

## **Martial Unity 301**

### Chapter 301: Mastered

Deep inside the mental technique training facility in an isolated room, Rui sat with crossed legs and closed eyes

He was stoic, unmoving.

The walls of the isolated room were padded tiled with an esoteric substance found in the caves of the Basara Mountain range far west of the town of Hajin, that insulated sound to an extremely high degree. Not a single decibel managed to escape its grasp.

It was so silent that Rui could nothing but his own heartbeat and his own breathing.

Yet, they did not distract him.

No.

They guided him in the void.

The guided him as he traversed through his own vast mind palace.

His body was in the Academy.

His consciousness was also in the Academy.

Yet, they were not in the same place.

One was in a real physical location, and the other was in a figment of his imagination thoroughly reconstructed inside his own mind.

He walked across his mind palace leisurely. Nonchalantly. Every location of his mind palace had documents and files neatly stacked on top of each other. Normally, it would be irresponsible to stack them that way, instead of in a drawer or file cabinet.

What if they fell over? They would certainly get dusty as time passed.

But Rui didn't mind.

This was within his mind, his imagination. He was effectively an omnipotent god inside his mind palace, gravity existed to help feel comfortable as he navigated his mind palace.

And dust simply did not exist.

He would occasionally pick up a document. He would carefully open it up, scroll through its content with interest before closing it and putting it back exactly where it was before.

Eventually he made his way to the Apprentice dormitory, accessing his room.

Yet it was quite different from its real-life counterpart.

The furniture was all gone.

In the center was a book.

On its cover was;

[Project Water and the VOID algorithm

By John Falken]

It was the publication he had published after the final iteration of the VOID algorithm was created. He picked up the book carefully, affectionately.

[...And so, although the VOID algorithm is complete and functioning, Project Water is not yet complete. The next phase of our research is aimed at verifying whether or not the VOID algorithm is viable. If it is, then the Project will end on the spot, but if not, we will continue working for as long as it takes to realize this project and succeed. We here at Combat Spots Research Co. Will aim to fulfill our dream to create the ultimate combat style!...]

A tinge of melancholy flashed through his eyes. He recalled the confidence and enthuse he had written that bit with. And yet, many years later, he had ultimately failed and later died.

Then he had woken up in a strange new world, with strange new phenomena. He was shown a new path, and he chose to walk it. And after much blood, sweat and tears, he had finally come to take a step further in the direction he never could in his previous life.

He was going to take that step now.

He shut the book with force, and instantly, his mind palace disappeared.

He opened his eyes.

"I have arrived."

A total of seven months had passed since he originally began his training. The techniques themselves had been mastered nearly a month ago. The problem was getting used to them and learning how to apply them in combat, building comfort and some amount of muscle memory so that he would fight fluidly.

For the Mind Palace technique, however, required more than just basic mastery. Rui had found that even if he was able to use the technique, it was too slow. He needed to become so adept with it that he could enter it and exit swiftly with the slightest bit of effort.

And so, he had locked himself in a room, dedicating himself to the technique thoroughly.

There were times where he felt he was losing his sanity, unsure of what was real and what wasn't. It got especially bad because the mental rejuvenation potions and the lack of a sleep cycle made him lose track of time. He'd felt like an eternity had passed in that isolated room and in his mind palace, and time didn't pass the same inside his mind palace as it did in reality.

But he gritted his teeth and continued until his proficiency grew tremendously. To a certain degree, he did with the technique what Hever had done with the Meteoric Swing technique, going far beyond basic mastery.

He had reduced the lag time until it reached a level where it no longer hindered him.

He consumed a rejuvenation potion as he opened the door to his isolated room, he simply walked out as he headed to the exit of the facility.

He needed to test his current power level and more.

He hadn't used the Mind Palace technique because his proficiency with it was too low, and too slow. But now that he had mastered it to the degree where he could actually use it in combat, he no longer knew what he was capable of.

He needed a strong, powerful opponent, preferably an all-rounder, preferably someone he didn't have much information on prior. The reason for these were simple. All-rounders were the best to test the Mind Palace solution for the viability problem, because they had no inherent weakness and so several of the lower systems of the VOID algorithm weren't effective, thus any success he had would mostly come from the pattern recognition systems he was going to employ.

It also had to be an opponent he didn't have much information on so that his analysis of the Mind Palace technique would not be skewed and biased. He had fought against Nel too many times and had gained a good intuitive understanding for his rather simplistic fighting style, so fighting against Nel would not give him a clear idea for how effective the Mind Palace technique was.

If he could not rely on Nel, then who could he rely on?

"Squire Kyrie." Rui called out as he reached the sparring facility.

She turned, meeting his unfathomably deep eyes.

"It's time." He told her.

### Chapter 302: Commencement

"It's that time, is it?" She asked him as she took note of the depth of the weight of his mind. She wasn't sure what it was, but she had the faintest sense he had grown stronger than just the number of techniques he had.

Rui had already requested her for a match ahead of time when he began refining his mastery of the Mind Palace technique.

The sparring facility was littered with Martial Apprentices. A routine sparring session with the Martial Apprentices was ongoing, yet they were surprised to see Rui. He hadn't shown up to one of these in a long time.

