

Martial Unity 1041

Chapter 1041: Played

The two of them quickly scuttled over to the dueling colosseum. Rui had to admit that it was definitely bigger than he had expected it to be. It took up a portion of the entire floating island, and was much more than even a kilometer in diameter!

('This is the kind of arena that is fit to host Squire-level battles,') Rui noted.

Martial Squires, particularly higher-grade Martial Squires were capable of unleashing immense force. An ordinary colosseum would simply be destroyed and ravaged by a single Squire-level battle, let alone a whole series of them.

Furthermore, a smaller colosseum would be a disservice to long-range Martial Squires who required range. Thus, this sort of colosseum was necessary to do justice to Martial Squires of all ranges. Given that these challenges decided which one of the combatants survived, they could not unfairly benefit one kind of Martial Squire more than the other.

Soon enough, they entered the colosseum, passing through a section that isolated the inside from the outside.

"Woah."

The two of them flew up into the air involuntarily once they returned back to normal gravity. The abrupt shift caused them to use too much force, launching a dozen meters into the air. Breathing also became significantly easier, but each breath was light and shallow, momentarily giving Rui the illusion of suffocation before he returned to normal.

The colosseum was a gigantic dome isolated from the outside, and the number of people watching was not few.

Rui could see many Martial Squires seated across the entire structure. Many of them wore different Martial attires of different kinds.

('They are initiates that are scouting the competition,') Rui mused.

That was obvious enough, but he was surprised that there weren't just a few Martial Squires that wore Martial attires with the emblem of the Floating Sect on it.

It appeared that guardians too were weary of each other's progress.

"Oh, looks like we just made it in time for a match," Kane remarked.

Rui turned his attention to the battle arena, paying attention to the individuals that stood before each other.

The guardian that wore the Martial attire of the Floating Sect was a mid-weight woman, while the initiate challenging her was a burly heavyweight man.

"Take your stances," A Martial Squire serving as the arbiter of the match instructed.

The woman balled her fists, pointing both of them toward her opponent. Her right arm was coiled to her side, with her fist tucked at her waist ready to lash out to launch a weighted blow.

Her other fist was before, also pointed toward her opponent.

('Sort of like a classical boxing stance,') Rui mused as he glanced at her Martial body with interest.

The obvious conclusion was that she was an offensive striker, yet when Rui observed her Martial body, he couldn't help but feel that this was the wrong conclusion. She didn't have a Martial body that looked like it was tailored for boxing-style combat.

Rui frowned as he noticed an oddity. ('Her joints... is that conditioning?')

Simultaneously, her opponent had taken his stance too. Guessing his Martial Path was much simpler. He was a power-oriented Martial Artist with a strong lean towards striking.

('Probably a Martial Art that is centered on drawing power from that ridiculously big gut of his.

His abs were so big, they were popping out of his belly like biceps. Rui couldn't even guess the sheer amount of power and torque he could generate, most likely he would be able to match Rui's strikes without even using any Martial Art techniques.

('They're both high-grade Martial Squires without a doubt.

"Begin!"

The battle had begun.

"RAAAAARGH!" The man roared in stereotypical caveman fashion as he raged forward toward her, swinging his barreling arms toward her with tremendous force.

Yet it was the woman who surprised him.

His eyes widened as she launched a strike to clash with that of her opponent, much to his shock. ('What?')

BOOM!!

The woman went flying backward skidding while the man was unmatched. He grinned as he rushed forward ready to pummel her with another strike.

Much to everyone's surprise, she rushed forward as well, balling her fist to clash with her one more time.

"Stupid," Kane murmured. "She's clearly losing the striking game, she should fight more intelligently than just try to match him where she's at her strongest."

Kane expected Rui to agree, but the latter narrowed his eyes as he wordlessly stared at her.

BAM!!!

She once more got overwhelmed as she got pushed back.

This continued without stopping. Each time the man swing, she chose to attack him head-on, and each time she got pushed back. The battle almost became monotonous as many of the initiates laughed at the woman.

Yet Rui simply stared at her with hawk eyes as realization dawned on him.

The man, on the other hand, stopped grinning as his mouth curled as though he was in pain.

He balled and joined his hands as he swung them down on her. Yet again, she refused to dodge, instead balling up in a shield.

BOOM!!!

The entire colosseum shook as even the powerful esoteric substances that formed the ground of the arena broke!

"Hah, is this a guardian? What a disgrace!"

"Idiot, I thought she would definitely fight smarter than that caveman oaf."

"She's definitely done after that one."

"Remarkable," Rui murmured with a knowing smile.

The dust cleared, revealing a very much intact woman beneath the gigantic fists of the man.

What shocked everyone was the pained expression on his face.

As well as the swelling on the man's wrists.

"Rgh!" The man stumbled backward in pain as he glanced at his wrists which were red and purple.

"What?!" Everybody was surprised at why the man seemed to have taken damage despite being the one to pummel down on her.

"Hahaha," Rui couldn't help but laugh. "He played himself. She's going to win this fight, he underestimated the power of a guardian."

"Wait, what the heck just happened?" Kane demanded an explanation.

Chapter 1042: Conclusion

"She was about to get absolutely flattened by an attack that she couldn't handle... But then somehow the man took damage and backed off," Kane murmured, confused. "Is that poison, is she a poison-user?"

The others that heard Kane's speculation seemed to be inclined to agree. It made sense, this kind of delayed damage that was inflicted without strikes and collisions was characteristic of poison techniques.

"Not at all," Rui shook his head with an amused smile. "He just hurt himself."

"Huh?" Kane tilted his head.

"Take a look at her joints and bones," Rui gestured with his head.

Kane turned back with furrowed eyebrows, scrutinizing her body. "They're a much darker skin tone than the rest of her body, they also seem rougher and thicker... They're conditioned?"

"Correct," Rui nodded. "The weak point of the skeletal structure of the human, as well as a Martial body are the joints. Joints are easier to break than bones. She simply exploited that principle to inflict damage on him using his own power."

"I don't follow, how can she even do that?"

