

## Martial Unity 1031

Chapter 1031: Quick

"Five may be too much," Rui remarked.

"We'll be fine," Kane confidently reassured him. "Between you and me, we can handle them."

"Just to remind you, I'm normally not as strong as I am when facing you," Rui told him. "My power depends on how familiar with my opponents I am. I grow stronger as the battle prolongs."

"Yeah, I know that, if we don't manage to take them down immediately, then we can rely on your adaptive evolution to overcome them," Kane nonchalantly explained.

Kane had grown much more confident ever since he regained his Fulminata technique. Rui often had to hold him back and ensure that he didn't fall prey to his own self-confidence.

Frankly, five was on the very limit of what Rui was willing to tolerate. If not for the fact that the reported squad was comprised of only mid-grade Martial Squires, he would have never agreed to that.

However, the two of them were high-grade Martial Squires at this point. Rui especially had a rock-hard foundation while Kane had powerful trump cards.

"Come on," Rui nodded. "It's time to go."

Because of the speed of Martial Squires, it was a very short time until the Martial Squires would reach the vicinity of Crexeet town. The department of defense mandated that all Martial conflicts were not to occur within a certain radius of the town as much as possible, which meant that Rui and Kane had to move quickly.

The two of them immediately dashed away in the distance as Rui used all of his sensory techniques to track and surveil in order to make sure that they weren't blindsided.

"There they are," Rui narrowed his eyes after he spotted them after merely a minute of travel.

Instinctually, he wasn't threatened by any one of them. The Squire Realm was much wider and broader than the Apprentice Realm.

The difference between high-grade Martial Squires and mid-grade Martial Squires was not small.

Before they could even reach each other, Rui quickly used his Pathfinder technique, launching a powerful sonic projectile from quite some distance away. He didn't have the pattern recognition systems of the VOID algorithm helping him at this point, but he aimed based on intuition.

THWOOM!

BAM!!

It struck him in the abdomen, striking him well enough to collapse him.

Rui grinned as he already caught one of his opponents completely off-guard with no active defensive technique. Because the activation of the Mighty Flash Roar Blast technique was not something that could be perceived at a great distance, and because sound was far too hard to directly perceive at a distance.

They didn't know what hit them, literally. The damage inflicted wasn't damning, but it was a great start as the remaining four rapidly moved forward after confirming that their ally was not in a critical condition.

Closing the distance became a much greater necessity, as Rui was nothing short of a high-grade long-range specialist in their eyes. The worst thing that they could do was give a long-range Martial Squire all that distance between them.

They didn't quite understand why this long-range Martial Squire was running straight at them, but they nonetheless welcomed it. The distance between them shortened in seconds, and the battle had begun before they even reached each other.

THWOOM THWOOM

POOW!

Two of the enemy Martial Squires launched projectiles toward Rui and Kane, and the two of them promptly avoided them while Rui launched multiple sonic projectiles at them. Avoiding them from that distance was effortless, especially for Kane.

However, much to Rui's chagrin, his enemies had also wisened up with the initial ambush, they paid attention to his motions very carefully, dispersing in random directions the moment Rui gave any sort of indication that he was attacking.

Without a predictive model, he couldn't know which direction they were going to go in.

Regardless, three Martial Squires immediately pounced on Rui.

He was unsurprised. After all, it was common sense that long-range specialists were weak at close ranges.

WHOOSH!

Rui simply disappeared when their attacks connected with him, leaving behind an empty image.

A simple feint from the Phantom Step technique.

TAP TAP TAP!

Rui exploited a blindspot as he employed his Lightning Ripple technique to send an electrical current down the nervous system of his opponent.

"Rgh!" The man grimaced as he felt certain parts of his body lock up!

POW!

A swift hook crashed into his jaw. Not only was he hindered, but Rui also employed Reverberating Lance to permeate the impact as deep as possible.

THUD

The two of them Martial Squires were shocked, Rui had taken down one of them before they could realize it. Furthermore, he did it in close-range combat. They were shocked that a Martial Squire could possess such great long-range capabilities as well as formidable short-range capabilities.

Rui stepped forth toward them as he blasted them with his most powerful strikes. The two hapless Martial Squires struggled to cope with the sheer onslaught that Rui unleashed. One of them tried matching his blows, yet was shocked when she failed. The other gritted his teeth as his guard rattled with every impact that Rui unleashed.

He prepared for an incoming strike, yet to his surprise, the impact was gentle.

The very next moment he felt a tremendous force all across his body pushing him backward.

"WAAAAAAH!" Rui launched him flying with Reverberating Catapult.

He turned to the woman, who launched a powerful weighted blow toward Rui.

Yet before she realized it, Rui had spun behind her, winding about her as his arms coiled across her neck and head.

He had swiftly exploited an opening to get her into a rear choke hold. Simultaneously, his charged body began sending a current across her body, partially paralyzing her muscles. Not only could she not breathe, but Rui's Thundercoil completely denied her resistance.

Soon enough, the brain shut down, deprived of blood.

Rui glanced over as he watched Kane take down the fifth Martial Squire that Rui had launched flying with his technique.

Just like that, it was over. Rui was reminded once that most battles were anti-climactic.

Chapter 1032: Departure

"You two are back already?" Squire Ferilwal glanced at the two of them with an expression of shock. "It hasn't even been ten minutes!"

She felt something was wrong. She recalled how strong the two of them were when she tested their prowess. Although Rui was strong, she didn't get the impression that she was this strong. He was either holding back or had gotten stronger.

She had a feeling it was both.

However, what truly surprised her was Kane. Kane's performance had long become known in Crexeet Town. What surprised her was that she recalled that Kane was definitely nowhere near as strong as he was these days back when she first tested him. He had grown much stronger in a very small span of time.

Both of these Martial Squires broke common sense in different ways, they were a pair that she was unable to understand.

"Would you rather we took longer?" Rui snorted as he dropped the corpses of the enemy Martial Squires. "Inform the mayor that this is our last deployment."

"Eh? You're leaving?" She asked with an alarmed tone.