"Yes, I'm ready." He told her.

"Alright, come along." She told Rui as one of the assistant instructors took over her duties.

"I recall long ago that you and Kane managed to push me to use a Squire-level technique against the two of you." She said as they hopped onto a large sparring ring. "You've come a long way since then."

"I hadn't understood how much you were holding back then." Rui replied. "The fact that I've grown vastly stronger since then and am yet so far away from you is truly astounding."

"You're not as far away as you might think." She said with a pointed tone. "Perhaps we'll find out just how close you are in this fight."

"That is what I wish to know as well."

"I can limit my power, defense and movement speed to the general peak of the Apprentice Realm." She told him. "However, my reflexes and reactions will remain at the Squire Realm. I cannot change that."

"I understand." He said.

"Good." She said as her eyes narrowed. "Then I don't have to worry."

A powerful wave of pressure fluctuated across the sparring facility as every Apprentice's attention inadvertently shifted towards its source.

Kyrie took a neutral stance, catering equally to offense, defense and maneuvering.

Rui simply closed his eyes.

He was fighting a Martial Squire. If he did not atleast draw out the best from within himself, he was not worthy of this opportunity.

The gravity of the air around intensified.

His mind converged as he gathered every ounce of focus.

This fight meant a lot to him. It was even more significant to him than the Martial Contest. He felt an unprecedented amount of energy saturate his muscles. His body quivered with power.

When he opened his eyes, he had already taken his stance.

"Are you ready?" She asked.

"As ever."

Kyrie didn't even hesitate.

WHOOSH

RUMBLE

The very step she took threatened to tear the earth as she pushed it behind, launching herself at frightening speeds. In just the briefest of moments, she had entirely crossed the distance between them, swinging a swift and powerful strike the aimed for his head.

WHOOSH

Rui calmly evaded the blow as he swerved past it. Kyrie immediately followed up with blinding speed as she launched a barrage of swift yet powerful attacks.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Rui bobbed and weaved as he evaded the strikes narrowly.

BAM!!!

He rolled out of the way of a heavy drop kick the shook the very facility!

She immediately dashed after him. Rui's instincts screamed as she unleashed an avalanche of attacks with untold power.

And yet.

Not a single blow managed to land on him cleanly.

He just barely dodged, barely redirected and barely guarded.

Yet, even that explosive offense did not inflict any meaningful damage on him.

Kyrie frowned.

Her parameters surpassed his, she should have been stronger and faster, yet Rui still somehow managed to defend just well.

He was slower but he moved early.

As if he knew what she was going to do ahead of time.

Her eyes widened at that thought.

Kyrie felt her pride a bit affronted. Even if she was holding back, she was still using enough power to be above him on paper. The fact that she was not able to overwhelm him meant that he was applying himself better than she was!

A kid who hadn't even been a Martial Apprentice, was fighting better than herself? A veteran Martial Squire who was the best of her generation?

She wasn't necessarily an overbearingly proud person. In fact, she was quite down-to-earth despite her success.

But still.

She was a Martial Squire.

She narrowed her eyes as she began moving more sharply. She wasn't breaking her word and using her power beyond what she promised, but she was moving accurately and precisely.

BAM!

Rui skidded away from an impact as he noticed it had become harder to keep up with her.

('She's starting exert herself.') He noted. It was easier for the VOID algorithm to work against a more static opponent, but now that she was fighting more dynamically, things would grow harder.

He didn't mind, he needed to be pushed if he wanted to test the prowess of his Mind Palace technique.

He felt a wave of excitement. He had waited for a long time for what was about to happen.

It was time.

His preparations were complete. Everything was in place.

It was time.

Time to find out whether his efforts with the Mind Palace technique were in vain, or not.

She stepped forward, shifting her weight onto her left foot as she launched jab with her right arm.

Rui's eyes widened as his mind flashed into the Mind Palace.

('Probability of right-left-right combo; ninety-two percent.')

And almost like magic, his prediction unfolded.

Kyrie threw a right jab followed by a left and another right jab in rapid succession. She had completely expected it to land on him.

Yet;

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

He cleanly weaved past her strikes with his maneuvering techniques, boosted by Wind Breathing and Primordial Instinct as he threw a weighted speedy jab at her.

BAM!

It crashed into a hasty guard, she had just barely managed to intercept the strike. She retreated, surprised. She had managed to completely close the distance between when she launched that speedy combo, it should have been impossible for him evade it in those circumstances, let alone land an attack while evading.

Yet he danced passed her attacks and launched a powerful strike before her attack was even over.

Rui's fixated on her as he watched her every movement like a hawk. Her every shift, twitch and movement.

Her body shifted weight, yet her arms were steady.

('Side kick; ninety-four-percent.) He computed as he flashed through the data in his Mind Palace.

He launched a crouching sweeping kick cleanly avoiding her side kick as his kick crashed into her ankle.

Yet again.

He dodged both attacks as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. Kyrie got the impression he wasn't even reacting, it was as though he already knew what move was the best to make. She launched a swift jab, hoping to tag him.