Rui paused for a moment as he considered how to explain it. "You can think of the skeleton as a chain. The human body passes power through each bone all the way to the fists and the knuckles that serve as the point of transfer of any impact of a punch. It's a chain that carries over the power of an impact. This is similar to a chain pulling an object where the force passes from the first link to the last link until it reaches the object, pulling it along. However, what if there was a weak link among all these links that couldn't withstand the force applied?"

"It would... break."

"Correct," Rui nodded. "What she is doing is essentially removing the weak links from her chain, so that the weak links in his chains will break first in a tug of war. It doesn't matter how much force he applies, human level, Squire level, or even infinite force. The weakest link will always break first in a tug of war, and the weakest links are all in his chain."

Kane's eyes widened as he understood the analogy. "So the clashes between their fists are like a tug of war but in the opposite direction. Both of their joints are experiencing the stress from their clash, but her conditioned joints stay strong causing his joints to take all the damage."

Rui nodded. "Ordinarily, the joints of both fighters will share the strain from the clash, meaning there is no difference. But in this case, it causes a collision where joints take all the strain because hers don't. When he swung down on her, she simply guarded because his wrist was weaker than her rock-solid

guard, meaning his wrist took damage before her guard, causing him to take more damage as a result. It was like trying to break a rock by hitting it with a glass rod, the glass is always breaking first no matter what."

It was a simple principle that exploited collision mechanics, yet it was quite remarkable. By conditioning not just her bones to be rock solid, but her joints to be equally tough, she could ensure that the clash would do the most damage to his joints than anything else.

('I knew she wasn't an offensive striker. She's actually a conditioning-oriented counter-offensive specialist,') Rui mused. ('And she's going to win this battle.')

BAM BAM BAM!!

The man tried different kinds of strikes to see if he could bypass her strangely painful defenses. He even tried bull charging with his entire body, yet she keenly struck back, causing sharp intense pain to his joints.

CRACK!

His shoulder dislocated when he threw a wild haymaker. She swiftly rushed forward, throwing a flurry of strikes at his shoulder, exacerbating the problem.

The rest of the fight was brutal. Rui and Kane watched as she utterly beat the man black and blue, breaking his joints one by one, before then breaking his bones.

CRACK!

A heavy blow to the head launched him across the battle arena, smashing him against the wall, as he collapsed to the ground unconscious, bleeding profusely.

She didn't even bother finishing him off.

It was only a few minutes later after the man breathed his final breath that the battle was declared over.

She simply left the arena expressionlessly. Rui watched her with a raised eyebrow.

('She's worthy of being a guardian,')

She ultimately did not even take any meaningful damage despite facing a high-grade power-oriented Martial Artist head-on. That was an extremely remarkable feat that put her above ordinary high-grade Martial Squires.

The fact that she was among the tenth class of guardians showed that the Floating Sect guardians were elites even among the upper echelons of the Squire Realm. Rui wondered what kind of guardian the number one ranked guardian of the Floating Sect was like. He couldn't even imagine how strong he or she was.

Rui glanced back at the arena as he considered his prospects against the two that just fought. They were much closer to him than the number-one-ranked Martial Squire of the island.

Against the deceased man, he would probably fight like Kane. Evading the man's haymakers was pretty easy with his capabilities, and exploiting the opening that he created to pepper him with blows.

Alternatively, he would also be able to blast him away from a distance with powerful attacks, although that was sub-optimal because his long-range attacks consumed more energy than his close-range strikes.

His guardian opponent on the other hand was much trickier, but he didn't think he couldn't win, not at all. It made him confident that he could get into the ten class of the Floating of the Sect, and bag a lower chamber. He just wanted to find an apt opponent without growing too reliant on the pattern recognition system.

"We're going to watch all fights that occur in this colosseum till the final date, and then pick candidates based on all of that," Rui remarked.

Chapter 1043: Criteria

Rui realized that the Floating Sect was probably the most elite group of Martial Squires for their size anywhere on the continent. The Shionel Dungeon had attracted a lot of powerful Martial Squires, but too many of them weren't high-grade.

Here, however, just reaching here required fighting off multiple Martial Squires.

Furthermore, those who were actually members of the Floating Sect had challenged and killed high-grade Martial Squires. Furthermore, they also killed all those who challenged them without even a single failure.

They were elites among elite Martial Artists with consistent formidability.

It reflected over the next few days as they witnessed challenges between initiates and guardians.

Not a single initiate won.

Rui was quite surprised. He expected that at least a few would be able to succeed. Yet each guardian stood their ground, gaining victory one way or another.

It made sense, of course. In order to stay as a guardian for long, it required surviving challenge after challenge for extended periods of time.

It required being unable to be taken down by most people who came to challenge a Martial Squire.

It wasn't until Rui's eight-day that he finally saw an initiate succeed. A swift offensive maneuvering Martial Artist took down a defensive Martial Artist, claiming her nine hundred and ninety-second chamber for himself.

('A formidable grade-eight Martial Artist was the eighth weakest Martial Artist in the entirety of the island,') Rui sighed, impressed.

The population distribution of the ten grades of the Squire Realm was a sharp and exponentially declining curve. Most Martial Squires were low-grade, some Martial Squires mid-grade, and very few Martial Squires were high-grade.

The reason for that was that simply mastering existing techniques did not make Martial Squires too much stronger.

Affinities between the technique and the Martial Art, Path, and the Martial body were the three most important variables to the power that a Martial Art technique gave a Martial Squire in combat.

An overwhelming majority of Squire-level techniques were overwhelmingly lacking in having an affinity with all three due to the Martial body's spec configuration being unique and different from the normal human body. It was the difference in comfort and aesthetics between a custom-tailored suit versus an ordinary suit that wasn't even the same size or for the same gender as the person in question. The latter was far inferior to the former.

Fewer and fewer Martial Squires possessed the drive and the brilliance to come up with techniques that were both individualistic and compatible with their Martial Art, Path, and body.

It was why very few Martial Squires that came to the Floating Sect were even qualified to challenge guardians, and even fewer possessed the power to take one down.