"Yes, we have accomplished what we came for," Rui replied. "And now we're done."

"But..." Her voice faltered as she realized that their remarkable prowess had been something that they had begun depending on to a certain extent.

She considered trying to persuade both of them to stay somehow, but she quickly realized that that was hopeless that was.

They did not need anything, nor was there anything particularly alluring to the two of them. Rui especially felt like he would fair just fine without the town.

"Thank you for your services," She sighed.

The two of them quickly gathered their things before leaving. Rui did not want to give the wishy-washy mayor of the town a chance to try and convince them otherwise. He was fine without having that conversation, even if it meant skipping out on the gratitude of the town and whatnot.

"Where to next?" Kane asked with a cheery smile.

"You seem happy to leave," Rui remarked. "Do you dislike the town that much?"

"It has nothing to do with the town, I'm just glad I accomplished what I came to accomplish," Kane replied. "It's a great sensation of accomplishment and satisfaction."

Rui smiled, he could definitely relate.

He had created multiple grade-ten techniques capable of incredibly great feats, and each he succeeded, it was an incredible feeling of deep satisfaction. He had felt that way when he created the Pathfinder technique, the ODA System was nothing short of a highly sophisticated mental software that extrapolated trajectory, allowing him to accurately batter his opponents from ranges that were otherwise something that only a Martial Senior would be able to do.

The greatest satisfaction he got was from the VOID algorithm, although he hadn't entirely realized it. He recalled the first time that he had used the pattern recognition systems of the VOID algorithm, it was truly one of the most euphoric moments of his life.

"Where do we go next?" Kane asked. "I know that it is further west, but surely we have someplace to go before we hit the western end of the continent, yes? Traveling straight to the other end of the continent will take far too long even with our speed."

"True," Rui nodded. "However, I do have some places in mind. There are all the prior places that I mentioned. We could start with those."

"Ahhh... the mountain where people go to endure weight in their body..." Kane made an odd face. "I'll pass."

"It's a mountain that sits on mist though," Rui's eyebrows furrowed. "That's an unbelievable phenomenon, don't you want to witness it?"

"Witness, sure," Kane admitted. "But I have no interest in training my raw durability."

Rui sighed, shaking his head, amused. "You can't avoid training your body to be tougher forever Kane, you shouldn't. I could save your life one day."

"Hey, I'm an evasive maneuver, I avoid things that could threaten my life. I'd rather focus on that," Kane huffed.

"Uh huh," Rui sighed, resigned. "Well, I have good news. I found a good place where it will soon be a good time to be a Martial Artist."

"Oh?" Kane glanced at Rui with interest. "What do you have in mind?"

"You remember the floating Ajanta islands?" Rui asked.

"Yeah, I sure do," Kane's eyes lit up in interest. "I would not mind going there at all, that sounds fun."

"Indeed it does," Rui nodded. "That will be our next location."

"Nice, anything to note about the place?" Kane asked.

"Plenty," Rui replied. "It is said that the gravity atop the island is extremely high, making even standing atop the island a form of training. It is said that air pressure is unbearable due to that, so it also serves as a place to train one's breathing techniques there."

Breathing techniques were extremely common across all fields in Martial Art. Breathing as an action was extremely fundamental to the sustenance of the human body. Thus the floating Ajanta islands were extremely attractive to all Martial Artists within a certain range of power.

Just like the Umiana Trench, and the Thundering Valley, the island was a place that was restricted solely to Martial Artists due to the sheer inhabitable conditions of the island.

"Still," Kane shrugged. "That doesn't sound very fun, honestly. That sounds like it could get dull very quickly, a boring place beyond the initial awe."

Rui furrowed his eyebrows as turned towards Kane with a disapproving expression. Perhaps it was because Kane was born in a fantastical world that such things were not nearly as shocking to him. His 'normal' was fantastical and exotic compared to the things that Rui had been exposed to when he considered his first life. A floating island was something that the people would have killed to see or have back in his previous life.

"That's not the only thing one will do in that place," Rui told him. "The floating island is not a place of peace... It is a harsh place where even entering is said to be a challenge."

Chapter 1033: Ajanta

"And why's that?" Kane asked with a curious tone.

"The floating island generally remains within a certain region, following a circular path of orbit," Rui explained. "There are many regions that are overshadowed and directly below the floating Ajanta island. The states and nations in that region have many misgivings with the floating island."

He turned towards Kane. "They wish to take it down."

Kane frowned. "But why?"

"Because it's an existential threat, of course," Rui replied. "The nations of the region cannot tolerate a giant rock floating that could fall. If it does, destruction is almost inevitable. Not just for any one nation, but all nations in the region will be wiped, out or extremely crippled."

"I mean, if the island has been floating for a long time, then is that a realistic possibility?"

"Pieces of the island fall all the time," Rui replied. "Not big fragments, but enough to kill people if they land anywhere near them. The island isn't exactly the most stable structure there is. There is a very real possibility that the activity of the powerful Martial Squires atop the island may cause it to become destabilized and then swiftly crumble into many fragments that will rain down upon some place in the Kaddar region, causing mass devastation."

"Makes sense, but I'm guessing the Floating Ajanta Island has other ideas?" Kane asked.

"It does," Rui nodded. "The people inhabiting the island are exclusively Martial Artists. And the Martial Artists of the floating Ajanta Island do not want the island to be pulled down and destroyed. Therein lies the conflict."

"Huh," Kane frowned. "So another war."

Rui nodded. "The floating Ajanta Island is ruled by the Floating Sect led by a powerful Martial Senior. It welcomes in any foreign Martial Artists but at the cost of being willing to defend the island from the attacks of the nations of the Kaddar Region."

"That reminds me of the circumstances of Crexeet Town," Kane murmured.

"There are similarities," Rui nodded. "However, in this case, the nations of the Kaddar Region have a much stronger justification and reason for attacking the Ajanta island."

"You said entering it alone would be a challenge," Kane reminded him.

