again, growing icier and chillier by the second. ('You're dead!')

"...That's probably what he's thinking right now," Rui remarked as he stared at the ocean, standing beside Kane.

The two of them had boarded a ship that was traveling across the Sojurim Ocean, one of the seven inland oceans of the Panama Continent.

"So the whole point was to misdirect their attention?" Kane asked.

Rui nodded. "Misdirect it towards me instead of my family, and where they think I am instead of where I actually am. If we simply disappeared into thin air, without leaving any inkling of my location, then he would have directed all his attention towards my family. And by having them focus on the Kandrian Empire, the one place where definitely I won't be, it opens up the rest of the world to us Kane."

"It also puts us on a timer," Kane sighed. "This whole thing proved that he's not letting go of his grudge against you. That protection will last ten years... After that..."

"After that, I must protect them on my own," Rui's voice was soft yet firm. "After that, only with my own personal power will I be capable of protecting them. After that, if I'm not strong enough... They simply die."

Rui knew that he changed the course of his very life forever. Gone were the peaceful days at the Quarrier Orphanage where he could spend time with the people he loved. Gone were the days of innocently frolicking around completing commissions from clientele. That was all gone forever. He highly doubted he would ever return to that plain and boring lifestyle.

"It appears that this is my diverging path," Rui pulled his hood down, revealing shining silver hair and eyes where there was once darkness.

#### Chapter 964: Negotiation

"And what exactly do you have in mind, young man?" Guildmaster Bradt raised an eyebrow.

Rui sighed from beneath his full-body suit. "I want to purchase your services and capital to help me get out of this mess."

"I'm aware that you do not require my help to leave the nation, given the stealth prowess of your little friend," Guildmaster Bradt narrowed his eyes. "Thus, I suppose you wish to do more than just run away from the country."

"That's correct," Rui nodded. "His target is me, he may target my family, but at the end of the day, he only wants to get to me physically and psychologically. If I simply disappear, then he would rather spend greater resources on a target whose location he knows, like my family, than to waste resources on searching for someone who has disappeared without a trace."

Guildmaster Bradt understood what Rui was worried about and intended. "You want him to focus his resources on you, and you only. In order for that to happen, he needs to be convinced of the merits of spending his resources chasing after you."

"And that requires letting him believe he knows the country in which I am hiding from him," Rui continued. "If he doesn't know that, then it won't be worth focusing on catching me directly, he'll turn towards trying to abduct my family to blackmail me to submit myself to him. That is an undesirable outcome, thus I need him to believe with certainty that I am hiding in the Kandrian Empire."

"This will also turn away his attention from where you actually will be since you evidently do not intend to actually return to the Kandrian Empire given that you want to fool him into believing it," Guildmaster Bradt stroked his beard. "A little rough around the edges, but a solid plan. Still..."

He turned toward Rui with a sharp gaze. "...What makes you think I'm on your side?"

Rui narrowed his eyes. "As opposed to Chairman Deacon, your greatest enemy, and your biggest threat?"

Guildmaster Bradt snorted. "Do not be conceited, boy. You are not my equal in this negotiation, not anymore. You can no longer enrich my business by giving me half your esoteric ore harvest since the Shionel Dungeon is nigh empty, you have already given me the full map of the Shionel Dungeon as well. Chairman Deacon may be my greatest competitor, but I do not need to help you to suppress him. I have been doing that just fine by myself for nearly the past twenty years."

Rui had to admit that he was right. Rui's negotiation and bargaining power in this negotiation was far lower than it was when he first interacted with Guildmaster Bradt. Guildmaster Bradt, on the other hand, was more powerful than he had ever been in his entire life.

"You seem to have forgotten the bargaining chip that you yourself handed to me five minutes ago," Rui raised the cheque statement that he had received from Guildmaster Bradt. "Seven-point-four billion Shionel gold coins is not a trivial amount."

Shionel gold coins were a heavy currency internationally, and while they weren't a world reserve currency within the local economy of the segment of the continent encompassing the various nations that participated in the Shionel Dungeon raid, they were certainly valued far and wide.

Guildmaster Bradt snorted. "Are you willing to bleed? Are you willing to watch a substantial chunk of that little cheque statement disappear in a heartbeat? The value of money reduces the more of it you have, it's not enough to purchase my strategically valuable assets and services by itself."