WHOOSH

Rui yet again, casually evaded her blow as he completely invaded her space with ease, launching a speedy jab of his own

WHOOSH

She swerved, evading the attack, yet before she could even counter, another attack from Rui had already arrived to the location she had moved to.

BAM!

The attack crashed into a hastily conjured guard.

She summersaulted away, opening up some distance.

('He knew exactly where I was going to be even before I did!') She realized, shocked.

Chapter 303: What it said

Everything had patterns. Everything was made up of patterns.

People, animals, plants, rocks, dirt, all of them had patterns in their very being, one way or another. Whether it was behavioral, psychological, cellular or even molecular and atomic.

Even the universe itself had patterns. These were codified in the laws of physics.

Martial Artists were no different.

The pattern recognition systems of the VOID algorithm collected data on the movements of the opponent of the user, organized them into an ordered data set and then conducted a statistical analysis on them to create a predictive model of the movements of the opponent based on the data gathered.

This predictive model allowed the user to predict the movements of their opponent based on certain parameters such as; position, center of gravity, distance, speed and acceleration. The greater the amount of data collected, the more accurate and precise the predictions of the predictive model were.

However, that was only half the work. After all, the VOID algorithm was an algorithm to adapt and evolve to your opponent, not an algorithm to merely predict your opponent.

Once the predictive model was completed, the user would input the predictions into the adaptive evolution model of the VOID algorithm that would output the move needed to counter the inputted move. The adaptive evolution model was created after many years of empirical research by Rui on what the best counter to every move was. It outputted the best counter for every move.

For example, the objectively best counter to a crouching sweeping kick was a flying knee kick. A flying knee kick cleanly would avoid the sweeping kick since the user jumped, while the knee kick would land perfectly into the face of the crouched person that was executing the sweeping kick.

If one inputted the crouching sweeping kick into the adaptive evolution model, it would output the best counter to the inputted move; the flying knee kick.

Thus, pattern recognition systems of the VOID algorithm had the user predict the movements of their opponents using the predictive model, then they would figure out the best counter to the predicted moves by inputting those predicted moves into the adaptive evolution model. The adaptive evolution

model would output the counter to the predicted move, and then the user would execute said counter moves, once the prediction came true.

This allowed the user to fight in a manner that was completely adapted and evolved to their opponent. Such was the prowess of the VOID algorithm, yet the difficulty of executing this was inhuman. Which was why Rui had failed to make it viable in his previous life.

'In his previous life', being the key phrase.

He grinned with excitement.

He was succeeding!

It took another lifetime, but he had experienced the first taste of success!

His dream was possible!

He felt like a parched traveler taking the first sip of water after days of being stranded in the desert.

('Hahaha... HAHAHA!') he felt ecstatic excitement course through his body. ('I can do this! I can-')

POW!

"Gugh!" He grimaced as Kyrie's fist crashed into his face, knocking him down like a bowling pin.

Kyrie's head tilted in confusion. His movements had suddenly become clumsy despite being pristine the moment prior.

Rui grimaced as he retreated. ('...Everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.') He mused.

The predictive model of the VOID algorithm was not absolute. The user needed to always be ready if the predictions didn't come out to be true. Of course, Rui had momentarily forgotten this because no one had even been able to reach a stage where he could warn them of this before.

He was the first person to get this far with the VOID algorithm.

Squire Kyrie narrowed her eyes as she dashed towards him, unaware of the sheer complexity of the mystery of Rui's incredibly accurate and well-timed movements.

WHOOSH

Rui cleanly leaned out of a hook as he simultaneously launched an upper cut that perfectly exploited the gap in her defense created by the hook.

Yet;

WHOOSH

She avoided it cleanly.

He wasn't surprised.

Her power, defense and speed were limited to the peak Apprentice Realm, but her reflexes were much harder to limit, reflexes were subconscious and she could not consciously reduce it.

This was even though she was holding back, they were still there. Rui was fighting against someone with Squire-level reflexes.

And he wasn't losing.

"Squire Kyrie." Rui said to her. "Please use as much power as is needed to defeat me. There is no point in holding back for my sake if you cannot force me to go all out."

Her eyes widened at those words.

He was telling her she wasn't strong enough.

He spoke those words seriously, yet he didn't realize how shocking it was for a Martial Apprentice to utter those words to a Martial Squire.

"...I see." She eventually replied. "I don't know what happened to you, but it seems I underestimated you."

Rui stiffened up as the pressure she exuded grew perilous. His sense of survival was triggered by the weight of mind she exerted onto him.

WHOOSH

The VOID algorithm barely predicted her movements in time as he just barely managed to throw a guard together before her attack crashed onto him with a power that exceeded what Martial Apprentices were normally capable of.

BAM!!!

Even with the four techniques of defense he had, his arms were bruised. His focus deepened as he drew everything he had, preparing for onslaught she was about to unleash.

And, onslaught it was.

Her every movement reverberated the ground and the shook the air violently. Their fight was no longer localized as it drew attention from everyone within the facility.

The spectating Martial Apprentices and staff all froze, gaping in disbelief at what unfolded before their very eyes.

In their eyes, Kyrie was no longer operating within the Apprentice Realm.

What did that say about the Martial Apprentice that was able to keep up?

