

## **Martial Unity 981**

### Chapter 981: Encounters

The many sights that Rui saw were quite fascinating. He saw all kinds of people, cultures, nations, and environments.

The esoteric and exotic nature of the physical landmass was already known to him. It was the reason why crazy phenomena like dungeons, and floating islands were possible. In their travels to the Thundering Valley, they came across strange phenomena that they had never seen before.

"Is that village inside a tree?" Kane's eyes widened when they stumbled across a huge tree with holes in and out through it while traveling through the Great Forest of Xar. An evergreen forest was said to be rich with esoteric flora and fauna.

They had come across a strange tribe of people that lived inside a big tree with a vertically extending village.

Unfortunately for Rui and Kane, these tribe's folk did not appear to appreciate outsiders.

"Oh fuck me, they're attacking us!" Kane groaned as he avoided a Squire-level bow and arrow attack.

Rui on the other hand simply stood in place as he gazed at the arrow with curiosity and interest. He could instantly tell that it was made out of extremely durable Squire-level material. The sheer force with which the archers were launching them meant that they certainly were Martial Squires.

"Hey! LOOK!" Kane shook him out of his stupor as a wave of arrows came flying right at them.

WHOOSH

The two of them just barely evaded, before disappearing into thin air as Kane activated Void Step with Rui.

The two of them quickly scampered away from their original place.

"Stop dazing out when we're being attacked!" Kane glared at him.

"My bad... Still, bow and arrow Martial Art...?" Rui murmured. "That should be impossible..."

He recalled a conversation that he had with Headmaster Aronian. The elder Martial Artist had told Rui that the fields that could serve as Martial paths were limited by how much of the intrinsic capability of human beings that employed. That was why operating esoteric technology that mechanically flung projectiles like muskets could never serve as a Martial Art, the power and the capabilities of such weapons did not emerge fundamentally from the human wielding them.

('That doesn't strictly apply to these tribal Martial Artist archers, I suppose,') Rui mused as he watched them cautiously investigating the place where Rui and Kane had disappeared out of their senses. ('That is why they are able to pursue their bow and arrow oriented Martial Paths.')

It made sense. The power that fundamentally drove a bow forward came from the human being, after all. One needed to draw a bow with force, and that force would get converted into mechanical potential energy in the bow, which would then get converted into kinetic energy.

Thus, even if instruments were being used to aid the Martial Artist, as long as the power came from the human being, it would most likely be a viable Martial Path that the Martial Artist could pursue.

The same was true for other weapons as well. The source of power behind sword attacks came from the human being fundamentally.

That made sense to Rui, but he still had questions.

('How in the world did these people become Martial Squires?') He frowned.

The breakthrough evolution process to the Squire Realm was not something that one could simply dream up on their own. It was an advanced scientific procedure that employed principles of Darwinian evolution in the human body.

Rui remembered the chamber and the esoteric surgical machines that they had used in the process of him becoming a Martial Squire. They were highly sophisticated machines and technology. Even if the tribe's Squire evolution breakthrough method was more primitive and limited, how on Earth were they able to evolve human beings?

"The same was true for the Martial tribes of Vilun Island..." Rui recalled. "How do such primitive small groups have access to such procedures."

Even though he didn't feel as though he had a large sample size, he couldn't help but wonder if the reason they come about it was not natural, but something orchestrated by someone, or a group intentionally.

If the reason that these tribes came to possess such a procedure was due to the intervention of a third party, it would be more believable than these tribes creating the procedure themselves.

But that would imply that there was a group that was trying to spread the secret of the Squire Realm, secretly. That was also a bit far-fetched.

Why even spread the breakthrough to the Squire Realm in the first place? Groups that could produce Martial Squires were always above groups that couldn't. That was why every nation had a strong vested interest in monopolizing the breakthrough to the Squire Realm. No nation was willing to spread or trade it under any circumstances.

He hadn't forgotten his mission in the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana where he had to destroy a research and experimentation facility where the breakthrough to the Squire Realm was being conducted. That was a good example of a nation doing everything in its power to stop a nation doing everything in its power to obtain the secret of the Squire Realm.

Rui shook his head, putting such thoughts away as he turned to Kane. "Let's get going, no point in entangling ourselves with them.

The two of them came across many more strange sights of different kinds of people and places on their journey to the Thundering Valley. As well as a variety of strange phenomena

They into clouds that were on the ground and rained upwards, for some reason. They ran into a lake filled with blood, They ran into a place of seemingly no gravity. Rui ran into a myriad of strange fauna and flora lifeforms that were straight out of a fantasy novel.

Traveling through a great number of places showed Rui that even after being around in this world for twenty years, he still didn't understand what was, and wasn't possible. If Martial Art weren't a thing, he most certainly would have explored the fantasies of this world his entire life.

#### Chapter 982: Arrived

After more than a week, the two of them had finally arrived at their destination. The Thundering Valley could be seen in the distance.

What they saw left them speechless.

A dark sky. One that nearly embodied the concept of night.

An even darker valley. It was the abyss of abysses.

Yet it was the myriad of streaks of blinding light connecting one to the other that truly stunned them into silence.

It was such a surreal sight that it hypnotized those who gazed upon it. The countless flashes of light were bright, capable of lighting up the entirety of the valley even better than the sun could. Rui could scarcely imagine the sheer amount of current flowing through each lightning bolt. The sum totality of all the power within the valley was so great that it would probably vaporize any Martial Squire on the continent!

It was a magical sight.

No words could possibly do the beauty of the dance of lightning any justice. No one could ever fathom what it was like unless they stood where they stood and beheld the magnificence of one of the most exotic phenomena in nature that Rui had ever seen.

The Thundering Valley was loud. Each flash of lightning was followed by thunder. Considering that they were quite some distance from actually reaching the valley, it was quite surprising to Rui that they could hear it quite clearly.