"It's not just money I'm offering," Rui replied with a calm voice. "If you know my identity, then you know my potential. I'm asking you to invest in me in the form of your services, in exchange for a hefty sum of money, and a future Martial Senior for a friend, perhaps even a tentative ally."

That earned a moment of silence from the guildmaster.

"...That's a bold assertion," Guildmaster Bradt narrowed his eyes. "You cannot guarantee that you will become a Martial Senior, nor will I take your word on your friendship."

"You've surely studied any and all information you could get on me since you know my identity," Rui replied. "My potential should be self-evident. My rate of growth is nearly unprecedented as a Martial Artist, and my Martial Art is potent. Or did you think dominating the Shionel Dungeon despite thousands of high-grade Martial Squires is something that any Martial Squire can do?"

"..."

Guildmaster Bradt definitely had the upper hand in the negotiation, but not even he could dare deny the value that Rui represented as a potential ally, even if a distant one. The sheer feat that the young man

had accomplished was unprecedented in the Martial community and had sent ripples across more than just the Martial community in their segment of the continent.

"As far as my word goes, I have a stellar reputation of reliability and credibility. I cooperated with you even after your traitorous attempts to try and track me with your little tricks in your deliveries of the information I have purchased from you from time to time," Rui replied. "I have operated with good faith the entire time even in circumstances where it would have been easy for me to not do so. I am relatively certain you have the means to verify my sincerity, esoteric technology, and Martial Art techniques are capable of a lot. I am willing to be subject to any verification you want."

Guildmaster Bradt didn't even bother considering employing those means, he could tell Rui meant what he said with a single glance. Furthermore, lying when he knew that his lies could be proven was far too foolish a move for someone as insightful as Rui.

"What do you want from me, young man?" Guildmaster Bradt asked, this time with a more inquisitive look in his eyes.

Rui smiled. "I have a plan that cannot be executed with your help."

#### Chapter 965: Destinations

"The ocean breeze is good," Rui sighed as he closed his eyes. "Quite soothing and relaxing."

Yet it wasn't enough to soothe his emotions. Abandoning his family was one of the most painful things he had ever gone through. He would gladly subject himself to the pain of the Squire evolution breakthrough another thousand times instead if he had the choice. But, he didn't.

He knew that he wasn't truly abandoning them in spirit. He had gone to great lengths in order to ensure that they wouldn't incur harm as a result of his failures. However, he knew that wasn't what they would feel. He knew that in the years to come, they would wonder why Rui hadn't come back home.

Just the thought of it made his soul ache.

He couldn't tell them the truth, that would be cruel. Informing them that the bigshot chairman of an international powerhouse of a company with Martial Seniors on retainer was doing everything in his power to harm them would shatter his family. He subsequently couldn't explain the reason he left either, in addition to being afraid of Chairman Deacon coming about that information and realizing that the entire chase of Rui and Kane he was on was an elaborate, and highly expensive sham.

In the end, he asked the Martial Union to discreetly convey a simple message.

'I'm sorry.'

Anything more, and the risks multiplied. His family would not understand the need for secrecy, nor could he trust their judgment in this matter, unfortunately, barring Julian. Given the number of immature kids in the Orphanage, it was not worth the risk.

He opened his eyes, inhaling deeply.

"So, where to again?" Kane asked, trying to dispel the gloomy mood that had beset Rui.

"As far away from here as possible," Rui applied. "We'll be traveling to the other side of the continent, to the other side of the world."

Kane's eyes widened as he realized what Rui meant. "The western end of the continent. We're going to go to the very other side? That's going to take forever!"

"It's not going to take a short amount of time, that's for sure," Rui replied.

"What are we gonna do once we get there?" Kane asked. "We're going to need housing and food at a bare minimum. Are we going to have to undertake missions and stuff?"

"Who knows?" Rui smiled wryly. "It'll be a fun adventure, although I do have a few places in mind."

"Oh yeah?" Kane raised an eyebrow. "Like where?"

"I have heard rumors of a place in the western end of the continent that is said to be able to help Martial Apprentices and Martial Squires grow stronger. A sovereign territory said to belong to a powerful Martial Senior," Rui replied. "Unfortunately, I didn't have time to do any research. I could have asked Guildmaster Bradt, but I didn't want him to know what my intentions were."

"Hm," Kane frowned. "A place that helps lower Realm Martial Artists grow stronger? That sounds like a scam, honestly."