However, Rui hadn't just spent all those days watching entertaining fights. He had been taking notes on the various guardians that he witnessed fighting. Although he abstained from employing the VOID algorithm's pattern recognition, he still made sure to thoroughly analyze the strengths and weaknesses of their style.

Much to his dismay, there were very few weaknesses. Martial Artists of this caliber were simply strong all around even if there were specialists.

The few extreme specialists that did have shortcomings were so incredibly strong in their chosen field that their strength outshined their weaknesses!

"Alright," Kane told him one day. "I've made my decision. I'm going to fight him."

Kane gestured to a guardian who had just won a challenge.

Squire Heviluo.

The man was a hyper-offensive long-range Martial Squire that sniped his opponent from a distance, his only shortcoming was that he was lacking close range.

"Don't underestimate him," Rui warned him. "His long-range offense truly is amazing, and I know he hasn't shown everything he can do in this fight."

"Yeah, I'll keep that in mind."

Rui was understandably concerned. The man had displayed long-range offensive prowess that significantly surpassed Rui, he had a wider range, and his normal offensive power was as good as Rui's tier-four Transverse Resonance.

That was quite surprising to Rui, it also meant that he could probably kill Kane with a single attack, and that was why he was concerned about Kane.

However, he didn't think Kane's confidence was unfounded, or that his decision was foolish, which is why he didn't stop him either. He knew how strong Kane had gotten recently, and it was certainly not something he could dismiss. He had the capital to challenge Squire Heviluo.

"Have you made up your mind yet?" Kane asked.

"...Not yet, but I have narrowed it down," Rui remarked.

There were several guardians who he found easier to adapt to than others, and he was definitely going to pick his pick among them. He had no intention of pointlessly giving his opponent an advantage in a death match.

There were several things that made adaptation to a style easier than others, and one of them was whether a particular style had a distinct disadvantage or shortcoming or not. All-rounders were much harder to be able to adapt to because their weaknesses weren't obvious, and Rui needed to pay attention to their capabilities and pick the best way to handle each one individually.

That was why his list of potential guardians to challenge were people whose weaknesses and shortcomings were self-evident. He would be able to adapt to them much quicker than normal, allowing him to put up a dominant display.

He also wanted a battle that wouldn't last very long, it was simply not in his interests to get into a prolonged battle that would allow all the challengers watching to get a good grasp of his techniques and his movements.

Though it was inevitable, he was not looking forward to contending with people who had more information on him than he had on them. That was why another condition was an opponent against whom he would need to use a minimal amount of techniques.

With these conditions, he had narrowed it down to just a handful of Martial Artists, after that, it was just a matter of refining his plan.

Chapter 1044: Begin

The days went by quickly and eventually, Kane's match rolled up. Ten days passed by very quickly.

"Relax, you'll do just fine," Rui reassured him. "Your plan is solid."

"Fuuu..." He exhaled deeply as he tried relaxing his nerves.

It wasn't every day that he was to compete in a death match where only one person was allowed to come out alive. This was not the same as risking his life on a mission or on the battlefield.

As an evasive maneuverer, he had great confidence in his ability to evade danger and death by simply removing himself from a given circumstance or situation. He was extremely fast and nimble, and it was difficult for people to tag him.

This gave him comfort and reassurance at the back of his mind.

However, in this particular circumstance, he could not run away and remove himself from this particular circumstance. Once he stepped into it, it was already too late. He would need to kill his opponent.

"It's time," Rui mentioned.

Kane nodded wordlessly as he loosened his joints, heading out of his quarters and towards the dueling colosseum.

"Good luck," Rui wished him one last time as the two of them split up

The spectators watched as he entered the arena, heading towards the arbiter of the match. Rui was quite nervous, but the rest of the colosseum did not echo his emotions, this was just another ordinary match to them.

Soon enough, Squire Heviluo also arrived.

He stepped up before Kane, locking eyes with him with a cold stare.

It couldn't be helped. Challenges from initiates were no different from a declaration of the intent to kill. The man was not going to interact with someone who had expressed the desire to kill him.

"Initiate Nake has challenged the nine-hundred and seventy-ninth guardian Heviluo," The arbiter announced. "Starting distance has been deemed to be fifty meters."

The Floating Sect handled the starting conditions of the duels in an interesting fashion. The Martial Squires were to give the range at which they would want the battle to begin, and the average distance

of the distance that they stated would be used as the range at which the battle would begin, in order to give both combatants as close to an equal starting as possible.

The average of their starting distances had come out to be fifty, which was not ideal, but not too bad for either side.

"Take your stances," The arbiter instructed.

Kane lightly hopped on his feet while his arms were loosely at his side, the man, on the other hand, inhaled deeply as he prepared a powerful punch with his right arm curled and wound back with his fist balled.

"Begin!"

Kane disappeared into thin air.

Void Step had been activated, and no one could sense Kane anymore. It was at times like this that Rui was reminded of the true power of the Void Step technique. Because of how useless it was against him, it was easy to forget it. But, when he looked at the reactions that the others had, it was a good reminder that the technique truly was grade-ten.

POW!

The confused man felt an impact on his body that didn't even hurt, it felt like a child hitting him. Yet his body shivered as he felt a deep sense of danger. He immediately cocked his head back.

SCRATCH

Kane's piercing technique just barely missed his eyes, instead causing him to have a skin cut above his forehead.

('Remarkable instincts to recognize the danger despite his consciousness being unable to detect pain,')
Rui raised an eyebrow.

The subconscious sense of self-preservation was the strongest, and it certainly was true even for the Martial body. It was easy for Kane to fool the ordinary senses of Martial Squires and even many of the techniques that they had to run circles around them, but when it came to more abstract senses like that it was much harder.

In the Shionel Dungeon, Kane had been able to get away with it because the Shionel Dungeon greatly hampered all senses even further, but Martial Squires was not to be trifled with when the sense of self-preservation was triggered. It was not something that could be misdirected entirely.