In fact, he suspected that it would end up being even noisier than the Umiana Trench once they actually entered the valley!

"Man..." Kane finally managed to squeeze out a word. "This... This is beyond anything I had imagined."

Rui nodded. The Umiana Trench had left them feeling in a similar manner, however, the difference was that the Umiana Trench was a man-made phenomenon. Furthermore, it was a man-made phenomenon created by a Martial Sage of all people.

The Thundering Valley, however, was a natural phenomenon. The climate of the region that they had entered was extremely stormy. The sun was seemingly perenially covered by the sun all the time, the environmental factors of the region were such that massive dense clouds were a staple.

The region received heavy rains most of the year while receiving light rains when it didn't receive heavy rains. On top of that, the valley was allegedly lined with an esoteric ore in land and soil that was extremely conducive to lightning bolts, every inch of soil served as a powerful lightning rod that pulled at the electrical charge in the cumulonimbus clouds, urging for the lightning bolt to fall.

These two factors combined resulted in an unprecedented phenomenon where a gigantic potential difference between the clouds and the valley created countless channels for electrical flow, resulting in countless lightning bolts that scarred away at the valley.

The Thundering Valley was so dangerous that ordinary humans could not survive stepping foot in the valley. Some humans could survive being hit by one lightning bolt.

Few may even be able to survive being hit by two. However, the Thundering Valley was infested with more than just a few lightning bolts or even a million of them. There were billions of lightning bolts across the entirety of the valley. Each lightning bolt was so close to each other that from a distance, it was too difficult to tell them apart! It just looked like it was raining lightning instead of water!

Rui doubted that even Martial Apprentices could safely navigate the Thundering Valley. Perhaps they could handle being near the exteriors, where the lightning was said to be less, compared to the core where the intensity was too great even for Martial Squires.

"Let's get some rest in the closest town to the Thundering Valley," Rui told Kane. "We can come back after we have gotten some rest. We have been traveling all day, after all. I'd rather we be at our peak than not. I don't want to waste potions frivolously now that we no longer have our wealth."

Rui and Kane could have quickly regained their stamina with physical rejuvenation potions and some nutritious food pills, but Rui had no interest in using resources that were growing more scarce. It was at times like these that losing the wealth that he had gathered hurt. He had retained some of the money he made, but almost all of it had gone into purchasing protection for his family and the cooperation of Guildmaster Bradt.

"Sure thing," Kane replied, never once taking his eyes off the Thundering Valley. "I wanna make sure I'm at my peak too... I may have underestimated how difficult this thing is."

It appeared that witnessing the power of the fastest and quickest natural phenomenon had had a profound effect and impact on him. He had been very eager to test his evasive maneuvering prowess against the lightning, but having finally witnessed it up close had shown him that he was still sub-par.

Rui knew that, of course. Lightning moved hundreds of times faster than sound. They were no match for its speed at the moment. Perhaps Kane could close the gap significantly with Godspeed, however, Godspeed was not an evasive maneuvering technique, and he couldn't use it to dodge continuously.

On top of that, the reflexes needed to react to lightning were extremely also extremely high, which the Godspeed technique did not help with. That meant that both Rui and Kane were going to be put through the wringer when it came to evading the lightning bolts.

It was quite likely, that at least at the start, they were going to have to remain stuck on the exteriors of the Thundering Valley, before slowly trying to make progress to the inner lands of the Thundering Valley.

Rui suspected that their time in the Thundering Valley would not be nearly as straightforward as their time in the Umiana Trench. For one, the freedom that they would have in the Thundering Valley alone meant that Rui and Kane could choose to train in any manner that they deemed fit.

#### Chapter 983: Lore

From what little research Rui had done, it was said that the Thundering Valley was used by Martial Artists from across the continent to test their Martial prowess. One thing Rui was relieved by was the fact that the Thundering Valley was not as densely populated as the Umiana Trench.

The latter necessarily needed a huge number of Martial Artists in it at any point in time. However, that made it more unpleasant for Martial Artists like himself. Most Martial Artists preferred to train in solitude, thus mass training was something most of them had not done in a long time; since before they even became Martial Artists in the first place.

Rui had to admit that the fact that training in the Thundering Valley was not regulated by some organization was quite relieving. He knew that there wasn't as much of an issue just entering and doing as he pleased without some Valley Surveillance Force getting on his back for every little thing.

Part of the reason for this, of course, was the fact that the Thundering Valley did not pose an existential threat to the surrounding nations. It was true that the prospect of entering the Thundering Valley was an extremely dangerous one, but it was true that the danger was almost entirely contained to the valley.

The Umiana Trench, on the other hand, threatened to ruin the coastal nations a second time if it was allowed to be consumed by the raging ocean. The coastal nations had actively put an immense amount of effort into advertising it to draw Martial Artists from all over. This was one of the reasons that even Kane had heard of it despite living a great distance away in the Kandrian Empire.

The same was not true of the Thundering Valley. There was no great sustained effort to promote and spread it. Thus it was far less popular than Umiana Trench.

In fact, the only reason he had come to be aware of it was because of the information that he had gotten from Guildmaster Bradt who had thoroughly covered his bases, as expected of someone with his information network.

"It seems that there isn't as much of a rush of Martial Artists looking to get in, I see most of your customers are not Martial Artists after all," Rui remarked as the innkeeper served them some food.

"We get Martial Artists..." She replied. "But most people who come here are tourists who wish to observe the spectacle from afar. Martial Artists are scarce, so even if many of them come running, ordinary tourists outnumber them greatly."

Rui nodded. This made sense. Ordinary people were essentially banned from entering the Umiana Trench. Reaching the place through ordinary means was impossible as no ship or fisherman would be willing to take anybody anywhere near the Umiana Trench.