"True. Still, I am a little optimistic. If it were a scam, I probably wouldn't have ever heard of it. Martial Artists aren't stupid, and they wouldn't flock to such a place, but who knows, maybe you're right" Rui offered. "I'm considering visiting that place at some point or another."

"What's it called?" Kane asked skeptically.

"Ruohuan," Rui replied. "I don't know anymore, unfortunately."

"Ok, that's one place we could travel to," Kane shrugged. "What else?"

"The Floating island of Ajanta is also something I've considered visiting at some point," Rui told him. "Seems like a remarkable geological phenomenon, said to be mostly accessible only to Martial Artists due to its extreme elevation. The higher concentration of Martial Artists definitely makes it a special place."

"That's a common element in the previous location as well," Kane raised an eyebrow. "Is that what you're going with?"

Rui nodded. "We may be traveling, but that doesn't mean we're here to relax and have fun. I want to get much stronger in the next ten years, and that means we need to make the best use of the next ten years to grow stronger. That generally involves going to places that are conducive to making Martial Artists stronger. One of the ways to find such places across the continent is to simply observe where Martial Artists across the entirety of the continent go."

"That makes sense. One such place would have been the Shionel Dungeon," Kane noted.



"That's right. A ton of Martial Squires came from all over to partake in it since it was a good chance to challenge one's self and hone one's Martial Art," Rui replied.

Rui did not intend to waste the next ten years. He was worried that simply traveling without actually pushing himself to grow stronger would lead to his strength stagnating. Exploring the tribulations of the continent was a great way to stimulate yourself.

"That reminds me," Kane remarked. "The Beast Domain is definitely one such place, isn't it?"

"Yeah, there's no doubt about that," Rui narrowed his eyes. "The difficulties of the Shionel Dungeon are commonplace in the Beast Domain. It's why Martial Artists often travel to the Beast Domain to forge themselves and grow stronger. It's definitely on the list. However, I am keen on exploring Human Domain more before we enter the Beast Domain."

"I am fine anyhow," Kane shrugged. "Just going far away from the Kandrian Empire is good enough for me."

Rui hadn't forgotten Kane's desire to break free from his family. It appeared that he had effectively realized his objective, for now, at least.

"What a strange turn of events," Rui remarked. "To think that you would come to get what you want through such crazy circumstances."

"Yeah, you're damn right about that. It's almost hard to believe myself," Kane concurred. "I wouldn't have been able to achieve it myself. So, I do owe you a big thanks."

Kane knew that he would have been caught by his family had he tried running away himself.

## Chapter 966: Objectives

However, Rui changed the game. He had cooked a clever escape plan that allowed them to get away tracelessly. What had been impractical before became quite achievable with his insights.

"How strong do you need to be by the time the protection of the Martial Union runs out?" Kane asked out of the blue.

"...I don't think just being an ordinary Martial Senior is going to cut it, I'm afraid," Rui sighed. "He has more than one Martial Senior on retainer. I need to surpass the Martial Seniors assigned to protect my family. If he happens to get a Martial Master on retainer in the next ten years, then I'll need to be even stronger."

Rui had no illusions about the difficulty of his task. He was going to try and achieve the Senior Realm at what was most likely going to be among the youngest ages at which a Martial Squire has ever become a Martial Senior. But he did not intend on letting that stop him.

He clenched his fist at the thought of how helpless he was when his identity was exposed. It showed him that his success in the Shionel Dungeon was far from true power. They were targeted solutions that possessed an immense amount of affinity with the circumstances of the Shionel Dungeon. The moment he stepped outside of the Shionel Dungeon, he was just another ordinary high-grade Martial Squire. Granted, he could become far stronger if he had an immense amount of time for observation and preparation, but that was meaningless against opponents against whom he didn't have such generous circumstances.

And, in the real world, he didn't have such luxuries. Most opponents weren't like the Root, which would sit tight in place, allowing Rui to observe them and gain data on their movements and allowing him to manipulate them into fighting who he wanted, and choosing when their battle would begin.

He needed to obtain the power he had against the Root in general, in all circumstances.

('I need far more than just that level of paltry power,') Rui recalled the one and only fight between Martial Seniors he had witnessed in his entire life. The sheer amount of power that the two Martial Seniors of the K'ulnen Tribe had displayed was shocking, yet the power that Senior Ceeran had displayed had truly shaken Rui. Up until that point, he hadn't known how strong Martial Artists could get. His understanding of the limits of Martial Art was shallow and paltry.