Chapter 304: Outcome

What it said was crystal clear;

Rui's combat prowess was no longer even in the same Realm as them.

He hadn't even been a Martial Apprentice for three years, yet he had somehow skyrocketed past all of them. Not a single person would show disbelief if they were told that Rui was the strongest Martial Apprentice of the Kandrian Empire.

WHOOSH

Rui just barely managed to avoid a strike with frightening power. Kyrie was showcasing a level of power and speed he had never faced off against before. Not even Fiona had been this overwhelming.

FLICK

He felt a sharp pain on his cheek as he avoid a strike.

DRIP DRIP

His eyes widened as he felt his cheek bleeding. ('She used a piercing technique.')

Her bodyweight shifted.

('Straight jab.')

The jab was almost blindingly fast to him, yet he managed to intercept it thanks to having predicted beforehand. He immediately activated Flow Flux, boosting it with Outer Convergence and Flame Breathing.

WOBBLE

She had limited herself greatly, and Rui had used a lot of power to destabilize her. Her balance was unstable for merely the briefest of moments.

Yet that was enough.

He launched the Stinger straight at her eyes. It was empowered with Outer Convergence and Flame Breathing.

Kyrie's eyes flashed, she had expected that. It was his trump card, after all.

Yet when she tried to catch his foot.

WHOOSH

Her eyes widened.

It was a feint.

The Phantom Step technique would not have worked, ordinarily. But unfortunately for Kyrie, the technique had shown her exactly what she had wanted to see, what she had anticipated seeing.

BAM!!

A powerful kick crashed into her gut. The sheer force of his attack launched her several meters into the air despite her remarkable defenses. Rui had purposely aimed the strike upwards so as to launch her up.

POW POW POW!

Rui launched several Tempestuous Ripples that struck her midair. The Tempestuous Ripple attacks blew her away even while she was midair, propelling her further and further away until she was headed well outside the ring!

This had been his strategy.

All those spectating widened their eyes in disbelief.

Rui was going to win!

Yet.

"Gentle Fury Style: Sky Stepping." Kyrie whispered.

Rui felt a shiver down his spine as his hair stood up.

BOOM

The very air itself shook.

A maelstrom of wind assaulted all those spectating.

Rui widened his eyes.

Kyrie had exerted a tremendous amount of power on the entire atmosphere, she stepped on the very air itself, stopping her plummet instantly with the might she possessed by virtue of being a Martial Squire. She walked down from the air as though she were walking down a staircase, returning back to the ring.

Martial Squires were capable of such power that even the atmosphere could be treated like solid ground!

"Oh yeah..." Rui scratched his head, feeling stupid. He had totally forgotten that Martial Squires were capable of walking on the atmosphere itself. He only recalled that Kyrie had mentioned it to him in the first round of the Martial Contest when Ana had demonstrated the Sky Walking technique. But nine months had passed since then that he almost forgotten.

He sighed at the sight of Kyrie returning in front of him, taking his stance once more. His plan had ended in a failure, he would need to create a new one.

Yet Squire Kyrie shook her head. "I told you Martial Squires could Sky Step, and that is true. I wasn't holding back in order to, breaking my word in the process. Thus, the win is yours."

Rui scratched his head. "Is that how it works?"

"This is the second time you've forced me to use my Martial Art." She said, as a rare smile broke onto her face. "The first when you were at the bottom of the Apprentice Realm, and now when you are at the peak."

"I look forward to seeing how far you will go, Rui Quarrier." She said with a profound tone as she turned around walking away, returning to her duties as the head instructor and supervisor of the combat training facility.

Rui bowed at her departing figure, as he himself left the ring deep in thought. He had mostly gained what he came for.

The Mind Palace was indeed a viable solution for the viability problem of the VOID algorithm. Although he wasn't nearly as adept with it as he would have liked, as was optimal, he was not saddened. The fact that he was able to use it at all meant that it absolutely was viable! As long as he worked hard and grew as a Martial Artist, he would one day be able to use the VOID algorithm to absolute perfection.

In his current state, his usage of the Mind Palace technique to store and sort patterns was still clunky, inefficient and slow. It had taken him quite some time and some preparation until he was ready to apply the pattern recognition systems of the VOID algorithm, and he was still not quite where he wanted to be.

Yet he did not mind. In fact, he was quite ecstatic. He felt a huge burden lifted off of his shoulders.

For a long time, he had gone to sleep thinking about the viability issue of the VOID algorithm. If he included his previous life, it would sum up to almost thirty years.

Thirty years of god-only-knew how much emotional investment in the matter. Words couldn't describe the relief he felt on finally gaining the certainty and confidence he had been looking for, for all this time.

Now, as long as he maintained an upward trajectory the problem would eventually be solved.

The only big problem left would be the VOID algorithm's inadequacy for the world of Gaia. Yet that was not a problem that could be solved in a short amount of time. Nor did it have a singular solution like the viability problem.

Still, he intended to solve that as well, one way or another.

### Chapter 305: The Next Step

The goal of his spar with Squire Kyrie was to verify whether the Mind Palace could serve as solution to make the application of the VOID algorithm viable. And now that he had acquired what he wanted, he left the sparring facility.