"Yes," Rui nodded. "There is a limited number of Martial Artists permitted on the island. Tens of thousands of Martial Squires could easily destabilize the island with their power, after all. Thus in order to earn a spot on the island, you need to challenge a Martial Squire and..."

"Defeat them?"

Rui shook his head. "Kill them. If the person you challenge is still alive, then you will have failed the challenge."

Kane was speechless for a second. "For a haven of Martial Artists, they sure are cutthroat."

"True," Rui nodded. "However, their circumstances are very different from that of the Uminana Trench and all the coastal nations. The Uminana Trench is something that desperately needs quantity of Martial Artists to man the perimeters of the trench, and it's maintained to also earn an immense sum of money from the Martial Artists to justify the continued sustained existence of the Martial Squires. They need Martial Squires to join, Ajanta Island does not need that, in fact, it needs the opposite."

Kane narrowed his eyes as thought about it. "I'm guessing it also means that the Martial Squires that do retain their spots on the island are the bravest and the strongest. Which is what they need in their conflict with the nations of the Kaddar Region?"

"Correct," Rui nodded appreciatively. "They've created a system that filters out cowards and weaklings, leaving them with true warriors."

"That's quite smart actually," Kane nodded. "It sounds like a fun challenge. But you said that the Floating Sect was led by a Martial Senior, right?"

Rui nodded.

"The fact that the Floating Sect has managed to resist the attacks of the Kaddar nations to take over the island, I'm guessing that there isn't a single Martial Master in the entirety of the Kaddar region?"

"Not a single one," Rui confirmed. "The Kaddar Region as a whole is capped at the Senior Realm."

"It's interesting to see how incredibly rare Martial Artists of the higher Realms are in the rest of the continent," Kane murmured. "It really puts into perspective the sheer power of the Kandrian Empire and the Martial Union."

Rui nodded. It was difficult to appreciate how powerful the Kandrian Empire was as a whole until Rui traveled across the entirety of the continent. The sheer number of Martial Seniors and Martial Masters that the Martial Union had made it an abysmally powerful force even by the standards of the entire continent. It was an absolute powerhouse, and even if every nation or state that Rui had come across after leaving the Shionel confederation came together, they would most likely be unable to match the might of the Martial Union due to the multiple Martial Sages that led the Union.

However, Rui was also glad to have left the Kandrian Empire, and the far east side of the continent because Martial Squires were limited in a place where Martial Squires were not nearly as relevant as they were in other places. It gave Rui far more breathing space than he had ever expected. There were few too shackles compared to the Kandrian Empire.

"The Ajanta Island will be breaking that pattern a bit since it is led by a Martial Senior," Rui murmured. "But oh well, it's just one Martial Artist, it isn't all that bad."

He didn't mind if there were a handful of Martial Artists of higher Realms. It could even help him learn things about the Senior Realm that he perhaps should have learned some time ago.

The breakthrough to the Senior Realm became more and more relevant to Rui as time passed, as he grew stronger. It became increasingly prudent for him to learn the secret, and the path to the Senior Realm, for he came closer and closer to taking that step to a higher Realm.

## Chapter 1034: Caution

Unlike their last journey, the journey to the floating Ajanta Island was quite substantial. They spent more than a week traveling west. They were constantly reminded how large the continent was.

Despite their remarkable speed, they needed many days of traveling to reach their location.

Rui knew that there were means of transportation that allowed nations to match the speed of Martial Artists, however, he also knew that these means of transportation weren't the norm. The norm was normal standard carriages pulled by relatively normal creatures or engines fueled by some esoteric substance.

The upper class of human civilization was able to engage in travel across vast expanses thanks to these solutions and means.

However, even they were limited, ultimately. This was very different from his previous life in which a flight or two could take you around the world.

Rui preferred the state of the Panama Continent over the state of the Earth. The sense of adventure and discovery had long but gone in the twenty-first century of his previous life.

Back on Earth, not only had all land been discovered, but it had been scrupulously mapped down to every street, and that map was accessible to everyone who could access the internet. Even if one tried their best, it was difficult to feel a sense of adventure in such circumstances.

However, the same wasn't true for the Panama Continent. An extremely minute proportion of elite entities and forces possess a map of the entirety of the Panama Continent. Rui knew that the Kandrian Empire was certainly one. It probably meant that the other three powerhouses also possessed that information.

The same could be said for the Shionel Confederation.

('Actually, I suppose it only applies to Guildmaster Bradt, not the Shionel Confederation as a whole,') Rui mused.

Regardless, the fact that so few possessed a map of the entire continent showed how scarce that information was, and it also meant that a sense of adventure was still very much present in this wide and vast world.

Rui was quite happy to be able to experience it. The two of them had come across all kinds of places in their travels, although they probably hadn't discovered anything that hadn't been long since discovered and known by humans, still, it was quite thrilling nonetheless.

Many days later, they had finally been able to spot the floating island.

"Is that...?" Kane squinted as he peered off into the horizon.

"Seems like it," Rui nodded. "Because the island is at such a height above sea level, it can be seen far before the Kaddar Region would be."

It was still just a small spec in the distance, yet it was clearly hovering above the horizon. It was a fascinating sight to see despite the fact that they hadn't gotten there.

"How is it doing that...?" Kane murmured, staring at it with interest as it got bigger.

"Apparently the core of the island is made up of some really strange esoteric substances weirdly," Rui was completely absorbed into it.

Unlike everybody else, he could sense the warps in space that constituted gravity. He was curious as to what his Riemannian Echo would sense from the island.

After that, it was merely a matter of time before they reached the Kaddar Region.

The Kaddar Region was a region that was densely packed with human civilization. Many nations occupied this little piece of the continent, and while they undoubtedly were in conflict with each other, if there was one issue that they were all united on, it was the matter of the floating Ajanta Island.

That island had to go, there was no doubt about that in any of their minds. However, it wasn't as though they could just deploy their Martial Squires and Seniors, as well as their long-range artillery weapons, and have them bombard the island with attacks, that was suicidal, the island would break and fall, with so much debris that it would be impossible to contain them.

The sheer impact would be devastating for the Kaddar Region.