He yearned, from the bottom of his heart, to reach that level of power. If he was as strong as Senior Ceeran was, he would have much more confidence in his ability to protect his family. Senior Ceeran was definitely a high-grade Senior who could defeat most Martial Seniors.

In order to reach that level of power, he would not develop his Martial Art to an incredibly high degree. Thankfully, the Shionel Dungeon had given him a lot of inspiration for many things. The limitations that he had were laid bare against a creature like the Root, although the Void Forestep technique was powerful enough to mitigate the difference between them, it had too many drawbacks and requirements.

What he needed was to strengthen Martial Art's very foundation. He needed to develop powerful techniques with an immense amount of individuality and affinity with his own Martial body and Martial Art in all fields. At the moment, he had to admit that his Martial Art was probably leaning more towards long-range techniques than it was close-range. The Void Forestep technique was a supplementary technique that could be applied to all other techniques, although it tended to be more impact when paired with close-range techniques.

He intended to balance out the mild imbalances that existed in his Martial Art at the moment. He also intended to incorporate more fields into his Martial Art than just the fields that he possessed at the moment. There were plenty of fields of Martial Art that he did not possess a strong affinity with, but were still necessary if he wanted to build a Martial Art that was capable of adapting and evolving to anything.

On top of that, he felt he was finally ready to upgrade the core of his Martial Art; the VOID algorithm. In the past few years, he had avoided touching the VOID algorithm himself because he didn't feel like he was ready to embark on such an ambitious venture, but he felt that he had matured enough as a Martial Artist to take this step. It was time for him to take the first steps in truly adapting the VOID algorithm to the world that he had been reborn in twenty years ago.

He wasn't sure about exactly how he'd go about it. The VOID algorithm was a complicated system of protocols that were centered around advanced statistical techniques and methods and scrupulously detailed and rigorous empirical data collected on the best counters to all human movements.

One thing he was aware of was the fact that he did not know what it took to become a Martial Senior, the breakthrough to the Senior Realm was a complete mystery to him. He had been informed of the traits necessary to fulfill some of the conditions necessary to become a Martial Senior, but the actual nature of the breakthrough was unknown to him.

All he knew was that it was a spontaneous event, given that Senior Ceeran had once inadvertently let it slip that he had broken through in the middle of a battle, which was impossible if it was an artificial man-made breakthrough like the evolution breakthrough process to the Squire Realm.

This was good news for him, it meant that he likely didn't need to depend on the Martial Union or any other entity in order to break through to the Senior Realm. It would be incredibly inconvenient if he had to rely on external parties to provide him with the key necessary for becoming stronger in the long run.

#### Chapter 967: Drive

With these objectives in mind, he realized that his motivations up until now had changed, and not just a little.

Previously, he was driven solely by the desire to develop his Martial Art, traverse his Martial Path, and fulfill Project Water by creating a viable combat style that could adapt to and counter anything.

He was what was known as a purist, someone who pursued Martial Art for the sake of Martial Art.

Now, however, this wasn't entirely the case. Although he still didn't seem to lose any longing to realize his greatest ambition and dream, he was also motivated by the strength that came with Martial Art.

This wasn't particularly something he was dismayed about, it wasn't as though purist Martial Artists were superior to Martial Artists who pursued Martial Art for reasons other than just for the sake of Martial Art.

No.

That was an elitist take that he didn't believe in.

At the end of the day, what mattered was the strength of one's determination to pursue Martial Art, regardless of what the desire that served as the core of that determination was.

('In that regard, this might actually end up being a good thing,') Rui realized. Having an additional desire to develop his Martial Art on top of his already strong desire to realize Project Water meant that this desire to develop his Martial Art was stronger at the end of the day.

That meant he would be more motivated and determined, and thus would likely make more progress faster than if he had still been pursuing Martial Art for solely his original ambition.

Regardless, he was not complaining.

"Oh, looks like we're arriving at our destination, the port town of Carmarl," Rui remarked as he saw the harbor in the distance. "Looks like we'll have to make our decision soon enough. Where do you want to go of all the places that I described?"