He had zero interest in fighting any of the Martial Apprentices of the Academy, they were simply far too weak to be able to even stand up to him. At this point only Nel and Fae could give him a challenge and only Kane had any real chance of defeating him because of the two grade-ten techniques he had mastered.

At this point, he needed to build experience with his current Martial Art.

At this point in time, he had twenty-three techniques in his Martial Art, furthermore with the Mind Palace technique, the way he went about the VOID algorithm had completely changed. He would be changing a very fundamental way of his combat style and he needed to build experience around it in a variety of situations.

"Missions it is." He mused.

The safe and controlled environment and atmosphere of the Martial Academy no longer provided him with any stimulation. The lack of stakes made it a very dull atmosphere to him, making it hard to draw any real tension from him. That along with the fact that almost none of his peers were his equals anymore made staying the Martial Academy lose its allure to him.

('Honestly, there isn't too much point in staying anymore.') He had reached a stage where he was more than ready to be able to sustain himself independently, if needed. He also didn't want to incur a greater debt with the Academy than he already had.

He hadn't forgotten about the debt scholarship he had undertaken when he joined the Academy. The Martial Academy was expensive. It provided him with housing accommodations and other necessities as well as expensive learning and growing resources, as well as combat resources.

The countless facilities and resources such as potions and equipment he had used in the near three years he had spent in the Academy did not come cheap, not at all. Nor were the highly-experienced instructors that had guided him. Everything he had indulged in as he walked his Martial Path had costed something, and every extra day he stayed, the more it costed.

His existing debt alone was quite substantial in and of itself.

He wasn't miffed about that. He would not be where he was today, and he had a lot of goodwill to the Academy for that. But soon it would be better if he left.

He reached for his communication device that he had purchased to keep in touch with Nartha during his previous missions, sending her a short message, informing her of his openness to undertake representative fighter commissions.

The next thing he intended to do was open himself for personal commission. Before he went into training, he had closed his profile for personal commissions since he knew he would be in training for quite some time. Now he intended to open it so that people could send personal commissions to him.

He headed to the commissions department asking them to do as much before he left for the mission library. Even if he opened his personal profile to personal commissions, they weren't going to flood in the very second he opened them. For now, he would need to rely on the standard missions made to the Martial Union.

"I'm a Grade-ten Martial Apprentice?" He asked, with raised eyes.

"Correct, Apprentice Quarrier." A staff member informed him. "The update was extremely recent. Just four minutes ago, in fact, this is why we didn't have time to inform you."

Rui's eyebrows knitted at those words. It wasn't a coincidence his grade was updated just as he finished his spar with Squire Kyrie. "I see."

Squire Kyrie must have sent over the information of his newfound prowess to the Commissions department immediately. He was surprised at how quickly they processed his data and evaluated his prowess.

Regardless, this worked out to him. Now he didn't need to worry about taking missions that were too tame. He wanted to increase the intensity of the missions so that they could push him and his Martial Art. This meant he could skip boring low-level missions and immediately head for more difficult missions

Soon, he entered the mission library, pondering what class of missions to undertake.

Defense-class missions often lacked conflict. Thus, he was reluctant to go for that class of missions. The miscellaneous class of missions were similar, they also didn't feel pressuring because of how odd many of them were. He was looking for a good old-fashioned classic mission that involved genuine conflict.

The remaining three classes of missions guaranteed genuine conflict much more, to some degree; Offense-class, hunting-class and the shadow-class missions.

Of these three, he was the least qualified for Shadow-class missions. The only Stealth technique he possessed was Blink, which was not enough by itself. He did intend to one day be qualified for Shadow-class missions, but for today, he would have to settle for one of the other two.

He immediately headed to the offense-class section of missions. It had been quite some time since he had taken an offense-class mission.

He scrolled through the section, browsing through the missions. As always, there were many Royal missions. Usually, law enforcement missions all kinds. There were only a few non-Royal missions, all of them were international.

Rui had previously abstained from taking international missions because of the difficulty and risks, but now, he had no more qualms.

Besides, he was curious. He was nearly sixteen, and he would be stepping outside the Kandrian Empire for the first time. Although the Kandrian Empire itself was quite exotic compared to Earth, he had still largely experienced a tamer life, compared to what this continent offered.

What was the rest of this crazy magical world like? What kinds fantasies and tribulations were out there? He wanted to experience all of it with his own two eyes.

And for the first time in his life, he had the power to.

He skimmed through international missions in the Academy, looking for something that met his needs.

There were many that did.

## Chapter 306: International

The Kandrian Empire was large. Especially when compared to the many small sovereign states in its immediate geographic neighborhood.

Most of these small states lacked a strong Martial foundation. They were unable to sustain or retain many of the Martial Artists that did end up breaking through from their populations.

The reason was brutally simple; Large nations were more attractive to Martial Artists than smaller nations. Many of them moved to the larger nations such as the Kandrian Empire, the Sekigahara Confederate, the Britannian Empire and the Republic of Gorteau.

These nations were able to facilitate their growth as Martial Artists to a much higher degree than smaller nations could. Due to a greater availability of better learning and growth resources.