They needed to take full control of the island, gently begin mining it delicately and extract the esoteric substance that made it float, before slowly letting the landmass down a good distance away from the Kaddar Region in an uninhabited region.

However, the damned Floating Sect refused to allow the nations of the Kaddar Region to do any of that. They were powerful enough to freeze any attempts to do so, which meant that the Kaddar Region needed to defeat the Floating Sect in order to do so.

However, it appeared that the Floating Sect's Martial prowess was great enough to be able to sustain their existence thus far.

('That's not the only reason,') Rui figured.

Another reason was that the Floating Sect had a huge strategic advantage. The fact that they were occupying the floating Ajanta Island meant that they were fighting down, while the nations of the Kaddar Region were fighting up.

Normally, they would simply be making a big target of themselves, but the Kaddar Region did not dare mindlessly launch attacks in the general region of the island, in fear of causing a destabilization that causes the island to break.

On the other hand, the Floating Sect had no problem launching attacks unrestrictedly at the nations of the Kaddar Region.

These advantages allowed the Floating Sect to sustain itself in addition to the inherent Martial power of the sect.

Rui's thoughts were interrupted as they finally neared the Kaddar Region.

"Alright stop," Rui froze in his tracks, decelerating quickly.

"What is it?" Kane frowned. "It's too early to eat."

"Not because of that," Rui explained. "But we ought not to enter the Kaddar Region."

"Why not?"

"Because we're going to be going to the Floating Sec," Rui explained. "Do you really think the nations of the Kaddar Region will peacefully let us go to our destination and watch while their enemies gain reinforcements?"

Kane realized what Rui was conveying. "That's sharp of you to realize. It would have been a mess if we tried going to the Floating Sect after entering the Kaddar Region.

#### Chapter 1035: Measures

One of the ways that the Kaddar Region could make life harder for the Floating Sect was by greatly reducing the number of initiates and reinforcements they gained from Martial Squires interested in training under the special circumstances of the floating Ajanta Island.

Rui hadn't received any information on this matter, however, he keenly analyzed the circumstances of the Kaddar nations and evaluated the probability of the nations taking measures to prevent more Martial Artists from joining the Floating Sect to be quite high.

"In other words, the test to join the Floating Sect probably begins even before we enter the island," Rui murmured.

From patrolling Martial Squires to long-range Squire-level artillery weapons poised to shoot down any floating figure that was ascending to the island, Rui could easily gain a good grasp of what they were dealing with.

What amused Rui, even more, was that he highly doubted that the Floating Sect was particularly irked about it either. In fact, there was a good chance that they welcomed it. After all, the Martial Squires who were unable to get past a patrol, or were too scared to even try were simply not material for the Floating Sect. They would never be able to become a member of the Floating Sect even if they did everything in their meager power.

It made their lives easier because it probably reduced the number of challenges they got at any given time, making managing challenges to be easy.

However, it was not enough to stop Rui and Kane, not even close.

"It's time to use Void Step once more," Rui remarked, turning to Kane.

"Easy peasy," He smirked.

He put his hand on Rui's shoulder as he breathed deeply, activating the technique. Rui couldn't help but marvel at the technique each time he saw it. As amazing as Kane's Fulminata technique was, his Void Step technique was what was truly sublime in Rui's opinion. It could essentially erase them from everybody's eyes and did not have a limit to the number of people it could affect either.

Since Kane wasn't actively manipulating people's minds, he was misdirecting their attention with his movements in the opposite direction of the direction that they were traveling, making people who saw it completely miss him subconsciously.

The two of them straightforwardly sky-walked towards the island. While Kane focused on the technique, Rui focused all his senses outwards, extremely alert. The sheer range that he gained from Riemannian Echo and Tempestuous Feel was great, furthermore, his Primordial Instinct was at its peak alertness.

He was looking to see if he could sense any Senior-level threats. His senses were extremely sharp, and it was too impossible for a patrolling Martial Senior to somehow miss his triggering all kinds of alarm bells in his head.

What he did find was what he had expected; multiple Martial Squires patrolling the skies. He hadn't spotted them when he was on the ground because he was too far from the island, but they were actually easy to spot. They weren't trying to hide at all, in fact, they were making sure to display themselves more openly.

('Deterrence is a far better option than ambushing,')

Deterrence minimized the amount of Martial Squires that joined the Floating Sect without incurring too many losses, however, ambushes would most certainly cost more as the rate of conflict would be near one hundred percent.

The island grew larger as the two of them got closer to it, it was roughly the size of a large town or a small city, with a flat surface while the side facing the ground was roughly hemispherical.

It made Rui incredibly curious as to how the island had come to float, but that was not something he wanted to ponder at the moment.

His Riemannian Echo began picking up extremely interesting readings from the island.

('Incredible...') Rui's eyes widened. ('The space curvature around the island is extremely abnormal!!')

It was as though the island curved and warped space only in part, on its surface. It was as though all the gravitation force that it experienced from the planet had all been absorbed and then used to create an enormously dense gravitational field atop the surface, where the space curvature created a titanic amount of gravitational force!

The force grew stronger at the center of the island than it was in the distant edges, Rui suspected that that meant that training at the center of the island was more sought after. He wasn't sure.

Soon enough, they had reached.

The two of them appeared out of thin air as they finally completed their travel.

And they could already sense it.

The world was different.

They felt as though they had gone back to being normal humans again, almost.

It was as if shackles had wrapped around their bodies, pulling them down. It was as though they were carrying the weight of the sky.

The air was extremely heavy, it stung their eyes and burdened their bodies. Every breath was laborious, they felt as though they had to pump air into their lungs.

Yet their eyes widened when they inhaled.

An incredibly fulfilling and uplifting sensation had passed through their body. A feeling of deep satisfaction permeated through their body with every labored breath they undertook.

It was almost addictive.

Before Rui could even gather his thoughts, a person had appeared before them.

A Martial Squire.

Of course, it was a Martial Artist, for even the strongest of humans would die before their brains could even begin to process it.