The man immediately leaped back as he covered his vitals, making sure that Kane couldn't hurt them. The previous two attacks had shown him that Kane's offense was not impressive. It was actually startlingly weak, he hadn't even been able to make him bleed with a piercing technique while his strikes felt like those of an infant to the grade-nine Martial Squire.

Squire Heviluo immediately realized that meant that there were a limited number of ways in which Kane could possibly take him down. As long as he covered for those ways well enough, it would be truly difficult for Kane to inflict much meaningful damage.

However, just sitting passively would not get him to victory, it would only significantly delay defeat.

And he was not interested in delaying it, he was interested in preventing it from ever happening.

There were a few ways he could go about that.

He leaped back as he exhaled deeply activating a breathing technique as he began spinning at incredible speeds.

WHOOOOOSH!

Rui's eyes widened as an enormous tornado erupted from his body, expanding widely in all directions. It was an incredibly powerful attack that attacked any and everything within the colosseum.

"Rgh!" Kane groaned as the whirlwind struck him. He had managed to dilute the impact by running to the very edge of the arena, but the attack had struck him nonetheless, dispelling the Void Step technique for a brief moment.

Rui narrowed his eyes, he had run into a similar technique in his time in Crexeet town, except that technique was purely defensive, while this technique was offensive.

The man began firing wide-range blasts in the broad direction of Kane.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!!

The powerful attacks crashed into a wide amount of area, yet Kane was nowhere to be seen.

Chapter 1045: Abandon

Rui had to admit, this was an unfortunate sequence of events for Kane. Not only had his initial ambush failed, but the man also just happened to have a gigantic attack that could fill up the entirety of the colosseum.

Because it covered all available battle areas, Kane could not avoid it with speed. Getting his by such an attack was inevitable. However, Kane had greatly minimized how much damage he took by moving to the very edge to withstand the impact.

However, he had to admit, he was impressed. Although Kane was extremely fragile as a Martial Artist, hurting him by simply attacking everywhere despite the dispersed and diluted impact was quite impressive. Rui suspected that the technique he used was probably grade ten, or grade nine at least. He could not imagine such a technique being mass viable. It was a testament to his power and mastery over the winds to be able to unleash such an attack.

However, at the same time, it was not something that he could keep using continuously for too long. However, the same could be said for Kane.

It was one thing if he was simply using Void Step to disperse attention while traveling, but it was an entirely different thing to use Void Step actively in combat. Combat stress caused all physical and mental actions to be more draining than if they were done individually in a non-combat setting.

Given the stress and strain that Kane was under, he definitely would not be able to maintain Void Step for too very long.

The question was who could last longer at the moment.

If Squire Heviluo could maintain his wide-range omnidirectional attacks longer than Kane could maintain his Void Step, then he would be able to ensure that Kane would never be able to use his Void Step technique to try and sneak past his guard.

However, if he couldn't he would be able to stop Kane from sneaking and start bullying him Void Step the second that he ran out of stamina.

The man stopped moving as he guarded his vitals as best as he could, standing in one place.

('He's waiting for Kane to come in,') Rui narrowed his eyes.

The closer Kane was, the more damage he would unleash with that tornado technique. Kane had been at the very edge of the arena when he had withstood that attack, that was why he had managed to get away with minimal wounds despite his weak constitution.

('However, he's looking to get that next attack off, the second that he feels Kane's attacks, or feels any sense of vague dread,') Rui mused.

This way, the attacks would hit Kane before they had traveled too much distance. The impacts would be far more potent, and would probably crush him.

('However, Kane seems to have realized that going in with just Void Step isn't good enough,') Rui kept track of him trailing around Squire Heviluo from a distance. ('The answer is right before you, Kane.')

Rui did not dare follow Kane with his eyes, but he was focusing on him. Kane's condition for victory was being able to land blows on his vitals. At the moment, the man's guard, as well as the threat of using a long-range and wide-scale attack to hit Kane were the obstacles that were in his way.

What Kane needed to do was find a way to eliminate them from the equation at the moment for just enough time.

There was only one way to do that, from what Rui could see.

Kane smacked his arms together, ready to rub the tattoos on both of them against each other. He rushed forward towards Squire Heviluo, reaching him in an instant.

Yet rather than launching a strike at his body with Void Step active, he instead rubbed his arms against each other in one sweeping motion, triggering the tattoos to generate a tremendous amount of electrical charge that instantly covered his entire body.

Instantly his reflexes and thoughtless motions grew significantly, the Void Step technique broke in that moment as his movements became governed by instinct and reflex, causing him to appear before the man's eyes.

Squire Heviluo was shocked but immediately activated his breathing technique to begin spinning to unleash his attack point-blank.

At this range, the force would be deadly enough to instantly kill Kane!

Yet, it never happened.

BZZZZT!

Kane mimicked Rui's Thundercoil partially as he shocked the man with a full-contact body charge, causing the man to freeze in place as he vibrated a bit due to the current. He struggled to activate his technique, yet for several precious moments, his muscles did not move.

And that was all that Kane needed.

SPLAT!

"RARGH!" The man roared as he finally activated his technique. A look of vindication appeared on his face as he was about to crush Kane point blank with his most powerful technique!

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His eyes widened as he realized his technique failed to activate for some reason!

DRIP DRIP DRIP

Blood splurged out of a hole in his Adam's apple.

Kane had poked a hole in his throat, causing him to be quite unable to exhale through his mouth.

Kane had crippled his breathing technique for that statement.

He caught his throat with his hand, trying to seal the whole, yet that removed a guard from his vitals.

Kane didn't even think about it as his Fulminata Godspeed drove him forward to lash out at the man's vitals. The neck, the eyes, the temples, the liver, the scrotum.

He was unable to mimic Rui's striking paralysis technique since Rui specifically aimed for the autonomous nervous technique since the contact of the entire.

Yet he was still able to deliver strikes that hurt Squire Helivuo.

Yet, the man wasn't done. He ignored the strikes that Kane launched as he immediately began spinning tremendously. Kane's eyes widened as the man willingly abandoned guard of his vitals all to get a single clean hit on Kane.