It was too dangerous after all. The edge of the Umiana Trench was subject to an unfathomable amount of forces clashing against each other. On one side, of course, was the ocean itself. The pressure that the ocean exerted on the water drove it forward with an unfathomable amount of momentum.

On the other side were tremendously powerful Martial Squires who, at least from the perspectives of ordinary humans, were nothing short of calamities in human form. It didn't take a genius to figure out that going anywhere near the edge of the Umiana Trench was courting death. That was why even getting anywhere near the Umiana Trench was essentially impossible for normal people.

The Thundering Valley, on the other hand, did not have such perils. Ordinary humans could spectate and even observe it from a distance with some safety precautions. Thus it made more sense that the many surrounding inns around the Thundering Valley welcomed more normal people visiting the Thundering Valley from afar.

"Are you two Martial Artists?" She asked warmly, turning towards them.

"Ah... We aspire to be," Rui smiled.

The two of them had changed their Martial attire before leaving, while also suppressing their Squire-level aura with their respective techniques. Furthermore, they made sure that no one saw them, thus it was impossible for anyone in their current surroundings to know their identity.



"Be careful what you wish for," The elderly lady sighed. "Martial Artists lead a perilous life fighting against other Martial Artists. It is true that they have power that transcends human limits. But it is also true that they are the most likely to die in conflict. The Martial World is a ruthless and dangerous world. I would hate to see two young men like yourselves get hurt."

"We will take your words into consideration," Rui lied. Now he felt guilty for being a Martial Squire, which was a strange sensation. "Can you tell us more about the Thundering Valley?"

"There is not much I can say beyond what you probably already know..." She spoke slowly. "The Thundering Valley is not a place I have dared gone anywhere near, after all. However... I have heard that the valley houses powerful beast species... The rajus. Martial Artists who have visited the Thundering Valley have mentioned it from time to time. Apparently... the Thundering Valley is a place where creatures that can harness the power of lightning reside."

Rui's eyes narrowed as he considered that piece of information. "I see..."

Considering everything that he had seen, it didn't even sound all that crazy. It was entirely possible for there to exist beasts and monsters that could harness the power of lightning.

It also made sense that they would reside in a place like the Thundering Valley where they would most likely best be able to advantage of their surroundings and environment when creating lightning.

"You must go anywhere near the actual valley..." She warned them with a serious tone. I know of people who have ventured close and never returned. No one knows what happened to them, they either fell victim to the lightning or fell victim to the beasts that reside in the valley."

Chapter 984: Enter

"Thank you for your concern," Rui smiled. "The food is delicious, by the way."

The two of them refueled themselves with some food and rest. It wasn't long before they sneaked out of the inn, and headed towards the Thundering Valley wearing their Martial attire.

They couldn't wear anything else, considering the sheer harshness of the environment that they were soon going to enter, any other fabric would be reduced to ash. Their Martial attire was made out of Squire-level fabrics that, while unable to offer any meaningful protection to them, were capable of surviving the immense rigors of Squire-level combat for the most part largely by simply evading being the target of most of the energy.

All punches and strikes were seamlessly delivered to Rui's body.

For a brief moment, Rui considered the prospect of wearing full-body armor of some sort to deal with the lightning, before shaking his head. There was a reason that Martial Artists did not make use of such combat gear regularly unless it was a significant part of their Martial Path. It was no different from committing Martial suicide. Growing dependent on such gear and equipment was a sign that a Martial Artist had abandoned their Martial Path, there was essentially a zero percent chance that they would be able to grow stronger.

It was why Kane was extremely hesitant of using a knife coated with poison in the Shionel Dungeon, and only did so for the briefest of times under life-threatening circumstances, before abandoning the weapon forever.

Furthermore, Rui did not think they would need such defensive measures and equipment in the first place either. It was rather unnecessary, although there was an extraordinary amount of current passing from the cumulonimbus cloud to the valley, it was spread across the entirety of the valley. Furthermore, the greatest amount was concentrated in the center of the valley where the distance between the ground and the clouds was at its minimum.

As long as they proceeded cautiously, death by lightning strike was a remote possibility.

Rui even made sure that both of their footwear was not made out of materials that conducted electricity, otherwise, dodging lightning was impossible.

Unlikely how most people thought, lightning strikes did not occur in a simplistic straightforward manner where a current of lightning straightforwardly jumped from the cloud and hit the ground.

The actual mechanics of lightning was a lot more complex. The process began with two streams of charged particles emerging from the ground and the cloud respectively due to the strong potential

difference between the clouds and the ground. It was only when those two streams touched each other in midair did the circuit become complete, causing a tremendous flow of current to occur through the path, striking the ground.

That meant that if their footwear was conductive to electricity, then they very well could become part of that conductive circuit. If that did happen, then it would be impossible to avoid the lightning as the circuit would just follow them.

Rui ensured that they would at least have a chance by making sure that their footwear attire would not be able to conduct electricity.

"Was it really necessary to put some rubber in our footwear?" Kane murmured. "I dunno man, this feels really weird."

"You'll get used to it soon," Rui replied. "Trust me, you want them on."

"If you say so, I guess."

The Thundering got louder the closer they got, as did the lightning flashes. At this distance, ordinary people would be unable to even lay eyes on the lightning. The two of them did not suffer any problems as they were able to withstand the brightness with their evolved vision.

"Here we go!" Kane excitedly grinned as they finally reached the entrance to the valley.

STEP

The air changed rather sharply. Rui had never ever particularly wondered what lightning smelled like, but now he got to know. The only way he could describe it was...

('Electric,') He sniffed the air lightly.

Yet he didn't have time to appreciate it.

Before them was an ocean of flashes of lightning, entangling through the air as they struck the ground with an astounding amount of heat and energy.

Suddenly, a sense of peril overcame both Rui and Kane, both of them had mastered Primordial Instinct to differing degrees and proficiencies, Kane more than Rui due to a higher affinity for the technique and greater ability to master to Martial Art techniques in general.