"Ho..." A deeply masculine voice reverberated through the ocean of air. "Not a single scratch on either of you like I'd heard. Impressive."

His body was diminutive, contradicting the image that his voice painted. Yet Rui was quite wary of him. Just a single glance, a single feel with his senses was enough for him to know.

This man was a grade-nine Martial Squire.

"It seems we have promising initiates," He remarked as he walked over.

"...You are?" Rui narrowed his eyes.

"I am Squire Veenioen," He replied. "The guardian of the Thirty-Sixth Chamber of the Floating Sect. The Floating Sect welcomes you to Ajanta Island."

#### Chapter 1036: Chambers

Rui paused for a moment while his mind furiously processed all the information that he had obtained in the last ten seconds.

Someone came to greet them almost immediately after Void Step had been undone. However, given that Rui had only sensed his approach before the exact moment that the Void Step technique had been undone, it meant that they had been sensed by someone who was able to observe them despite Kane's Void Step. This was also supported by the fact that the Martial Squire noted that he was told that they were unharmed.

That was unnerving.

It was the work of an exceptionally high-grade sensory Martial Artist with powerful senses, or grade-ten sensory techniques, or more likely...

('A Martial Senior,') Rui's eyes narrowed. ('Tentative conclusion: A Martial Senior is most likely always surveilling Ajanta Island and, more importantly, its surrounding air space. However, that also means that...')

It also meant that the island almost certainly had more than one Martial Senior for it to be able to afford such extravagant protection. Rui was relatively confident that there had to be at least three Martial Seniors!

The fact that they went through the efforts to go through such measures had even more implications for their experiences and circumstances. However, Rui was more focused on the man before them.

He was exceptionally powerful without a doubt. He would have been a star had he formed a party in the Shionel Dungeon raids.

He mentioned that he was the guardian of the thirty-sixth chamber.

Rui did not know what that meant.

Unfortunately, unlike the prior places that they had visited, the information about what exactly went on atop the island was extremely scarce. This was unlike the Umiana Trench where Rui could easily dig up more information about it just by talking to the locals and the natives.

The reason for that was that no human had ever set foot atop the island, and the only ones that entered and left were Martial Squires. The ones that returned were either Martial Artists who had succeeded in joining the Floating Sect and had rigorously trained in a successful relationship with the Sect and had no desire of selling the Sect.

There were wimps who had merely stepped on the island, refused the challenge, and left.

There were none who actually lost the challenge and returned because everybody who lost the challenge died.

Victory by death, or it was a loss. Thus the defending Martial Artists were ruthless and eliminated their challengers.

That was why Rui had absolutely zero context on what the man meant by 'chamber', but he could take a guess.

('He's stronger, but he said he's the guardian of the thirty-sixth chamber. It can be conjectured that strength inversely correlates with the number, thus a smaller number would correlate with stronger Martial Artist,') Rui's eyes narrowed.

He also couldn't help but think about a certain movie that came to mind when he thought about those words.

"Uh... Thanks," Kane scratched his head. "I dunno what's going on, but what do we do to train on this island?"

Sometimes Rui appreciated Kane's approach.

"There are a limited number of training avenues on this island known as 'chambers'," The man explained. "The chambers are large and rigorously include all manners of training Martial Art of all kinds. Training outside the chamber is prohibited because it risks destabilizing the island outside of the chambers that were built to protect the island's bedrock from the power of Martial Squires."

He paused for a moment, before continuing. "Thus, if you wish to train on this island, you need a chamber. If you want a chamber, you need to officially challenge any Martial Squire occupying a chamber to a death match and win by eliminating the defender, then you may occupy their chamber after becoming a part of the Floating Sect."

Rui's thoughts were more or less on the ball.

"Come," The man calmly instructed them. "You must be wary from your travels, furthermore, this new environment must surely be jarring and disconcerting. You may stay in the outer ring as a guest of the Floating Sect. More will be explained in time.

He immediately began walking away, and Rui and Kane quickly followed him as they tried to adapt to their new circumstances.

"You mentioned a numbered chamber," Rui prodded him. "Does that correlate with Martial prowess? If it does, does that mean some chambers are better than others?"

The man wordlessly turned back as he glanced at Rui. "That is precisely correct. The infrastructure of the chambers is almost identical, however, what makes some better than others are their locations."

"Chambers that are deeper into the island are better due to the more extreme conditions of the island leading to more intense training," Rui realized.

"Correct," The man replied. "The two of you must have already realized, but the air here is more nourishing despite weighing down harder and making it harder to respire."

The two of them nodded as they still felt incredibly rich and empowering sensations each time they inhaled.

"Our Martial bodies..." Rui realized. "Our capacity to take in air and the capacity of our blood to carry air to the rest of our body is far greater than that of normal humans. This sensation is simply our blood nourishing our body with greater amounts of oxyge-ahem, air."

"Correct again," The man glanced at Rui, sizing him up briefly before turning back. "They do not yield any net boost to our short-term Martial prowess since the greatly increased effort it takes respire, as well as the corresponding resistive force and weight we experience negate the boost we get from the more nourishing atmosphere. But it does benefit the Martial body greatly in the long term."

That was truly alluring to Rui and Kane. At that moment, their motivation to become a part of the Floating Sect grew tenfold.

However, Rui was too cautious to get caught up in all of the hype, he wasn't committing to anything until he understood what he was getting into.

## Chapter 1037: Member

"What does it mean to be a part of the Floating Sect?" Rui asked cautiously. "What are the obligations and duties of a member? What are the rules?"

"Despite the name, the Floating Sect is not a singular cohesive group," The Martial Squire replied. "It is more of... an association of those bound by some mutual interests. As for duties and obligations, the biggest one is that you're obligated to fight to protect the Floating Sect from those that wish to destroy it in order to assume control over the island. You're also obligated to handle the initiation of newcomers every once in a while as I am doing to the two of you."

"...That's it?" Rui raised an eyebrow with suspicion.

"That's it," He replied. "Asides from that, you can train and live here for as long as you wish, assuming you can protect your chamber from those who seek to steal your position, and you follow the rules."