The whirlwind emerged one more time, this time with Kane right before it!

Chapter 1046: Persevere

He had the briefest of moments to make a decision when he saw that his opponent abandoned defense to try and blast him with his hurricane technique. His reflexes flashed as he immediately began sprinting away from the man at the man desperately.

WHOOOOOSH!

The hurricane expanded fully engulfing Kane before he had the opportunity to reach the edge of the arena.

"Urgh!" He grimaced as slammed into the arena wall.

The damage wasn't little, this time, he hadn't withstood at the edge, he had withstood much prior. He had taken a significant hit.

Yet, Squire Heviluo wasn't doing too well either.

Although he had abandoned guarding his vitals with just a brief moment, Kane had gotten in a multitude of strikes. His speed was so high that he could strike the most vital points multiple times before the man had unleashed his technique.

When the dust settled, he was bleeding out of several wounds. Furthermore, his eyes were completely shut, bleeding profusely.

('He wasn't able to finish the job in time,') Rui tutted, narrowing his eyes.

Unfortunately for Kane, the battle had not entirely gone the way he would have liked to. His initial plan had been to use the Void Step to simply accumulate damage over time while avoiding any attacks that the man would dish out in an attempt to hit him.

However, what neither of them had expected was this remarkably powerful technique that would allow him to launch a long-range wide-scale so large that it encompassed the entire battle arena.

Furthermore, he was able to launch that attack not just once, but multiple times.

('Kane underestimated him,')

It was unfortunate, but it appeared that the Void Step alone wasn't enough to take down elite high-grade Martial Squires, especially when the one using the technique had offense and defense that was as limited as Kane's was.

Kane couldn't even use Void Step for a while, while Fulminata Godspeed was active, he would need to finish the charge that he had in his body before he could use the technique. The man rushed forward towards Kane. Although his vision wasn't functioning, he could sense Kane using his other senses since he wasn't using Void Step.

('He's trying to get as close to Kane as possible when he uses that technique. That's why he's being as swift as he is,')

Kane, on the other hand, simply circled away from him, maintaining their distance. If he tried rushing in to inflict more damage, he would simply be hit by that powerful technique.

It appeared that he was in no rush to continue fighting.

However, Rui was concerned about the fact that Godspeed had time limits, he would be forced to use exclusively Void Step when he was done, and he would also be quite tired and weary when that was done.

WHOOOOOSH!

Squire Heviluo launched another long-range attack, yet this time the attack actually failed to hit Kane hard.

('You've moved away from the center of the arena,') Rui mused. ('Your attacks can no longer effectively occupy the entire arena.')

Kane wisely realized that too as he made sure to never allow the distance between him and his opponent to go below a certain degree. Although he was within the range of the technique, he made sure to keep enough distance to ensure that he could run out of range of the technique.

('The technique is slower the further away it goes. You can only hit Kane with it when you're at the center of the arena and your attack properly covers the entire arena.')

WHOOOOOSH!

WHOOOOOSH!

WHOOOOOSH!

The man continued trying to tag Kane with the one technique of his that could. Rui frowned as he wondered why the man wasn't using ordinary attacks now that Kane was visible.

The only reason he had used this wide-scale hurricane attack was because he didn't know where Kane was. Now that Kane was using Fulminata Godspeed, he couldn't use Void Step for a while.

Rui's eyebrow rose. ('He hasn't realized that Kane is unable to use Void Step with his current speed and movements! He thinks Kane will use it the second he tries attacking normally. He doesn't want that to happen.')

Rui couldn't even blame him for thinking this way, but it was a good opportunity for Kane.

Suddenly, Kane rushed forward towards him, surprising the man, he immediately unleashed a hurricane, successfully hitting him.

WHOOSH!

Kane's image faded the second the winds struck him.

('Phantom Step,') Rui grinned. ('Good application of the technique. I'm glad you realized it could be used this way.')

It showed that Kane had not been completely enamored by Fulminata Godspeed and Void Step. It was true that those three techniques were super powerful, but his Martial Art contained more than just those techniques.

With extremely convincing feints, he was able to force Squire Heviluo to use the hurricane technique, otherwise, he would risk allowing Kane to reach striking distance. He did not want to get incapacitated by the electrical charge in his body leaving himself open for more attacks a second time.

Kane began abusing the technique, forcing the man to either burn his stamina by using the technique every time that Kane appeared to rush in, regardless of whether it was real or a feint. Either that or the man would have to gamble on his senses.

Normally, Rui did not spam the Phantom Step technique himself because the technique was most powerful when your opponent wasn't expecting it. Spamming allowed for one's opponent to get used to it and eventually become immune to it.

('But Kane has hampered his vision, and fried his nerves to a certain extent.')

It meant that he wasn't exactly in the best condition to sense it. Furthermore, with Kane's speed, he had very little time to judge whether it was a feint or not, since Kane could cover a lot of distance in a short amount of time, if it was real, then he would not be able to react in time if he made the wrong choice.

Chapter 1047: Outcome

As the battle passed, Squire Heviluo began exerting himself tremendously in his attempts to prevent Kane from entering.

Eventually, it appeared he could no longer keep up.

THUD

He fell to one knee, sweating profusely. His exertion had also strained his healing factor. Even if he attempted to simply wait and recuperate, Kane would not let him. Every time he stopped using the technique, Kane would rush in and employ the Phantom Step technique, or he would attack for real, forcing the man to once again use a taxing technique.

Both sides were exerting themselves, however, Kane's Fulminata technique was fueled by the esoteric substances in his tattoos, while only his Godspeed technique consumed a lot of energy, however, it consumed it over time as opposed to an instantaneous consumption like the man's hurricane technique.

The Phantom Technique was a very light technique and did not require much energy, either mental or physical, to function.

WHOOSH

Kane rushed in for real, the man desperately launched normal attacks at Kane this time instead of his strenuous hurricane technique, yet he was challenging Kane in his technique. With Fulminata Godspeed, there was almost no chance that any wind could possibly hit him.

BZZZT!

Kane shocked him, incapacitating him momentarily.

SPLAT!