Rui had spent some time telling Kane about the various places that he had researched from data that he purchased from Guildmaster Bradt. The man's whole business centered around connecting people and places over large distances. It was the very essence and core of his business model. He was truly the most apt person to purchase such information from. Rui had gone with the intent of simply requesting to glance over the data once instead of actually purchasing it, but unfortunately, Guildmaster Bradt had seen right through the trick.

"I have long deduced that you possess the ability to memorize data," He had snorted, unimpressed. "Glancing at them will cost you the same price as purchasing them. And my maps are expensive."

Rui had taken the L on that, but at least he had gotten what he came for. He had chosen to opt for purchasing data surrounding a greater number of places rather than getting more details on a limited number of locations, the price of information rose exponentially the greater the detail, and he had already bled a lot to get Guildmaster Bradt to divert two Martial Seniors away from matters of national interest for a simple red herring.

But, in the end, he had come to learn about Ruohuan, a place for Martial Artists to grow stronger, as well as the floating Ajanta islands, a place that only Martial Artists could seek.

Mountain Drexeuelian whose base and foundation were said to be made out of a dense esoteric mist that supported the weight of the entire mountain. Martial Artists of the Lower Realms were said to

temper their body by wading through the extraordinarily dense mist and bearing a portion of the weight of the mountain on their body. The deeper one went the more weight one bore.

The Havas Field was said to be a special forest where Martial Artists trained in self-control. The forest was infested with a special species of flowers whose pollen acted as an aphrodisiac, drawing out lust and urge from within man, and driving them to uncontrollable rampages where they committed unspeakable acts. Women were said to avoid the forest, while men were strictly forbidden from setting foot anywhere within ten kilometers of the forest. The only exemption was for Martial Artists, who possessed far greater control over their mind and body and were much less likely to lose control.

The Thundering Valley was said to be a place uninhabitable to anybody but Martial Artists and Monsters. Billions of lightning bolts abused and scarred the valley every second, due to the rich presence of an esoteric that attracted lightning in combination with perpetually extremely stormy weather. The deeper one went towards the core of the valley, the likelier one was to get struck by lightning. It was said that Martial Artists used this place to hone their speed and maneuvering, training themselves to be able to react to lightning bolts!

The place was so treacherous that not even Martial Apprentices were qualified to enter and cope, only Martial Squires and above could handle the Thundering Valley. It was said that even Martial Masters trained in the core of the valley, that was how challenging it was.

Umiana Trench was a location in the inland ocean where they were currently traveling through that was said to be a trench in the ocean where the water never reached. The reason for this was rather unexpected and shocking.

The reason the Umiana Trench was untouched by water despite being in the middle of the ocean was not because of some odd esoteric substance that kept the ocean away or anything of the sort.

No.

The cause of the trench was actually connected to a Martial Sage. According to history, a vaunted Martial Sage traveled to the deepest part of the ocean in her pursuit of training.

According to lore, the sky roared, the Earth trembled, and the ocean died. Sage Sia created the Uminana Trench with pure force. Her sage-level technique at the deepest part of the inland ocean blew away the water surrounding her with unfathomable amounts of force that beggared the mind.

In an instant, she had created a hole in the ocean with no water. A hole the size of a small country.

#### Chapter 968: Umiana

Her actions led to the loss of more than ten million lives. Smaller kingdoms on the coastline of the oceans ceased to exist as if they never were, while more powerful nations had shielded themselves from the wave with the help of powerful Martial Artists, and esoteric technology derived from esoteric sources that were nothing short of national treasures.

She never ceased to practice her technique, keeping the hole open for nearly the next twenty years. The surrounding nations had already adapted to the elevated sea levels by the time her training phase had been completed. When she threatened to leave, the coastline nations realized that her leaving would leave the whole filled up once more, which could cause a disaster on par with the original disaster that she had caused.

The coastline nations came together hours before her announced departure, and formed a treaty, known as the Umiana Treaty. Each of the coastal nations would not only deploy their Martial Artists to keep the hole that Sage Sia had created open but also create an open invitation for all Martial Artists to keep the hole open as a form of training in exchange for a training fee.

That day, countless Martial Artists of several Realms from not just the coastal nations but even nations that were deeper inland were sent to the Umiana Trench to force back the water with their Martial Art techniques. Many Martial Artists from across the entire continent reveled in the opportunity to train in such a thrilling and novel manner that they flocked in great numbers to the Umiana Trench.