"Since only Martial Artists can step onto this island, how is the Sect maintained? With such infrastructure, as well as the acquisition of necessary goods and services, the training Martial Artists can't possibly undertake such duties themselves."

The Floating Sect sounded and looked like a place that was difficult to maintain. Furthermore, the chambers sounded like they were taxing facilities that most certainly required constant maintenance and supplies.

These were tasks that were maintained by logistical employees and specialists. They were not tasks for high-grade Martial Artists.

"The Floating Sect's management department is comprised of ordinary humans and enslaved Martial Squires," Squire Veelioen replied. "They handle all of the necessary tasks in this regard."

"Enslaved Martial Squires?" Rui's eyes narrowed.

"Yes," The man simply nodded. "Those that came here to undertake a challenge and failed, but were given a choice between death or servitude. Those that chose the latter became part of the staff."

"And how long is their bondage supposed to last?"

"Forever," He calmly answered. "Of course, they can end their servitude by trying to escape, in which case we will swiftly execute them before they are able to take a single step off the island."

"..."

It appeared that the Floating Sect was even more cutthroat than the Shionel Confederation but for Martial Artists as opposed to merchants.

"How do the human employees of the management department you mentioned survive in this environment?" Rui asked about another thing he had been curious about.

"There are specialized facilities and infrastructure that are meant to create a human-friendly environment. They also have access to special full-body suits that can temporarily allow them to step out of the human-friendly zones.," The man replied. "This is also something you need to keep in mind because causing damage to these particular facilities or to any human by mistake or by intention is punishable by death. Be sure to steer clear from them, both as a guest and as a member."

Rui could actually understand the rationale behind this strict rule.

Logistics, administration, and management were boring elements of any group or society that were overlooked, but they were actually extremely important.

This was especially true for the Floating Sect, whose foundation was unique and extreme due to their environment. It made the duties of the management department extremely important. If a clumsy Martial Artist caused damage to the personnel or the infrastructure that was needed to sustain them, then it could end up being quite crippling to the Floating Sect. Given that they were so isolated from the rest of human civilization, and even entering and leaving the Floating Sect was a challenge, it meant that if an emerging problem arose that couldn't be solved by the personnel and the resources on the island, fixing it would be extremely difficult.

That explained why the punishment for causing any problems to the management department as a Martial Artist at least was heavy. Especially when there were many Martial Squires that treated human life as worthless. Capital punishment was needed to get the message through to psycho Martial Artists.

"I've never heard about the enslavement part," Kane remarked.

"That's because not a single one of them has left Floating Sect ever since," The man smiled.

Soon enough, they arrived at a block of buildings.

"This is the initiate block," The man explained. "It is your housing, for the time being, you may stay here for about twenty days before you are to initiate a challenge, or you will be required to leave the Floating Sect."

It made sense to Rui that there was a time limit. Otherwise, someone would be able to stay in the initiate block indefinitely while benefitting from the environment and training all that time.

"The staff inside will help you with any of your needs," The man replied. "Inside each room is a booklet containing all the information you will need in order for your time here in the Floating Sect, and in your venture to become a member of the Floating Sect. If you have any further questions, you may contact the support staff, and they will alleviate them."

"Good luck," The man replied, before turning away and heading deeper into the island.

The two of them took a good look at the initiate block.

"Not exactly the most hospitable," Kane murmured.

"This isn't a resort," Rui huffed. "Let's get going."

The two of them entered the guest block's main entry. They were immediately greeted by reception staff equipped in what looked like futuristic space suits. The ones that Rui would constantly see in sci-fi movies that looked impractically small and perfectly sleek.

"Welcome to the initiate housing block of the Floating Sect," They bowed to the two of them with deference. "Please come this way so we may register a room for yourselves."

Rui studied the suit carefully. His scholar degree in general sciences combined with all he had learned on esoteric material sciences allowed him to get a better idea of how the suit functioned.

From what he could see, it relied on the same esoteric substance that made the island float.

Chapter 1038: Means

In fact, it seemed to employ the same principles that made the island float, to negate the island's gravity, allowing the humans inside the suit to experience normal gravity. It probably employed some esoteric substances that were highly phobic to gases to reduce the amount of air that entered the suit, ensuring that the pressure and density of air within the suit were normal.

It was a respectable engineering application of esoteric material science.

"May I know your names?" The staff member asked.

"Falken."

"Nake,"

Kane lazily switched around two consonants in his name, earning a disapproving glance from Rui.

"We don't have to provide identification verification, do we?" Rui asked.

"Correct sir, we do not demand identity proofs," She smiled as she proceeded along.

Rui had expected as much, even if it was still counter-intuitive as a person who was from Earth and had also lived his entire life in the Kandrian Empire.

Back on Earth, communication technology was so powerful and accessible, that it had spread across the entire world allowing all nations to create a universal system of passports, visas, and other forms of identity documentation. One could not travel to another nation without a passport which signified the native country's approval of the citizen leaving the country through an official channel, or without a visa, which signified the approval of the country that the person was traveling to. A complex web of protocols laid out through various international treaties allowed for a highly sophisticated system of identity and security verification and approval across the globe.

However, such a system was utterly impossible on the Panama Continent for the time being. The sheer communication technology and framework needed to create and support such a system was just impossible.

That was why most nations had a crude and unsophisticated system of protocols to handle immigration and emigration. They had no choice, there were no universal norms that could be relied upon. Far too many nations and states of human civilization lacked proper means of identification, and it was because there were far too many of them that it was impractical to bar them all.

It meant cutting away a lot of trade that was far too beneficial to the nation.

The Floating Sect wasn't in the same position, but they had their own reasons for lightening the requirements for entry. Many Martial Squires came to visit the Floating Ajanta Island from across the entire continent. They would be rejecting too many high-quality candidates if they demanded identity proof.

"That was super lax," Kane murmured, voicing his own thoughts on the matter. "How do they prevent the enemy Martial Squires from infiltrating the island with such lax conditions?"

That was actually a keen point to bring up.