In a millisecond, the two of them leaped away.

BOOM!

A lightning bolt struck the land that they were there a moment ago!

Rui glanced at his hand unhappily, which had turned a little red. It had been too close to the lightning bolt. The temperature of a lightning bolt was easily tens of thousands of degrees Celsius, this naturally resulted in it heating the environment around to extremely high degrees. Thousands of degrees Celsius was not something that even a Martial Squire could entirely ignore.

Rui had been a hundred microseconds too late, compared to Kane who had not only reacted much earlier but also moved far quicker than Rui had.

"You good?" Kane asked.

"Just the tiniest of burns," Rui replied. "My healing factor has already healed it."

While his evolved healing factor took longer with more significant wounds, it could easily mend simple wounds like a really mild burn.

"However..." Rui murmured. "I think we might have underestimated how difficult training in this place is."

"Speak for yourself," Kane grinned. "This is perfect! Also, that lightning bolt felt a little dangerous to me, but the damage it did was lacking."

He pointed to the tiny indentation in the ground caused by the lightning bolt. "That's not even a Squire-level attack, that's more comparable to the Apprentice Realm. It's weird that it even felt threatening."

Kane scratched his head, confused.

Rui understood why he felt this way, but it was a misunderstanding. "Lightning is not a solid object, Kane. It did not collide with the ground like a meteorite would. It passed through the ground like water traveling in a river. It is tremendously energetic, but most of that energy is simply passing through, rather than inflicting damage."

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Chapter 985: Means

The two of them had stepped back behind at the entrance of the valley.

"Wait, so the lightning is passing through the ground?" Kane raised an eyebrow. "How is it passing through solid ground?"

Rui had long known that esoteric material science was quite developed in this world due to the presence of many fascinating esoteric substances that could do things that defied logic.

In turn, a holistic and theoretical understanding of the more natural and day-to-day phenomena had taken much of a backseat, compared to Earth. It made sense that Kane did not know what lightning was constituted of, and how it moved, given that electricity was not really something that was a well-known phenomenon that was used widely. Rui highly doubted this world had come up with Maxwell's equations.

"Lightning is closer to a gas than it is a solid, it passes through things rather than colliding against them like a solid object," Rui briefly explained to him. "So do not be fooled by the mild craters they produce. The average lightning bolt isn't a threat to Martial Squires but this..."

Rui turned back to the ocean of lightning bolts in the distance that only grew denser the further away. "This is not average, this is at a bare minimum on the upper end of lightning bolts."

He glanced at the ground in the distance, noting the strange neon colors of the rock and soil. ('This esoteric substance is most likely a charged superconductor. It would explain the absurd voltage and potential difference between the clouds and the land, causing such a flood of current passing from the clouds to the land in the form of so many lightning strikes.')

"Well, whatever it is, I'm good," Kane cracked his knuckles and joints. "Forget dark dungeons that one can't sense worth shit, or dumb training methods involving punching water like a dummy. This is what I'm about!"

He dashed in swiftly with blurring agility before Rui could even reply. It was only a split second before he encountered his second overhead lightning strike.

**BOOM!**

A single step was all he took. He sidestepped a bolt of lightning narrowly yet cleanly, making sure to not get hit by the ambient heat as well!

"Come on, Rui! Whatcha waiting for?" He called out before suddenly evading yet another lightning bolt.

Rui couldn't help but be impressed.

Of course, he knew this did not mean that Kane was faster than lightning, or even as fast.

Not even close, in fact. The reason that the two of them could conceive of dodging it was because the distance between the clouds was maximum at the edges of the valley. Tempestuous Feel told him that the clouds were three kilometers away from the ground. That was the reason that they were able to dodge it was because of the sheer distance that lightning bolts needed to travel before they reached Rui and Kane.

Even ordinary humans could dodge a bullet from half a kilometer away.

However, Rui could see that the clouds got increasingly closer and closer to the ground the closer one got to the center of the valley.

Rui turned back forward as he watched Kane evade the lightning bolts with greater comfort every passing second. He had a confident grin as he swiftly and sharply danced past barrages of lightning bolts.

It was definitely a stark contrast with his gloomier self in the Umiana Trench.

Rui heaved a sigh as he considered how to go about the matter.

('I definitely need to use Forestep at some point, even if I have to dial it down a bit... But the issue is that it won't be anywhere near as effective as it was against the Root.') He sighed.

The reason for this was that against the Root, he already had a rigorous predictive model that served to be quite effective against the organ. The same could not be said here. Lightning paths did not have any discernible patterns. They were mindless, and what path they took was subject to near-quantum factors that he simply did not possess the ability to perceive or analyze.

That meant that, for the time being, he could not predict lightning. That meant that he could not use the Forestep technique to its absolute maximum the way he did against the Root, or even in the Umiana Trench. The ocean was far easier to predict, even if intuitively than lightning was.

('I suppose I'll eventually need to bank hard on using Forestep with Primordial Instinct,') He noted to himself. Primordial Instinct was certainly not on par with the VOID algorithm as far as being able to compensate for his lacking reaction time, but it was still better than nothing.

He closed his eyes as he honed his mind briefly, focusing on himself. He could not afford to be scatterbrained.

"Fuuu..."

STEP

He readied a running stance before quickly dashing forward.

His skin tingled as it felt the sheer amount of energy that blew through the air. Just then, his instinct soared as he felt a threat from above.

BOOM!

This time, he managed to evade the lightning bolt cleanly and entirely. It was quite a thrilling sensation to do something that was thought to be utterly impossible back on Earth.

Kane had already gone quite ahead in the distance, and Rui aimed to catch up with him as soon as possible.

He closed his eyes as he activated Forestep with his breathing, suddenly, his body felt much lighter while a significant surge of power coursed through his body.