In the end, the training service became so absurdly profitable that the coastal nations decided to indefinitely delay the process of slowly and gradually closing the hole. The demand for the training actually exceeded the supply of available position 'slots'!

It became one of the most popular training grounds for offensive and power supplementary techniques across the entirety of the Panama Continent!

"I've definitely heard of the name, but I never knew about its backstory," Kane frowned. "What an absurd tale! Is that how fucking strong Martial Sages actually are?! That's terrifying. Damn, maybe I should have been more careful when I escaped from my father. But I suppose it's a testament to your ingenuity and my stealth that we managed to escape my father."

Rui didn't reply to that. He had had some suspicions about Kane's situation, and those had only grown stronger as time passed, especially when he learned more about what the Martial Artists of higher Realms could do the more he was exposed to the world of Martial Art.

If Sage Arrancar truly wanted Kane to return under his family's control, then he would never have been able to escape from him, ever. The Lightning Sect could be damned for all he cared, only another Martial Sage could stand in the way of Sage Arrancar, and it was clear that Kane had not earned the favor of the leader of the Lightning Sect.

He wisely did not voice these thoughts aloud at the moment. Kane truly despised his family and his father, and it was best not to poke at those words with careless speculation.

Instead, he couldn't help but heave a deep sigh of admiration for the Martial Artists that had managed to reach the Sage Realm. The simplest of courses of actions he went through from time to time like training, when done by them could affect countless lives and could rewrite maps.

"You said the Umiana Trench was in this very ocean, right?" Kane glanced at the surface of the ocean. "The sea levels are kinda shaky now that I look at it closer, but it is surprisingly stable."

"Indeed," Rui nodded calmly. "But through Seismic Mapping, I can sense an unnaturally high level of seismic radiation being transmitted through the hull of the ship to our feet, when I compare it to the seismic radiation I felt on the ship to Vilun Island, which I assume is the norm or close to it."

"I guess this is probably the closest location to us among the ones you learned about?" Kane asked. "In that case, might as well start there?"

"That's fine by me, we could make significant gains if we make the best use of this opportunity."



"You betcha!" Kane grinned. "I can't wait to see this hole."

"Then the Umiana Trench it is," Rui smiled as the ship boarded the harbor. He couldn't help but feel a wave of anticipation now that they had chosen their destination. The Panama Continent was inherently esoteric compared to the landmasses of Earth, and far larger than all of them combined. That made for a variety of exotic and supernatural phenomena that Rui never thought possible.

It made tourism across the Panama Continent a truly fascinating prospect. Although Rui had traveled outside of the Kandrian Empire many times for foreign and international missions, he had stepped into the international market that the Martial Union had managed to capture. He had never stepped into the more crazier and esoteric locations of the Panama Continent.

('When I get back, I'll tell you all about the adventures that I had.') Rui's enthusiasm gained a tint of melancholy when he thought back to the members of the Quarrier Orphanage that he had left behind. ('I'll tell you all about it, so do forgive me.')

VOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The ship's horns blew as it slowly drew to a stop at a harbor in Caracol port town. The many passengers quickly formed a chaotic line as the boarding stairs unrolled, meeting the deck.

Rui and Kane patiently wait in line even though they could have easily sky-walked down. Rui, however, wanted to avoid announcing that they were Martial Artists. If it was the case that Chairman Deacon did decide to look elsewhere, then any report of two Martial Squires having arrived from a place that was in the direction of the Shionel Confederation might draw his eyes. Even if there hair was silver and blue, instead of black and green.

## Chapter 969: Dependance

The port town of Caracol was a simple town, barely a sovereign state if it could even be considered that. The town's energy refreshed Rui, although it was a bustling and densely populated town, the air and the atmosphere felt rejuvenating. Rui could tell that the town's entire economy was centered around the fact that it was a coastal town.

A few steps into the town and he could already see a market selling sea products and related services. The many harbors along the coast welcomed many boats and ships while bidding just as many away. It seemed like a popular checkpoint for sea travel.

Rui and Kane indulged themselves with a hearty meal. Rui couldn't even remember the last time he consumed food, he had been busy dealing with the greatest crisis of his second life that he had forgotten to engage in basic living things. Hell, he had even forgotten to breathe sometimes.

"Oh mannn," Kane groaned as he heartily consumed some local seafood dishes. "I can't get enough of this. This stuff is delicious! You have to try it out, man."