"It's probably because they have information on all of the Martial Squires of the Kaddar Region that could infiltrate the Floating Sect," Rui replied.

"How is that the case?" Kane frowned.

"Given that the nations of the Kaddar Region are capped at Senior-level, it means every Martial Squire is prominent," Rui explained. "Even if the Floating Sect only knows their Martial Art and Paths, they will be able to weed them out."

"Ah," Kane understood what Rui was trying to convey. "Because the infiltrating Martial Squires cannot hide their Martial Art and Martial Paths if they don't want to die."

"Correct," Rui nodded. "Even if the nations of the Kaddar Region deploy high-grade Martial Squires, they will most certainly be killed in the challenge if they do not fight seriously. And when they fight seriously, they will be forced to expose their Martial Art and Martial Path, making it much easier for the Floating Sect to identify them. If I'm not wrong, it's likely that the Kaddar Region has lost powerful assets trying to infiltrate the Floating Sect, before they achieved any success. It is an extremely high-risk option. Still, I suspect that there will be additional security measures if we so succeed in our challenge and enter the Floating Sect."

"Oh, these are our rooms," Kane remarked as they reached the end of the corridor. "Let's get some rest, it has been a long day."

"Make sure to go through the rule book," Rui advised him.

"Yeah... no, I'd rather just have you read it and explain it to me," Rui closed his door with a resigned chuckle.

The hospitality was decent, and that was good enough, he didn't expect a five-star treatment or anything of that sort.

The bare furniture in the room seemed unaffected, but a quick sweep of the substances with his senses allowed him to analyze why they weren't succumbing to the pressure. The materials weren't all just

Squire-level, in fact, he recognized some of the esoteric substances to actually be Apprentice-level with his newfound knowledge in esoteric material science.

They were employed in brilliant ways to handle the enhanced gravity and air pressure. The enhanced gravity was countered by esoteric substances that bolstered evenly distributed pillars made up of esoteric alloys. While the air pressure was actually more complicated. The furniture was actually filled with a powerful esoteric gas known as calconogen that exerted a tremendous amount of pressure disproportionate to its temperature or volume, countering the extreme air pressure from the outside.

A simple yet sublime solution, one that even nature applied. Many creatures that existed at the bottom of the ocean many kilometers underwater were able to survive due to having a remarkable amount of internal pressure that countered the external pressure.

In fact, even normal humans possessed a similar mechanism that allowed them to withstand standard air pressure without even feeling it.

He began noticing these small things that he previously ignored due to not having the background and foundation to not entirely understand. It made sense that esoteric material science was at the forefront of research across the entirety of human civilization, it was also true that it had more potential than other fields of science as far as harnessing more power. It made Rui understand how technology is able to keep up with Martial Art.

#### Chapter 1039: Potential

Rui now had a unique perspective as a Martial Squire decently knowledgeable on esoteric material science. Furthermore, his background in physics also enabled him to gain a far better understanding of the ways that esoteric substances and materials could be applied in technology.

All he could say was that he now truly understood how esoteric military technology was able to keep up with Martial Art, even if just barely. These esoteric substances were capable of some truly astonishing things, and if applied and engineered properly, could provide great results.

Furthermore, these were just ordinary esoteric substances and alloys, he couldn't even imagine what the high-grade esoteric substances were capable of.

For instance, he wouldn't be surprised if there were esoteric substances out there that had the power to annihilate mountains, or perhaps even more.

Still, he was rooting for Martial Art to maintain its superiority, more than anybody else. However, he understood the potential of science, probably more than anybody else on the continent.

The human civilization of Earth did not have access to these wonders of nature. They were limited to more ordinary substances instead. However, despite these limitations, the human civilization of Earth had accomplished wonders using technology. He knew the power of technology better than anyone else, as well as the power of science.

In his opinion, it was merely a matter of time before esoteric substances and materials ceased being so 'esoteric'. The scientific community would fully understand them, and they would no longer be esoteric.

At that time, the full might of these substances would be harnessed, and technology would unleash a level of power, unlike anything that the world had ever seen, unlike anything he had ever seen.

At that time, he didn't know if Martial Art would be able to keep up. This directly affected him as a Martial Artist.

Previously, he wouldn't have been nearly as concerned. For he used to solely pursue Martial Art for the sake of Project Water.

However, ever since the fiasco in the Shionel Confederation where he had been forced to make some extremely painful decisions, he had learned the feeling of the plight of the weak in a fantastical, but equally cruel world.

He had developed a genuine hunger for power for the first time. Although he still mostly focused on developing his Martial Art and realizing his greatest ambition across lifetimes, he was more concerned with power.

He hadn't forgotten that he had a timer. It had already been a year since they had left the Shionel Confederation, which meant that he only had nine years left to go before the protection of his family was up.

Of course, he had made significant gains in the past year, and had most certainly grown stronger, it didn't mean he was anywhere near how strong he was to whatever he wanted to be.

However, he had high hopes for the Floating Sect and the Floating Ajanta Island. The sheer pressure that they put on Martial Artists stimulated a tremendous amount of growth from the Martial Artists, causing them to train like their lives were on the line.

And they were, if one wanted to continue training that was. Challenges were won and lost by death, thus every challenger duel was a death match where only one person could live unless the Floating Sect needed more slaves.

He glanced at a small book placed on the table before reaching out to grab it and give it a read. He had sort of broken the rules in the Uminana Trench and had gotten a simple warning from a Martial Senior.

Here, there were no warnings for major violations, it was simply death. That was the kind of world that he was dealing with at the moment.

The book first went into more basic information about the Floating Sect.

There were a thousand and three chambers in the Floating Sect, a thousand of which housed a Martial Squire each that served as the guardian of the chamber. The thousand guardians were divided into ten classes, each class containing one hundred Martial Squires. The tenth class contained the top hundred Martial Squires of the Floating Sect, while the first class contained the weakest hundred. The number of the class correlated with the percentile of the Martial Artists of that class relative to all Martial Squires.