WHOOSH!

Rui dashed forward having grown multiple times faster.



"You used Forestep eh?" Kane noted as Rui began catching up to him. "Be careful you won't drain yourself."

"I minimized the technique's effect significantly," Rui replied. "It makes it easier on my mind to be able to process everything at this speed."

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

The two of them swiftly shifted from their spots as three lightning bolts threatened to fry them, cleanly evading the lightning as they surged forward into the Thundering Valley.

Chapter 986: Pain

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

The air rippled with thunder as Rui and Kane evaded lightning bolts meticulously, being careful to avoid being within the vicinity of the lightning bolt to not get exposed to extreme heat.

As they evaded lightning bolts, they also tried to move closer and closer toward the center of the valley. Although the two of them knew that there was no way they would be able to make it to the center of the valley as Martial Squires, they still wanted to push themselves and see how far they could go.

Their progress was very wonky and chaotic. Rui felt strangely nostalgic as he thought back to his fight with the Root. He had been faced with a similar predicament back then as well. Back then, he had needed to close the distance between himself and the Root. He had needed to make marginal progress bit by bit, taking five steps forward, but four steps back.

This was a similar situation. Instead of roots, there were dealing with lightning.

Rui and Kane both froze for a moment as their Primordial Instincts screamed of great peril.

The two of them dove from their spot as a lightning bolt larger than they had ever seen struck the spot that they were less than a millisecond ago.

BOOOM!!!

"Rgh!" The two of them grimaced as they were unable to escape the heat. Their bodies were covered the light burns as the skyrocketing heat of the lightning bolt burned them lightly. Kane was better than Rui considering that he moved away faster and thus got further away, but their outer flesh had turned red.

"What the hell was that?!" Kane asked even as he dodged a lightning bolt that struck his spot a second later.

"That was one of the larger lightning bolts of the Thundering Valley that are more common the deeper we go," Rui replied as the damage he took was healed by his body.

"That one was way thicker than any other lightning bolt we've seen thus far!" Kane exclaimed. "If I actually got hit with that..."

He didn't even need to complete his words. His actual toughness and durability were extremely low, both of them knew that he was a goner if a lightning bolt of that magnitude hit him.

Rui would probably fare far better than he did because his Martial Body's configuration did lean more towards durability and defense. Furthermore, he had a stronger healing factor, and he had also mastered Final Breathing, which was one of the reasons he survived being chewed by the Root.

"Maybe... We should avoid biting off more than we can chew at the moment," Rui offered.

"Yep,"

Just as Rui was about to suggest returning back a bit, his eyes widened as he realized he made a mistake.

"Sh-!"

BOOM!

A powerful bolt of lightning struck him.

It hurt more than he had expected. Even more than the damage he had undertaken against the Root.

A titanic surge of current passed through his body, and more importantly, his nervous system. It made him feel pain that was comparable to what he felt during the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure.

"AAAAAARGH!" Rui grimaced as he fell to his knees. "...Damn!"

"Rui!" Kane called out as he avoided lightning strikes on his way to Rui. "You okay?!"

The actual energy of the attack was that of a low-grade Squire-level attack at most. The issue was that it caused pain far greater than the actual damage. It caused pain like every cell in his body was being devastated by a powerful attack.

The reason for that, of course, he knew. The current had affected his nervous system, every nerve across his body was firing pain signals to his brain greater than what the damage actually was due to the current flowing through his nervous system.

BOOM!

Rui barely managed to dodge another lightning bolt, still reeling from the pain of the one that hit him.

He quickly headed back momentarily, as he felt himself regaining proper control over his body.

"Are you ok?" Kane asked with concern. "That looked pretty bad."

"Yeah..." Rui groaned. "It hurt way more than it actually damaged my body."

Rui flexed his muscles testing his motor control. The current has also introduced a mild paralytic effect that he was struggling to get rid of.

"Let's not get too ahead of ourselves," Rui finally said as he finally felt his body returning to normal. His healing factor was doing a good job mending the damage and the burns to his body. "Probably best to not venture in too deep. The lightning bolt that hit me wasn't even that big. If it was the large one from earlier, that... That would be brutal."

Rui wasn't sure whether he'd be able to survive a powerful lightning bolt that large striking him.

"Yeah," Kane nodded, turning back to look at the ocean of lightning bolts. "If it did that to you, I don't even wanna think what it would do to me."

"The boundary that we went to is very close to our limit at the very moment," Rui murmured. "Maybe we can change that in our time spent training here."

The two of them had come pretty close to their limits, especially Rui. His evasive capabilities without the VOID algorithm were not something that could be boosted immediately.

The two of them had quite a lot to think about in this particular regard. Rui was determined to not leave the Thundering Valley without making some progress. Kane was determined to not leave the Thundering Valley because... he liked it too much. He was in his comfort zone and his home court when it came to training like the one that they were doing in the Thunder Valley.

"Alright, let's get back to training," Rui commented as he bounced back up, heading towards the Valley again.

"Are you sure about that?" Kane looked at him with a dubious expression.

"Yes, I don't want to waste the Forestep that I have already activated."

## Chapter 987: Overcome

He had activated Forestep to a minor degree than he normally did, the Forestep technique boosted his movements to a much less degree than Kane's Godspeed did because it inherently spread the boost over time and because Rui had only mastered the Godspeed amplification technique to a partial degree due to lack of affinity and Kane's talent.

Even still, that almost entirely compensated for the significant gap between them, albeit Rui's moves were still less fluid than Kane's, his reaction was longer than his as well. He still did not want to waste this application of the Forestep technique.

Even if he did not make much progress today, he was determined to gain more experience and then use that experience to identify what it was that he was lacking, and what he could do to make it better.

In time, he hoped to become more effective in dealing with lightning.