These nations were also one of the few that had a strong centralized Martial Artist organization, such as the Martial Union of the Kandrian Empire. This was also an additional incentive to the Martial Artists of smaller states to join the larger nations, as these Martial Artist organizations often offered a plethora of useful benefits to joining them.

The larger nations did not make it too difficult for these Martial Artists to integrate into their states either. After all, Martial Artists were precious assets to all nations. They were of strategic importance and were absolutely vital to all nations in order to maintain their militaristic power.

Thus, no nations would refuse gaining more of them.

As a consequence, the smaller nations were much more depleted of Martial Artists in comparison to the larger nations. The fewer Martial Artists of each of these nations were unable to fulfill the consumer demand for Martial Art services.

Furthermore, without a strong and large bureaucratic organization such as the Martial Union that could quickly process all commissions for Martial Art services in a standardized manner and convert them into mission bills that could swiftly be delivered to all Martial Artists, it impossible for the Martial Artists of

these smaller nations to be able to fulfill the large demand of the market for Martial Art services in their own nations.

So what did the consumer market do when the Martial Artists of their own nations could not fulfill their demands?

They turned to the larger nations.

The Martial organizations of larger nations like the Kandrian Martial Union were in no shortage of capable Martial Artists, thus they happily catered to the demand for Martial services. Each of the large nations had commission offices across the territories of the smaller nations, allowing them to access a wide international market outside of their own borders, receiving a vast number of commissions from across all these nations.

The missions Rui was browsing through were among these commissions from nations within the large international market that the Kandrian Martial Union.

[Offense-class mission: Elimination mission.

Clientele: Dashaian Temple. Mosca, Minnivaille Kingdom.

Target of elimination; Inhabitants of Mosca Church of Woyeh.

Location of target; Mosca, Minnivaille Kingdom.

Difficulty: Grade 8

Mission commencement: Immediate.

Successful completion remuneration: 30 gold coins, 7 silver coins and 5 bronze coins/ 800 Martial credits.

Mission summary: Eliminate as many inhabitants of the Mosca Church of Woyeh once the mission commences. Averaging with a population 150 at any given point and confirmed presence of one Martial Apprentice.]

"Woah." Rui's eyes widened.

A temple commissioning a grade-eight mission to massacre a church in the same town as itself?

"That's wild."

The Kandrian Empire was secular and didn't have a particularly dominant religion. However, it seemed that the Minnivaille Kingdom had to have severe religious conflicts if a temple was willing to massacre a church!

Rui shook his head. He had no interest in doing something as distasteful as massacring a church.

The other offensive missions weren't necessarily better. All of them made Rui feel fortunate to be born in the Kandrian Empire where there was a certain degree of stability. He did not have to feel worried about international Martial Artists being commissioned by citizens to harm others citizens within the same nation, because such things were unprecedented, as far as he knew.

"Hm?" Another mission bill caught his eye.

[Offense-class mission: Elimination/Capture mission

Clientele: Fria

Target of mission: Ruyloken Gang

Difficulty: Grade 9

Mission commencement: Immediate.

Successful remuneration completion: 38 gold coins, 4 silver coins

Mission execution location: [23.3285, 26.4523] Hefermaine Village, outside the Kingdom of Grahal

Mission summary: Eliminate or capture the Ruyloken Gang that has seized control of the Hefermaine Village alive.]

This one didn't seem as distasteful as the rest. He picked up the mission, shugging. It was definitely the best out of the existing international missions that he saw.

He took it to the Registrar, officially accepting the mission before sitting down at a table in the library. After all, one couldn't gain access to the full information in the mission bill until one accepted the mission. Mission bills often contained sensitive and confidential data that only the Martial Artists accepting the commission had access to, according to the commission contract that the clientele signed with the Martial Union.

He immediately opened it, as he began reading the details of the mission thoroughly.

The Hefermaine village was a tributary of the Kingdom of Grahal, a small kingdom south-west of the Kingdom of Grahal. it was a small settlement as far as population went. The villagers made a living by engaging in agriculture, they occupied rich plains with highly arable land and sold all the excess crop harvest to the Kingdom of Grahal.

Although their lifestyle was rather simple, it was a peaceful village.

Until a gang known as the Ruyloken Gang took over the village and robbed all of the village's wealth earned from the harvest sold to the Kingdom of Grahal and other surrounding states. The village had very little security, being as remote as it was. Furthermore, the gang was lead by an experienced Martial Apprentice. The village had no way to resist.

The gang simply occupied village and barred anyone from leaving, they simply had the villagers work relentlessly and took the gold when the pay came.

#### Chapter 307: Undertaking

The clientele was a young woman named Fria. She was a villager of the Hefermaine Village who had managed to escape during the hostile takeover nearly eight months ago. She had recently commissioned a mission to free the Hefermaine Village from the grasp of the Ruyloken Gang.

And Rui had just picked up the mission bill of the mission.

He skimmed through the data provided by the Martial Union.

The Ruyloken Gang was a known criminal gang of the Grahall Kingdom. They were rather small for a gang, with a member count of only twenty-four. But their size meant that each member got more of each plunder.