In the brief moment of time, he targeted wounds that he had already inflicted prior, allowing him to pierce much deeper than he would be able to normally.

He slashed at blood vessels, widened wounds, and inflicted more damage before leaping back, narrowly evading another attack.

The man bled profusely, spilling copious amounts of blood.

Yet he never gave up. Kane simply proceeded to rinse and repeat the existing strategies. His Fulminata Godspeed eventually ran out, yet even the exhaustion that beset him wasn't enough of an opportunity for Squire Heviluo to get back into the game, especially since Kane could use Void Step for a brief amount of time even in his exhaustion.

THUD

The man's body collapsed in a pool of his own blood. Yet it wasn't until his heart stopped beating that the arbiter declared the match over.

"Squire Nake wins by death, officially becoming the guardian of the nine hundred and seventy-eighth chamber!" The man announced.

There was no applause, of course. The spectating initiates did not care for either side one way or another. Kane was just another potential target for them from this day forth.

Kane stumbled out of the battle arena in a daze.

"Congratulations," Rui smiled offering him rejuvenation and healing potions as well as some food pills. "There were some incredibly close moments, but you managed to obtain victory nonetheless."

"Yeah... that was rough," He grimaced. "I broke a few ribs and some fingers even though I took small parts of the total attack."

He quickly chugged down the potions and the pills when he was approached by a staff member.

"Guardian Nake, allow me to guide you to your chamber."

"Uh..." He turned back to face Rui.

"God," Rui gestured. "I'll catch up soon enough."

"Definitely let me know ahead of time whenever your fight happens to be."

"Will do."

Rui turned back to the colosseum as he watched the next fight ensue.

Unlike most challenges, this was one between two guardians.

The guardian of the nine hundred and forty-eighth chamber had challenged the guardian of the nine hundred and first chamber.

The difference between the two of them wasn't that great, they were both highly powerful Martial Artists that were probably on the verge of being considered grade nine. Rui paid close attention to the two of them.

The Martial Squire of the nine hundred and first chamber was a short and petite woman. The second Rui laid eyes on her, he couldn't help but frown.

('There's something off about her skin,') He immediately couldn't help but notice with the help of his sharp senses. The color was completely normal, but what did draw his attention was the texture. It was just incredibly non-standard in ways he wasn't fully able to sense.

She took a wild stance, spreading her arms to her side as she crouched a bit.

Rui couldn't even understand the point of such a stance.

Her opponent, in comparison, was much more standard. He extended both arms forward with one arm facing her with sharp palms while the palm of the second hand was tucked at his elbow.

('A Wing Chun stance,') Rui raised an eyebrow with interest. He most likely had a strong offensive close-range striking Martial Artist.

"Begin!" The battle commenced as the two of them lashed out at each other. The man rushed forward towards her in a normal fashion, but the woman, she did more than just that.

Her arms lit up on bursts of fire every time she swung forward as she ran forward.

Rui's eyes widened with surprise. ('A flame related to Martial Art?')

POW POW POW!

The two of them exchanged a spiral of strikes, and immediately, she gained an advantage. Much to Rui's surprise, her opponent's fists immediately began bleeding!

Not only that, but every strike she landed on him also tore away at his skin, leaving flesh wounds in her wake.

The man grimaced with a shocked expression.

('Was he really not prepared?') Rui furrowed his eyebrows. ('I suppose preparations isn't nearly as much of a thing as it is when you're an initiate.')

He immediately leaped back, yet she refused to give him any room to avoid her. She rushed forward, making wide extravagant movements as she began launching flame plumed at him with her every movement.

FOOOM!

The grimaced as his skin was singed by her attacks.

Yet Rui had stopped paying him as much attention. He focused on the woman, analyzing her techniques.

('It's... friction!') Rui's eyes widened. ('Her skin is rough beyond all imagination. She can shear away at her opponent's skin with just a simple brushing movement.')

Furthermore, the flames that she generated with her technique, were generated by heating up the air enough with just sheer friction alone.

Chapter 1048: Considerations

She most likely needed to reach a certain level of speed and force in order to generate flames with just friction alone, yet she seemed able to pull it off. Not only that, she also possessed a remarkable amount of control over the directions and intensity of the flames as well.

POW POW POW!

The battle was brutally one-sided, unlike a lot of challenges between guardians. It seems that the man had overestimated himself or underestimated her. Whatever the case, he most certainly messed up.

It wasn't ten minutes into the fight that he forfeited.

"Woah..."

"She's strong..."

"I'm not challenging her, that's for sure."

Rui heard a wave of murmurs from the spectators. He could definitely understand why they thought the way they did.

Yet he didn't share their sentiments.

('I wonder how well I can adapt to her,') Rui couldn't help but consider the matter. In actuality, her Martial Art was actually not that ill-suited to him. Her strengths were defined, and the resulting fighting style that he would create to adapt to her did not require most of his Martial Art, allowing him to get away with hiding most of his arsenal.

Perhaps there were easier targets, but...

('But they're not worth it,')

One of the ways that he could improve his ability to adapt was by challenging himself in new ways. Simply adapting to more normal Martial Art wasn't very productive.

After all, many Martial Art ended up having similar solutions when it came to adapting to them. Although they were all unique in some way or another, at their core, they followed the same concept.

The predictive models were unique, but the adapted Martial Art that he ended up fighting wasn't drastically unique.

('But she is strong,') Rui noted.

It reduced the probability that he would win, and thus the probability that he would survive.

Yet, he didn't mind undertaking the challenge. In exchange, he relaxed his rule regarding the usage of the VOID algorithm. He got a decent grasp of her movements, however, it wasn't enough to form a predictive model as the battle hadn't lasted long enough, and he hadn't seen enough of her Martial Art.

Yet he had made his choice. He left the colosseum heading back to the initiate housing block.

"Friction and fire?" Kane raised an eyebrow when Rui told him about her. "That sounds scary as hell. I would not want to fight her."

"You don't have the best compatibility with her, after all."