The two of them immediately jumped back into training as they maneuvered across the outer layers of the Thunder Valley. Rather than just statically dodging lightning from place to place, the two of them decided a run course across the outer section of the Thundering Valley.

This increased the difficulty of the challenge because they needed to dodge lightning while moving at high speeds. It was much more difficult to dash off in a direction perpendicular to one's running than it was to do so when one was stationary. It allowed them to make it more challenging without increasing the risks too much by going too deep into the Thundering Valley.

Kane had it easier as he had to hold back since he was still faster than Rui due to the Forestep technique being limited in order to last longer. Furthermore, Rui himself was acting more cautiously and carefully, since he was moving faster than what he was most comfortable with.

**BOOM BOOM BOOM!**

The two of them engaged in all kinds of maneuvers to evade lightning from all directions. One of the tricky parts about lightning was the fact that not only did it not follow a straightforward trajectory, but it was capable of moving in all kinds of wacky directions.

Rui had to dodge a lightning bolt that seemingly was going to completely avoid them but then suddenly change trajectories and race towards them. Dodging such bolts was extraordinarily difficult.

The first time they ran into a Martial Squire was quite surprising since they had forgotten that this was a place where Martial Artists trained. As they circled around the valley, they ran into several Martial Squires. Thankfully, they each minded their own business. No one wanted to do anything that could be misconstrued as hostility and get into a fight in such an environment, that was concretely detrimental to both sides. It was not possible to fight all out here without getting hit by lightning bolts, thus all of them pretended the other did not exist.

However, Martial Artists weren't the only creatures they ran into.

Rui's eyes widened as something moving in the distance caught his attention.

Most of his attention was focused upward since that's where the lightning came from. He had purposely minimized his awareness of what was ahead given that he was preoccupied by the lightning, he only needed to make sure that he was tracking the terrain.

It wasn't until both of them felt a sense of threat that was different from the lightning did they direct more attention ahead.

It was smaller than Rui had expected. About the size of a tiger, yet vastly more perilous. It resembled a fusion between a lion and a wolf, with one of the most eye-drawing traits being the fur coat that sparkled with lightning. In fact, the mane of the creature looked like it was made of lightning!

"Is that...?" Kane's eyes widened as he gazed at the fantastical beast ahead of him.

"It's a rajju," Rui paused in his paths, prompting Kane to do the same.

The creature had intelligent eyes.

It was a magnificent creature with an otherworldly appearance. It possessed a grace and a fierceness that co-existed. He knew that they were not going to be able to evade.

[Outsiders. Leave.] It growled at them. Rui's widened as he instinctively understood what the beast was telling them via Fauna Flow.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

Rui didn't need any more confirmation as he watched several lightning bolts land on the creature without so much as fazing it. It appeared that it was truly immune to lightning!

Before Rui and Kane could even turn away, the creature lashed out at them!

"Shi-!"

ZZZZT!

"Rgh!" Rui and Kane grimaced as webs of lightning emerged from the creature's fur coat, striking them. Their bodies burned as an immense sensation of pain enveloped their entire body, they struggled, before finally retaining control over their body.

They both leaped away, dashing away from the creature as they did their best to avoid lightning bolts on the way back.

THUD!

"That... HURT!" Kane cursed as he fell to his knees. The attack had done a number on him as he realized that he truly could have died there, due to his weak constitution. "Oof, what was that creature's problem?!"

"It grew impatient that we were still standing before it," Rui groaned. "This lightning is harder to deal with than I expected. We're going to need to find a way to deal with it more concretely."

Rui had already come up with a brand-new idea on how to be able to evade lightning more efficiently and effectively than normal. Their current rate of success was simply too unacceptable at the moment. Rui wanted to actually accomplish something in their time in the Thundering Valley, make progress, even if it was only by one step and nothing else. He didn't want to simply get bullied by lightning and leave the place with unsatisfied grudges against the natural phenomenon.

"What do you plan on doing?"

"What I've always done..." Rui narrowed his eyes. "I'm going to overcome it."

#### Chapter 988: Tools

"Let me guess," Kane raised an eyebrow. "You're going to come with another technique in less than a day, and figure out a way to overcome this?"

Rui turned to him with furrowed eyebrows. "Unfortunately, no. That technique was something I already had all the necessary tools for. That's why I was able to deal with it so quickly. Otherwise, coming up with a technique that quick is normally impossible. In this case..."

He turned towards the rain of lightning pouring down on the valley. "In this case, I just don't have all the tools necessary. I'll need to truly start from scratch."

His thoughts immediately turned toward the Raiju. Watching it had given Rui some inspiration on the spot.

Watching its form alone had given him some ideas, let alone the lightning attack that it launched. Rui wondered what the principles behind that were. It was possible that it simply directed an immense amount of charge at Rui, and the potential difference between Rui's neutrally charged body and the immense negative charge from the raiju's body caused the negative charge to bolt toward Rui.



Though he wasn't entirely sure, regardless, it had given him some ideas.

Unfortunately, many of his more ambitious ideas weren't something he could work on by himself in the middle of nowhere. He needed access to resources that he would have had at the Martial Union.

It was at moments like these that he recalled the benefits of Commissioner Reze's deal. He wasn't foolish enough to think that there were no upsides to the deal. Being an internal subordinate of the Martial Union meant that he could access these resources any time he wanted.

The Martial Union's training resources were so comprehensively vast and wide that these alone were quite a big plus to accepting the deal.

Still, he didn't regret his decision all things considered.

The Martial Union was a shackle to him at this stage. Although they wouldn't do something as stupid as antagonize him, he could think of himself as a bonafide slave to their interests for the most part. A handsomely compensated and rich slave, but a slave nonetheless. The very thought of it made him want to puke.

He shook his head, putting aside such thoughts, focusing on the situation at hand.

He had what he had, and not what he wished he did. He needed to make do with what he had and make the best use of it.