Furthermore, the gang was led by a middle-aged Martial Apprentice known as Vranil Fra. The intel the Martial Academy had managed to gather on him was not scant. However, as far as his combat prowess went, the only the mission bill told Rui was that he was an extremely strong Martial Apprentice.

Confirmed to, at the very least, be in the upper echelons of the Apprentice Realm without a doubt. He once fought off and killed three mid-grade Martial Apprentices, and that was before he reached his physical prime. The other piece of information the Martial Academy had been able to provide him was the fact that he was an offense-class Martial Artist.

He was the reason the mission was graded nine. For a singular Martial Apprentice, this mission was close to about as dangerous as Apprentice-level missions got. Furthermore, the fact that the mission was occurring well outside the Kandrian Empire made it that much more dangerous.

There was a lot more information included, but they were more mundane details. Rui quickly inputted and stored all the data in his Mind Palace as he began sorting it out.

There were several things that he didn't quite understand. But he intended to resolve them after meeting up with Fria, the clientele who had commissioned him. She had made the commission from the Kingdom of Grahal, through one of the commission offices of the Kandrian Martial Union in the Kingdom of Grahal, and was currently residing in the Kingdom of Grahal.

She had even requested a meeting with the Martial Artist that accepted the commission prior to the commencement of the mission in the Kingdom of Grahal, which Rui found odd. The commission costs included the travel, shelter accommodations and food costs, among other things. She was making the mission more expensive by requesting a meeting with-in the Kingdom of Grahal.

Regardless, Rui had no choice but to oblige. He did want to ask her some questions as well, if he could.

He got up heading back to his dorm room to get prepared. He really didn't have much to do at the moment, so there was no problem beginning his journey immediately. The mission was meant to be commenced immediately according to the mission bill, and he also had to meet Fria before he actually began the mission.

He quickly bathed, freshening up before he tidied up and put on his Martial garb. He immediately headed to the commissions department, completing the paperwork needed before he headed down to the dispatch facility where he collected his toolkit and gear.

Once he finished the final bit of paperwork, he immediately dispatched. The Kingdom of Grahal was located well away from the Kandrian Empire. About a little under three hundred kilometers south-west of the Kandrian Empire.

Rui was travelling by foot, at his current level, even the effort that transport saved him was not worth the lower speed. The costs of travel in this case would be the rejuvenation potions that the Martial Academy had equipped him with to last the entire journey.

His route required him to cross a few regions of the Kandrian Empire before he exited it. He largely travelled by foot. At his current level it only took two hours to cross entire regions

Which was actually very little, a bit surprisingly. His physical parameters were extremely high in the Apprentice Realm, he could run a huge amount of distance at high speeds before he felt the need of using a potion.

Rui followed a main route that directly connected the Kandrian Empire and the Kingdom of Grahah, and thus the terrain was suited to maintaining what was a decent speed for him.

In less than three hours, he had already reached.

The environment and weather were considerably more different than he was accustomed to in the Mantian Region. The temperature was warm and the air was quite humid, the sun shone bright, unleashing its fury onto the plainlands of the Kingdom of Grahah. The Mantian Region was generally quite cold most of the time, barring two months of the year.

An abundance of fauna and flora saturated his surroundings, different from what he was accustomed to seeing on the outskirts of the town of Hajin where the Quarrier Orphanage was. Lush bold green leaves littered all the trees and shrubs, painting a picture of an environment filled with vitality.

This was the first time he had journeyed outside the Kandrian Empire, and the experience was refreshing. Different people and different environments assailed his deep senses, he genuinely did feel like a tourist. Yet, his alertness had also heightened.

He had been pushing Primordial Instinct and Seismic Mapping to the maximum. Everything was a potential threat. The safety net of the Martial Union and Kandrian Empire was gone and he was truly all by himself. If anything happened, he had only himself to rely on and nobody else, unfortunately.

His immediate destination inside the Kingdom of Grahah was to rendezvous with Fria at a Martial Union commissions office where he could actually interact with her directly.

As for getting into the country. He didn't care to get in via legal channels, the Kingdom of Grahah was a weak and small nation that had not managed to obtain an extradition agreement from the Kandrian Empire. Meaning, no matter what crimes he committed in the Kingdom of Grahah, the Kandrian Empire would not cooperate with the Kingdom of Grahah to enforce their laws onto him, and there was nothing the Kingdom of Grahah could do about it.

The Martial Union did not have any protocols requiring him to enter legally and maintaining the secrecy of his identity was recommended by it.

He himself didn't want to reveal his identity under any circumstances, something that entering through legal channels, being the Martial Artist that he was, would undoubtedly happen.

#### Chapter 308: Arrival

('What they don't know won't hurt them.') Rui casually leaped past the fence that had marked the territory of the Kingdom of Grahal. The security was pitifully weak, but then again, he had expected this.

Even back on Earth in the twenty-first century with all the civil engineering capabilities of the technologically advanced first-world countries, perfect border security had not been accomplished and was quite difficult.

Even superpowers like the US had not achieved even satisfactory border control as illegal immigrants, smugglers and traffickers routinely burrowed into its territories.

It wasn't that these nations in both Gaia or Earth were doing a particularly bad job, the problem was not with the administration or initiative.