Kane would be able to evade her pretty well, but he could probably forget about trying to inflict any damage on her. His constitution was much weaker than hers was, and even hitting her would probably bust his hand up. He didn't even have a single genuine way hurt her.

If he tried shocking her, just being in contact with her would probably rip open his flesh effortlessly.

The same wasn't necessarily true for Rui, not only was his body much more durable, but he had undergone Adamant Reforging that conditioned his flesh very well, allowing his flesh to be able to withstand a lot without breaking.

However, that wasn't the route that Rui intended to go through when confronting her. He couldn't afford to rely on his conditioning to try and withstand her offense, that was a foolish move.

Her friction and heat were her offense and what made her a high-grade guardian. Rui did not think that a simple grade seven technique would be able to do much against her offense.

Instead, he intended to engage in a form of combat where he could simply deny her the opportunity to ever even come in to take him down.

He had a bit of leeway due to his decent healing factor being able to heal light wounds really well, but it didn't give him too much rope, he was better off being able to ensure that she didn't land a hit on him ever.

He quickly began cooking up an optimal game plan in his mind. He had come to accrue a lot of techniques in the past five years. It gave him an immense amount of versatility that he had the ability to choose from.

He had the five techniques that he had initially re-mastered when he became a Martial Squire. Wind Breathing, Outer Convergence, Phantom Step, Adamant Reforging, and Reverberating Lance.

After that he had come to develop his first two techniques; the Pathfinder technique, and the Flux Earther technique. He had mastered the Sonic Bullet technique as a result as well. In his time on Vilun Island, he had also come to master the Mighty Roar Flash Blast technique and had developed the Transverse Resonance Technique as a result.

He had developed Gale Force Breathing and the Riemannian Echo technique in preparation for the Shionel Dungeon and in his time in the Shionel Confederation, he had mastered the Forestep technique.

He had then gone on to create the Reverberating Catapult, Eye of Lightning, Thundercoil, and the Lightning Tap in his subsequent travels after escaping the Shionel Confederation.

Those were not a small number of Martial Artist techniques, not to mention the multiple Apprentice-level techniques that he had naturally come to adapt to the Squire Realm.

However, he realized that the more techniques he mastered, the more complicated it became to create the most optimal adapted Martial Art to any given Martial Art because he had to go through a large number of techniques before picking just the right ones that he needed.

Of course, the resultant adapted Martial Art would be even more optimal than if he had fewer techniques.

('Unless the techniques are higher in quality than quantity,') Rui noted to himself. ('Perhaps there is merit in focusing on creating a lesser number of high-grade techniques than it is to create numerous low-grade techniques.')

He shook his head, putting aside such thought for the time being. He had a fight to prepare for, and it wouldn't be that long before he would be stepping into the arena himself.

Chapter 1049: Outcome

"Challenger; Squire Falken. Defender: Guardian Saiwal."

The two of them stepped forward, bowing to each other. Rui locked eyes with her, and he could feel cold bloodlust in her eyes. He didn't expect anything less, of course. By challenging her, Rui was basically saying that he wanted to kill her and was confident that he could do it.

He couldn't even deny it, since that was indeed the case.

Kane had already joined the Floating Sect, and it was time for Rui to follow suit.

"Take your stances,"

She took a wide stance, crouching with spread arms and legs.

Rui stood nearly fifty meters away from her, having chosen a long-range distance while she chose a short-range, with a completely neutral stance.

He stared at her with a calm expression. Yet he exerted a faint pressure on her without making any threatening stances or glares.

"Begin!"

She immediately lashed out toward Rui, hoping to reach him in her initial charge. After all, her most effective range was when she was up close with her opponent, tearing off their flesh while she roasted them in her flames.

Yet, she wasn't surprised when Rui took to the air as he leaped back. He launched a barrage of Mighty Roaring Flash Blasts.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

Unfortunately, he wasn't nearly at the distance where the creation of the technique could not be sensed. That only worked when he was hundreds of meters away. She was able to notice that he was manipulating the atmosphere somehow when he created the sonic bullets, even if she couldn't sense the sonic bullets themselves.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

She somersaulted away as her sharp instincts told her to disrupt her travel path.

Yet, it wasn't enough.

BAM!

She grimaced as one of the sound projectiles struck her even after she moved away. Rui had aimed for her maneuver from the very start.

He launched a hail of projectiles at her, restricting her path forward.

('I knew it,') Rui's eyes narrowed. ('Durability isn't your forte.')

Most of her techniques and training, as well as the spec configuration of her Martial body, it was largely devoted to maximizing her friction, and the utility of her friction. It meant that she wasn't as strong at other aspects of combat.

Of course, her friction made up for it, but it didn't help her get past Rui's attacks. She wasn't swift and nimble enough to evade all the attacks that he threw at her, nor was she durable enough to withstand all the attacks and just bulldoze through.

However, it was his predictive accuracy that was helping him out. With each passing second that went by, he grew better and better as he memorized her active and passive patterns that existed in her motion, growing more familiar with her evasion patterns especially.

However, at the same time, Rui wasn't going to be able to win this way. She wasn't able to reach him, but that didn't mean she was helpless when it came to dealing with his onslaught. His long-range offense wasn't high-grade in power, thus he wasn't able to inflict too much damage with each strike.

Furthermore, long-range attacks were more power-consuming than close-range attacks, thus she would certainly last longer at this rate.

She had already fallen into a comfortable place where she only spent enough energy avoiding his attacks while she waited for the right opportunity.

He could try hitting her with a Transverse Resonance, but unfortunately, that was much more difficult to land because he needed to spend mental effort into ensuring that the four sound waves overlapped with each other. It made aim much harder.

The battle fell into a brief stretch of monotony. She did her best to avoid his attacks while still trying to close in where and when she could. He, on the other hand, kept bombarding her with attacks.

Until he decided to stop.

He heaved a sigh as he seemingly took a moment of respite.

Squire Saiwal had been waiting for this opening. She did not believe that he would be able to outlast her with his attacks despite her much lower effort evasion. She lashed out, itching to shred him to pieces and then roast him to ashes with her flames.