('The biggest issue is that I have absolutely no fathoming of the trajectory of lightning,') he tutted with frustration. ('It's truly painful because I cannot make use of my Martial Art fundamentally.')

His Martial Art was fundamentally centered around adaptive evolution, which was his Martial Path. He fought by making motions and movements that were perfectly well-timed and placed on his opponent.

Having insight into what his opponent's movements were, one way or another, was extremely central to being able to counter them, it was almost impossible to be able to make the perfect counters in real-time when reacting to one's opponent after they had already begun moving, there simply wasn't enough

time to process what the best option was after the movements he was trying to react to had already begun.

That was why the VOID algorithm incorporated a predictive model function. Predicting one's opponent was necessary when it came to being able to counter them well.

It was rare that Rui was in a situation where his predictive model was ineffective, but unfortunately lightning had no patterns that he was able to discern, none that weren't on the quantum level anyway.

('Does that mean my Martial Art just doesn't work against opponents that wield lightning?') Rui wondered as he considered the raiju that they came across yesterday.

That was unacceptable. He felt strongly about that in his heart, due to the fact that it meant that any opponent with this particular method of attack might very well be able to evade his predictions was something that he found unacceptable.

He could not let there be a means of attack that eluded him to such a degree.

('I need to find a way to predict, or at least gain more insight about the motion of lightning,') Rui's eyes narrowed as he considered the various options at his disposal.

In a way, the fact that he didn't have as many options meant that there were few ways in which the answer could even possibly lie.

('Being able to develop some sort of algorithm to sense lightning is most likely beyond me at this moment,') He sighed, shaking his head.

Not only were the factors that dictated the trajectory of the lightning bolt small, as in small on the quantum scale, but he also simply lacked the means to perceive them and process them.

Had he been able to do that, then he would be able to predict them. After all, lightning was dictated by four rather simple equations in Maxwell's theory of Electromagnetism. He didn't even need to use all four in order to predict the path that lightning would take.

However, the issue was that he knew that quantum senses were something beyond him at the moment. The sheer amount of information that he would get from such a sensory technique would instantly make it grade ten. That level of detail surpassed even the few grade-ten techniques that he had come across.

This was different from the Riemannian Echo as well, that technique had great range and was difficult to sabotage, but it was not good at being applied in combat, and did not have great detail either. Rui had to make do with what he had against the Root.

('Such a technique would take far too much time too, it's far too ambitious,') Rui sighed. He knew that this technique would probably take longer than Riemannian Echo did, which took around nine months. He didn't want to spend that much time on a solution to gain better insight into the trajectory of lightning.

#### Chapter 989: Narrow

('Last time, against the Root, I was able to compensate for lacking reaction time against the Root with the VOID algorithm instead of trying to create a technique that improved my effective reaction and reflex time,') Rui mused. ('Maybe I should attempt the latter this time.')

The issue was that this too was an extremely ambitious project as well. Improving reaction time was one of the holy grails of Lightning Sect. Even for him, this was not something that could be done immediately.

('If push comes to shove, I'll create techniques that allow me to sense on a quantum level and techniques that improve my reaction time somehow,') He sighed. ('But is that really the only two paths forward? Is there no other simpler and easier solution that would allow me to overcome this obstacle easily?')

He reviewed everything he knew about lightning. An immense amount of charge is built up in a cloud with the excess electrons accumulating at the bottom of the cloud while positive charges migrate away to the upper portion of the cloud.

This causes a positive charge to build up on the surface of the valley. Streams of electrons jump from the cloud reaching downwards, this negative streak was known as the step ladder. Simultaneously, streams of positive charges would emerge from the land moving upwards towards the sky, known as streamers.

Because streamers and step ladders were of opposite charges, they would be attracted to each other and meet midair, completing the circuit between the clouds and the land. An immense flow of current generating a lot of light and sound would occur from the cloud to the ground, that was the lightning bolt.

It was a phenomenon for which a lot of unseen precurring events preceded the lightning bolt.

('Maybe...') Rui's eyes widened as an idea popped into his head. ('Maybe I don't need to predict the trajectory of the lightning bolt after it has begun. What if I rely on observing the conditions before the lightning bolt has even formed?')

He realized that he was being too close-minded in regard to the manner in which he could predict the lightning. He didn't need to predict its future trajectory based on the existing trajectory, that was exceedingly difficult.

Not only could he not perceive the variables responsible for determining its exact trajectory, but the timeframe he had to predict before it was too late to avoid the lightning bolt was also small. He didn't know how he was supposed to be able to do anything when the lightning bolt reached the ground within a millisecond.

('However... if I am able to infer information about lightning before it even begins based on the preceding events that occur prior to it, then...') He realized that this was a viable strategy. It was entirely possible for what he had in mind to be realized.

('If I can somehow use the streamer and the step ladder that occur before a lightning strike, then I will be able to gain crucial information on the lightning bolt,') Rui replied.

The streamer that emerged from the land, constituted of positive charges, could allow Rui to detect the destination of the lightning bolt ahead of time.

('I need to be able to sense the streamer,') Rui's twinkled with realization. If he could properly read the preceding conditions of lightning well enough, then he would be able to know the destination of the lightning bolt ahead of time!

This meant the viability with which he could evade lightning was extremely high!

('This is much more practical than developing a technique that greatly enhances my combat cognition speed, or gives me quantum senses.

The latter was downright impossible when compared to the grounded solution of analyzing the preceding phenomena of a lightning bolt to dodge it. That was why he was rather optimistic about his chances of creating some means to be able to gain information.

He realized that he had been too fixated prior on specifically trying to predict the lightning bolt in a particular way.

('Subconsciously, I was getting too fixated on my prior successes, and assumed that that was the only way to do things. I couldn't be further wrong.') He shook his head.