Rui didn't even bother replying. He was stuffing himself with so much food so fast that even his evolved digestion system was struggling to keep up!

Kane was right.

Food was godly when a person was starved of it.

It wasn't an hour later until Rui was finally satisfied, he was so stuffed that he felt as though he wouldn't be able to sky-walk even if he wanted to. The two of them booked two rooms in an inn, before resting the entire day.

It was until the next day that Rui regained an alert state of mind.

('Maybe falling dead asleep was not the best choice,') Rui massaged his head, but he felt a lot more at ease after finally getting some rest now that the escape from Chairman Deacon had been a success.

He quickly bathed, freshening up as he left his room alone. He didn't want to disturb Kane who was sleeping.

Walking around town aimlessly in a serene manner was therapeutic and relaxing. The Shionel Confederation had been quite stressful, in hindsight. Although it definitely made him stronger, the

constant worrying about political enemies who had the power to crush him was tiring in ways that he didn't even realize until he had finally removed himself from that situation.

('In hindsight, it felt like the battle against Chairman Deacon was harder than the battle against the Root,') Rui sighed, shaking his head.

He would rather avoid subjecting himself to something like that ever again, as much as he could again. He was not naive enough to believe that he could avoid it forever. However, next time, he should probably gain a better understanding of how bad things could go.

Especially when his opponents were powerful enough to squash him like an insect.

Pursuing his Martial Art and pursuing power without all this nonsense seemed much better. Ideally, he ought to focus on cultivating his Martial Art and pursuing his Martial Path in solitude, but in reality, he had needs that necessarily intersected with human civilization.

For instance, while he could rely on himself to create brand-new techniques out of scratch, it was a lot more convenient to get the basic building blocks for his Martial Art by breaking apart existing techniques using certain components from them. He had no interest in wasting time reinventing wheels.

However, it wasn't as though these techniques were engraved into mountains for anyone to be able to learn at any given point. He needed to seek out the people who did possess these techniques.

That was never a problem before since he had the Martial Union, which seemingly possessed every single technique under the Sun. Even in the Shionel Confederation, he could rely on the Martial Union to provide him with everything he needed for mastering the Godspeed technique partially.

However, now that he had distanced himself from them and intended to go far away, he could no longer rely on them when he needed to get his hands on certain techniques and other training resources.

That necessarily meant that he needed to interact with other organizations and states that would be willing to perform exchanges with him. He would probably need to offer his services to complete a few missions for them.

He heaved a sigh at the thought, but unless he built his own sovereign state that had garnered enough bargaining power or something like that, he could forget about simply gaining access to them whenever he wished.

('Well, we can put that aside for now,') Rui shook his head. ('Time to do some research on the Umiana Trench and what is necessary to get in on that action.')

He was sure that he would be able to find information from the locals on the Umiana Trench, though he wasn't sure how many of them spoke the international dialect. However, given that this port town was on the ocean that the Umiana Trench was a part of, he could definitely find some information surrounding it.

('Ah, Kane worked up,') His sense pricked as he noticed Kane waking up back at the inn.

He quickly went to fetch his friend.

"Eh, you want to leave?" Kane rubbed his eyes, yawning. "I dunno Rui... This town is great. In fact, I dunno if I ever wanna leave. Maybe I could just get a house here, find a woman and make a family and live peacefully for the rest of my life."

"Weren't you complaining about how you wouldn't be able to see Fae anymore the other day?"

"Nobody's missing her stuck-up ass," Kane snorted.

"Riiight," Rui peered at him with narrow eyes, amused inwardly.

"On second thoughts, let's get going," Kane waved him away. "I wanna see what the hype surrounding the Umiana Trench is all about. You're taking full responsibility if it doesn't live up to the hype."

"I didn't make the trench," Rui shrugged. "Find the Martial Sage and make her take responsibility."

"I'm good, thanks,"

The two of them bickered as they made their way through town.

#### Chapter 970: Sight

"The Umiana Trench eh?" A bartender glanced at the two of them skeptically. "That place is not safe for normal humans, forget about it."

Rui did not bother denying the obvious misunderstanding about who they were, he actually welcomed it. The two of them had been hiding their auras as Martial Artists using their respective techniques and were posing as normal human beings for a reason.

"I heard that Martial Artists train there," Rui continued.