Rui stepped backward as she reached him, yet that only fueled her aggression.

BAM!!!

Her eyes widened as her pupils dilated in agony.

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

She felt several ribs cracking.

"Cough!" She spat blood as her vision finally came into focus.

Rui stood right before her, with his fist buried into her gut.

Before she could even process what had happened.

POW!

A swift high kick crashed into her chin.

THUD

She collapsed to the ground, unconscious.

('You tunnel vision every time you launch an attack,')

Rui had noticed her lack of environmental awareness in her previous fight during particular moments of the fight. Thus he had exploited that by using Phantom Step to play into that shortcoming, misdirecting her awareness momentarily, before using that blindspot to land an incredibly clean body blow.

His fist had slammed into her rough body with one of the most powerful attacks that Rui could launch at that range. Furthermore, he had managed to catch her completely off-guard, thus she hadn't even protected herself with a single defensive technique. That single blow had caused devastating damage.

After that, it was just a matter of finishing the job.

CRACK!

His leg cracked into her head, leaving open a sickly wound.

After that, it was just a matter of time.

"Winner; Squire Falken! You are now officially the guardian of the nine hundred and first chamber."

There was a sharp silence in the colosseum.

Of course, there always was since none of the initiates made any kind of noise either way, but this one felt strange.

He could feel the nagging attention of all of the initiates. Many stared at him with bewildered expressions, as though they didn't quite comprehend what happened there. Most battles against guardians were extremely difficult for the challenger, yet in this case, the opposite seemed to happen!

Chapter 1050: Application

DRIP DRIP DRIP

Rui glanced down at the fist with which he had struck her.

It was bleeding profusely. Just coming into contact with her rough skin in a strike had caused not just the skin of his fingers and knuckles but all of the flesh to completely be shredded off.

('What a lethal Martial Art and body,') Rui sighed as he walked away.

It was just a single strike, yet she had already caused him significant damage. Unfortunately for her, the impact of a strike was conveyed through the bones of the hand and not the flesh.

Thus, she wasn't able to soften the blow any bit at all. He had struck her diaphragm with incredible force without any defensive technique protecting it. He debilitated her far more than the loss of flesh had debilitated him.

"You made that look easy," Kane marveled at Rui. "Did you make a predictive model ahead of time?"

"Not really," Rui shook his head. "I used the data from her previous match and this match to find a chink in her armor that I managed to exploit to the absolute very best with an incredibly well-timed and placed powerful blow. It's all just applying what I had cleverly."

Rui only managed to take her down so quickly due to his incredible observation skills, not the sheer potency of his techniques.

Although his Flowing Canon was incredibly powerful, had she used even a single defensive technique, she would have been in the game, even if injured. Furthermore, with the injury that she had inflicted on him just by virtue of him touching her, she would certainly make it count. The entire fight had been Rui gaining more information by observing her and using that information to create the perfect opportunity to take her down.

He knew that had he tried taking her down by simply brute forcing her with power, long range or short range, he would have been bleeding tremendously, just like her previous opponent had.

"Here," Kane handed him a healing potion. "That wound looks nasty."

"I'm glad that I only took one of it," Rui sighed as he inhaled the potion. "She would have started eroding away at my bones and muscles had I continued hitting her."

"Guardian Falken," A staff member stopped before him. "You have just ascended to your position, allow me to guide you around and run you through everything that you need to know."

Rui glanced at Kane, who shrugged, before turning back to her. "Sure, lead the way."

Rui and Kane left the colosseum as they headed deeper into Ajanta Island, following the staff member.

Rui raised an eye once they reached a huge spiraling complex. Its overall shape was like that of a flat spiral seashell.

He recalled reading that the reason that it was in a spiral was that the deeper that went into the spiral, the better the training conditions of the training chamber because it was closer to the center of the island. Thus all one thousand chambers had been arranged in a spiraling pattern inward and down into the island.

('That way they can ensure that each chamber is the same size, eh?') Rui immediately realized the significance of the architectural choices.

Apparently, word spread about Rui's match quickly, because the various guardians that they passed all glanced at him strangely.

It was rather strange because he did understand their incredulity. It was probably unheard of for a Martial Squire to be able to beat the nine hundred and first chamber of the tenth rank, and quickly take over.

He had recalled that there were only five guardians spectating at that time, meaning only those five knew the way that the fight went down as far as the guardians went. There were plenty of initiates watching the fight, of course, but something told Rui that none of them were likely inclined to challenge him any time soon.

That was a good development because Rui wasn't interested in subjecting himself to death matches.

As they passed through a spiral corridor that connected all the chambers, Rui found that the chambers were armed with anti-sensory technology. However, that wasn't enough to stop his Riemannian Echo.

Of course, what did stop his Riemannian Echo was the sheer gravitational field of the island that increased the deeper they went. It became harder and harder to sense anything through the walls of the chambers or anything as they went deeper and deeper into the spiral of chambers.

"This is your chamber, guardian Falken," She informed him. "Each chamber is staffed by a personal aid staff that will aid you in operating any parts of the chamber in any way you wish. As well as tending to your every need. Inside, you will also find a book that details all the rules and guidelines that all members of the Floating Sect are expected to follow."

Rui nodded. "Thank you."

"I'm glad you've finally gotten your chamber." Kane grinned. "Come on. Let me show you around."

The two of them stepped in as Rui took in his new personal quarters for the foreseeable future.

"Spacious," Rui murmured. "No wonder they take up most of the island."

The chambers contained training avenues for all forms of training at all ranges, including long-range techniques that required hundreds of meters of space.

He was quite impressed with the level of sophistication that he saw in the chamber's training avenues. It was a robust and diverse avenue for training and provided everything that a Martial Squire would generally need.

Rui could definitely feel its appeal now that he no longer had the Martial Union to lean on. In fact, most Martial Squires from most places would probably find the chambers of the Floating Sect to be quite appealing, there was no doubt about that. This was a level of quality and extravagance that ordinary

Martial Squires would not even be able to dream of having for themselves. That was why he was certainly pleased by what he saw.