The method that he had previously been trying to apply was similar to the ODA System, where he concretely predicted the future by analyzing the past. The ODA System was so successful, that it was easy for Rui to fall into a self-made trap where he limited himself to an extremely narrow path of how he ought to go about things.

('But that's not right. Information is information. Knowledge is knowledge. No matter where it comes from, no matter how I got it,') Rui mused.

It was good that he found the opportunity to correct the fallacious line of thought that he had had prior.

Now that he had figured out the broad solution by which he would accomplish his goal, he had come to figure out exactly how he would apply the solution in real life. Sensing the stream of positive charges that emerged from the land was not going to be easy, after all, he couldn't do it now, that meant he would need to come up with new mechanics by which he would be able to sense the positive upward stream from the ground.

('Think...') He closed his eyes as he pressed his hands into his temples.

The positively charged upward stream of particles was made up of charged molecules and atoms, and from what he understood, they likely weren't super thin like electrons were. Perhaps if he developed a way to sense charge, then he would be able to sense them.

However, not even Martial Squires possessed an active sense

He glanced at the ground as another idea popped into his head. ('If I simply am unable to even begin to sense a particular kind of phenomenon, then... Maybe I can do what I did the last time I ran into that problem.'))

He recalled how he overcome his inability to sense curvature in space to create the Riemannian Echo.

Chapter 990: Different

The Riemannian Echo was a technique to sense gravity that he had created by inserting esoteric substances that were sensitive to gravity and reacted in specific ways to gravity. He inserted them deep into his body so that he would effectively be able to treat them as sense organs inside his body capable of sensing warps in space-time.

That didn't mean that the esoteric substances merged with the cells of his body, or became connected to his nervous system like other sense organs did. No.

It meant that he could sense their reactions to gravity inside his body and thus deduce the curvature of space based on that.

Right now, he was in a bit of a similar situation.

Just like back then, he was definitely unable to sense what he needed to. Considering that he overcame the problem with gravity, there was a chance that he could use the same solution to overcome that problem with the electromagnetic field.

If he inserted materials in his body that allowed him to sense the electromagnetic field, then maybe he could give himself the ability to sense the electromagnetic field.

However, there were issues with this solution as well. For one, he needed to do a lot of research into esoteric material science, just like he did back when he was working on the Riemannian Echo technique.

Unfortunately, that was not possible. The Thundering Valley was in the Fenescin Region, a rather remote region with very little going on. It meant that he would have to go pretty far before he reached a place that possessed the information that he needed. Then he would have to spend quite some time researching, looking for materials that reacted to the electromagnetic field.

Then he would also need to conduct some experiments.

It was simply too impractical an option at the moment. Had he been in the Kandrian Empire, it wouldn't be an issue, but it was quite problematic in his current circumstances. Even if he did find a place that had such information, it would not be enough, after all, acquiring them would still cost him.

On top of all these practical issues, he also needed to be wary about getting comfortable inserting foreign substances into his body. He couldn't just apply that solution each time. There were not only toxicity concerns that he wouldn't be able to address in these circumstances, but also that there was a limit to the number of substances that he could keep track of inside his body. He couldn't keep track of too many esoteric substances inside his body, they would simply be distracting beyond a certain point.

('For now, this isn't a solution I can apply at this moment,') He shook his head as his thoughts flew back to other options and considerations.

These weren't the only ways in which he could sense the upward positively charged stream of particles.

Since they're a dense stream of particles, it may be possible for me to sense them with Tempestuous Feel.

He had never particularly tried sensing them since he was always focused in the opposite direction; upwards towards the sky.

If he could sense the upwards drafts of the streamer with Tempestuous Feel, then he would be able to pinpoint the destination of a lightning bolt. As for whether it was possible, he would need to test it.

It was possible that Riemannian Echo when focused on the land might be able to pick on the incoming lightning bolts.

He was eager to try both of them.

He got up, leaving Kane a bit behind as he headed closer toward the entrance of the Thundering Valley.

"Wait," Kane interjected. "Don't tell me you plan to go again."

"No," Rui replied as he closed his eyes.

First, he used Tempestuous Feel to sense the land. While he was it, he tried using Seismic Mapping.

He wasn't sure, but it was worth testing to see what the effects of using Seismic Mapping were. It was possible that the streams of positively charged particles leaving the ground would leave behind some seismic radiation that he could then use to identify them

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

"Tsk," He tutted in irritation.

The seismic radiation from the lightning strikes was too loud, they completely overshadowed any seismic radiation that the positively charged stream might leave behind.

Tempestuous Feel was in a similar pickle, it was too difficult to make out any individual stream of particles. The reason for this was because the entirety of the Thundering Valley was a furnace for the atmosphere in a sense, the sheer amount of energy in the air meant that the particles were extremely



excited, blasting into each other. Had it been in an ordinary environment, perhaps his senses would have been able to sense the stream, but unfortunately these circumstances made it too difficult.

('Let's hope this works,') He prayed as he used Riemannian Echo to scan the valley.

The Riemannian Echo technique was never one to distinguish detail, unfortunately. He was able to sense streams of energy muffled across the entire valley, but he couldn't pinpoint their location. He was unable to sacrifice scale for detail. He could only choose which direction he directed the scale of his senses.

The preliminary experiments with all three sensory techniques failed. He didn't even bother using Primordial Instinct since it only detected threats within things that Rui could already sense.

Just before he was about to consider other possibilities, a simple idea plopped into his mind.

('What if I compare data from all three senses simultaneously?') Rui wondered.

Focusing on the feed of the three sensory techniques was mentally taxing though Rui was confident he could deal with it just fine as long as he didn't spend too much time on it.

It was no different from normal humans trying to pay attention to their vision, hearing, and sense of touch at the same time. It was extremely tricky and difficult, but not impossible as long as one was sharp.

Rui had a feeling that something might go different this time.