"That, they do," The man sighed as he poured Rui and Kane a drink. "Martial Artists flock from all over, trying to join in on the training. The coastal nations decided to keep it open for that reason, but at what cost eh?"

He snorted, shaking his head helplessly.

Rui could sympathize with the man's frustration. The people of the town depended on the sea significantly, which is why it was probably really scary knowing that the only reason the ocean didn't recede was that a bunch of Martial Artists kept smacking away at it continuously. That would be scary if his entire life and livelihood were centered around the ocean which was so volatile.

If the ocean receded, it would definitely be bad for the town, but Rui knew that it would probably give them peace of mind in the long run.

"This whole problem was caused by a Martial Artist in the first place," His eyes narrowed as his mouth curled with contempt. "Do you have any idea how many people died? The few Martial Squires in the old town struggled to hold back just the tiny portion of the wave hitting the old to allow as many people to escape. Yet it wasn't enough."

Rui could sense that he held a great deal of resentment towards the one who had caused the natural disaster in the first place, and understandably so. He could only imagine how horrendous the disaster really was, and how much suffering it had caused to the locals. He didn't expect them to look at the Umiana Trench in a positive light.

"If you really want to go, then you need to find a fisherman willing to give you a ride most of the way," The bartender snorted, seeing that Rui wasn't dissuaded. "Martial Artists just go over there through the air, normal humans ain't got a way to get there safely. It's dangerous to even try. Even the sea life knows to stay far away from the Umiana Trench. You're going to have to pay the fisherman a whole lot of money up-front. They won't get their money afterward if you die, after all."

"I see," Rui nodded, relieved. "What about being able to actually train there? I heard that just reaching that place isn't enough."

"Yeah, you got that right," The man nodded. "I ain't ever been there to see it myself, but there's actually an entire office setup belonging to the Trench Surveillance Force that was set up by the coastal nations to make sure that the ocean level never receded or fluctuated too much. Martial Artists gotta purchase tickets for slots, it's actually a complicated matter, or so I hear."

"I see," Rui narrowed his eyes as he grew deep in thought himself.

It was convenient that all of the matters could be handled in the trench itself. It meant that they didn't need to reveal their Martial Artist status in this town, which reduced the probability of Chairman Deacon coming across them by chance.

"Appreciate the information," Rui dropped a gold coin on the table.

"Woah, that's too much!" The man's eyes widened at the gold coin. "I don't have change for a gold coin!"

Rui cursed as he felt stares at him from around the bar. His titanic success in the Shionel Confederation had warped his sense of wealth, and value of it. A single gold coin was insignificant, but to the average person, even a single amount of gold coin could significantly make their lives easier. To people living a simpler life, a gold coin was more than the entirety of their life savings!

"Keep the change, appreciate the information," Rui dragged Kane out of the bar.

"You wanna head there immediately?" Kane asked.

Rui nodded. "I don't want to reveal our identities as Martial Artists, so use Void Step to obscure our departure."

"Gotcha,"

The two of them took off from a remote location where nobody could see them from. Kane immediately activated Void Step, misdirecting the attention and awareness of everyone whose gaze fell upon their figures away.

The two of them speedily sky-walked across the ocean.

"You know the direction that we're headed in?" Kane asked.

"Yeah," Rui glanced at the Sun. "I memorized the maps that Guildmaster Bradt sold me. You can undo the technique now, I don't want anybody realizing we have this ability when we get there."

The two of them traveled across the ocean speedily, Kane was unperturbed in his speed, while Rui sky-walked with Outer Convergence and Gale Force Breathing while he paid attention to the seal life that he was able to sense with his Riemannian Echo. He definitely felt there were some oddities that probably weren't normally the case, although he was no oceanologist.

The sea life seemed to grow scarcer the closer they got to their destination. In fact, it was far more dense closer to the coastal areas despite the strong human presence than it was in the direction of the Uminana Trench.

The closer he got, the more his sharp sense could pick up the general energy radiating from the direction of the Uminana Trench. Not even the powerful aquatic monsters were willing to stray anywhere near it, from the looks of it.

It wasn't long before the view over the horizon changed.

"Is that...?" Kane squinted his eyes as he noticed something at the edge of the horizon.

"Yeah..." Rui's eyes widened as his senses began touching the edge of the trench. "Truly unbelievable. To actually see it with my own two eyes is completely different from just learning about it."