Challengers were allowed to challenge any guardian from any chamber. However, they didn't get to observe the guardians ahead of time to pick and choose the guardian that they were most comfortable fighting after spending a lot of time observing them.

That gave the challengers far too much of an advantage.

Rui was mildly resentful of the rule since it meant that he wouldn't be able to prepare predictive models ahead of time but he quickly put that mindset aside.

The real world wasn't kind enough to allow him to construct predictive models before every fight. Power obtained through immense targeted preparation was not true power. Rui did not want to be selectively strong against some opponents.

He wanted to be strong against everybody and everything.

Furthermore, even if he took down a strong guardian with the help of a prepared predictive model, he would put himself in a dangerous predicament where he wouldn't have predictive models against those who challenged him.

That meant he would have to contend with a level of strength that was perhaps above what he was capable of, meaning that he would probably die.

('I want a powerful foundation and a rock solid Martial Art, not just some elaborate preparations,') Rui narrowed his eyes.

It was one thing to employ such means against the Root to complete an established goal, but it made no sense to do so even when training to become stronger, it would only get in the way of real progress.

At the moment, from what Rui could see, it was probably best for them to take on the lowest class to be safe. He didn't know how strong they were, but given how ruthless the system was, he highly doubted whether there was even a single non-high-grade Martial Squire.

#### Chapter 1040: Conditions

The Shionel Confederation exposed Rui to the powerhouses of the Squire Realm across the east side of the Panam Continent. He had thoroughly memorized the sensation of Martial Artists of various grades.

That was he could tell that Squire Veelioen was a grade-nine Martial Squire, and a particularly formidable one. He probably wasn't that far from being considered grade-ten, and the difference between genuine grade-ten Martial Squires wasn't large enough to allow them to dominate him in a fight.

He exuded a calm sense of power and security in his mannerisms, Rui was quite curious to see him fight, heck, he'd like to fight him as well.

Given that he was the guardian of the thirty-sixth chamber, it meant that there were thirty-five Martial Squires that were stronger than him. With such a number, Rui had no doubt that the top Martial Squires undoubtedly were grade-ten Martial Squires.

Rui had already decided to start off with the lower end of the spectrum before moving up to higher chambers in his time in the Floating Sect.

With that aside, he quickly skimmed through the additional information provided in the book.

"Oh...? Duels will occur under standard gravitational and atmospheric standards, it seems" Rui raised an eyebrow. "That's interesting."

Rui was surprised, he had thought that the battles would occur under normal circumstances, but apparently, he was wrong.

In hindsight though, it made sense. The entire world experienced normal air pressure and gravitation, it made no sense to train to battle in an environment that simply did not exist almost anywhere else in the world.

It reminded all the guardians to constantly keep in touch with normal environmental conditions in order to make sure they never grew to become unaccustomed to the normal world.

Rui heaved a sigh of relief. He was a little worried about the terrain advantage that guardians would undoubtedly have if a battle ensued under the extreme conditions of Ajanta Island.

The guardians, having spent a lot of time under these conditions, would undoubtedly be very familiar with it. He would definitely have an incredibly hard time against them under such circumstances.

However, if the battles occurred under normal circumstances, he would be a lot more confident.

"Guardians are not allowed to refuse a challenge if they haven't accepted a challenge in the prior ten days..." Rui murmured as he read through the rules with interest. "So they can't just get away with not accepting. They'll have to fight once every ten days if they're inundated with challenges."

The ten-day rule was to ensure that guardians couldn't just hang on to their chamber by refusing all challenges. However, it also ensured that they weren't bombarded with challenges, being forced to fight once every ten days was just the right frequency to keep guardians on their toes without taking away much time from their training.

Ultimately, Martial Artists came to the floating Ajanta Island to train, if that purpose could not be accomplished then there was no point in entering the Floating Sect.

Rui could easily imagine that the lowest class of guardians received the most challenges for the same reason that Rui chose to go with the lower classes. If they were not allowed to ever refuse a challenge, they would never be able to train.

"Interesting that the guardians themselves don't have to die if they lose a match in a challenge against other guardians," Rui murmured.

He could already figure out why this wasn't the case with the guardians. It was to ensure that they were never too scared to challenge and risk death against stronger opponents perhaps when they already had access to a good training avenue.

Removing the necessity of death in duels between guardians at this stage incentivized them to challenge higher-class guardians for their chamber, ensuring that no guardians grew too comfortable in their chambers since they were all too afraid of each other.

With such conditions, there was most likely a constant reshuffling and updating of the ranks of guardians through the thousand chambers.

It meant that the current ranking was most likely extremely meritocratic and an updated ranking of all one thousand Martial Squires.

"Oh?" Rui's eyes lit up in interest. "It seems as though all challenges are publically viewable. That does benefit the challengers more than the guardians."

However, he supposed it could be beneficial for guardians as well when he considered the fact that guardians could observe each other's progress and capabilities.

"So they're incentivizing gauging your opponents before challenging them," Rui murmured.

He wasn't sure that he wanted to do that, because while others could make minute preparations, he did a lot more. He elevated his effective power by several grades depending on how intimately he was aware of his opponents.

He had already resolved not to rely on the pattern recognition systems to build robust predictive models ahead of time in order to gain a level of strength he didn't have due to how dangerous it was.

He didn't want to end up with a level of power that he could not muster when someone he didn't know challenged him.

('No rigorous pattern recognition, then,') Rui resolved.

There were more rules and guidelines, but they were more detailed stuff such as some regulations to make sure that the duel was completely fair, etc.

"Nake," Rui said after knocking on his door, remembering to use his lazy fake alias.

"What is it, Falken?" Kane emphasized Rui's alias in turn.

"Let's go check out the schedule for upcoming challenges," Rui mentioned. "I want to see what kind of caliber of Martial Squires we're going to have to pit ourselves against."

Kane opened the door. "That actually sounds like a fun idea. I was getting bored of the rulebook."

"I hope you read through it all."

"Lazy skimming is what I did, but I did lazily skim through all of it, but the retention was rather low, so I'm going to have to rely on your big brain to make things make sense," Kane yawned.