The problem simply was that nations were absolutely enormous. The sheer distance that was covered by the borders and circumferences of these nations was huge, it was an incredibly difficult task to try and achieve high security across every inch of one's borders.

This was especially true for smaller and more impoverished nations. Although their borders were also smaller, the inadequacy of the number of Martial Artists due to emigration, the lacklustre technological development meant that achieving security across borders was far more difficult despite being smaller.

Larger nations like the Kandrian Empire were much better, although not perfect. More powerful nations had an abundance of Martial Artists; thus, these nations could afford to deploy a certain number of Martial Artists with sensory capabilities patrolling the borders as well as a sophisticated anti-infiltration system in place thanks to their highly developed esoteric surveillance technology.

Although it was certainly not impossible infiltrate the Kandrian Empire. One had to be far more careful, equipped, specialized and prepared in order to infiltrate the Kandrian Empire. This was in sharp contrast to Rui who infiltrated the Kingdom of Grahal with ease.

The Kingdom of Grahal had a different air to it than the Kandrian Empire did. It exuded a gloomy and desolate vibe.

Rui couldn't put his finger on a single element, it was a combination of things that made him feel that way.

He could see it in the energy of the people that he walked past. He could see it in their eyes; tired resignation. He could see it in the poorly maintain infrastructure, the number of homeless people who slept on the streets, these were people who were just trying to get by day-to-day without much of an eye on the distant future.

The Kandrian Empire, on the other hand, was generally a more vibrant nation. Especially commercial hubs like the town of Hajin. He walked through the steets, having covered himself in a robe that hid his affiliation with the Kandrian Martial Union.

Soon, he reached a commissions office of the Kandrian Martial Union.

"Purpose of visit?" One of the Martial Apprentice guards asked him as he approached the building.

"Mission." He replied as he showed them his mission bill and learner's license. The guard frowned when he saw Rui's grade, before nodding after having verified the legitimacy of the documents and the mission.

"Okay, clear."

They let him in without any problem.

('I guess it's odd for a grade-ten Martial Artist to still have only a learner's license.') He guessed as he reached the reception.

"Excuse me." He approached one of the receptionists.

"Hi! How may I help you." She cheerily replied.

"I'm a Martial Artist of the Martial Union here to meet with a client." He told the receptionist. "She lives in another city, I was hoping to contact her via the Martial Union."

"Alright, I need your license and mission bill please."

He duly handed her the documents as she fiddled with a device on her table. Rui guessed that the Martial Union employed a certain degree of information technology in order to manage its data. However, he suspected that the information technology was highly limited and also not viable for mass production due to relying on uncommon or highly valuable esoteric resources.

The same was true for all the esoteric technology he had seen in this world. They were capable of replicating a lot of Earth's most common technology, yet they relied on scarcer wondrous esoteric resources instead of science to accomplish it, making it impossible for it to be mass-produced and fully integrated into the structure of society because of scarcity and value of the esoteric resources used.

"Your client is miss Fria, correct?" The receptionist asked.

"Yes."

"She resides in the town of Frungeur, which is about a little over two hours from here on carriage." The receptionist. "I can give you her address."

"Isn't there any issue with disclosing her personal details in that manner?"

"Not at all, the commission contract indicates consents to it in order to meet the Martial Artist who undertook the commission."

"I see, then please do."

She scribbled down an address on a piece of paper before folding it and giving it to Rui. "That's the address. You can visit the commissions office of the Martial Union in the town of Freunger for guidance if you want."

"Will do. Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Rui immediately set out for the town of Freunder.

The receptionist had told him it would a little over two hours on carriage, which meant he could easily reach in under an hour as long as he exerted himself a little.

He took the off-beat path away from the public to avoid as many prying eyes, and in about half an hour, he had reached the town of Freunger.

It took him a longer time to actually reach the location in the address, since he needed to ask around. Thankfully there enough people who spoke Sanskrit, the international language of the Panama continent. Julian had helped Rui become proficient in the language when he was growing up.

Eventually, Rui found himself in a rather slummy area. The infrastructure of this part of town was particularly bad, and the people were much poorer too.

Rui was a bit confused. His remuneration pay was thirty gold coins, which meant the mission must have costed sixty gold coins. How could someone who could afford to pay for such a mission live in such an area?

Chapter 309: Fria

"This should be it."

He murmured as his eyebrow raised at the poor small hut in front of him. The structure looked so frail that Rui wouldn't even need to use an Apprentice-level technique to completely demolish it.

He knocked on the door lightly.

"I haven't finished preparing myself, the night hasn't begun yet, please wait."

Rui hadn't even the faintest idea what those words meant, they were literally in a different language. "I'm the Martial Artist from the Kandrian Martial Union who has accepted your commi-"

The door clicked, instantly swinging wide open.

Rui found himself staring at a young beautiful woman, who stared right back at him with disbelief and elation.

"Miss Fria?" Rui asked.

Rui's eyebrows rose as he saw a tear flowing down from her eye, she seemed choked with emotion.

"Are you okay?" He asked, seeing that she clearly wasn't.

"No. I mean yes, but no. Oh god I can't believe you're here. I ca-" She choked once as again as she pressed her lips together suppressing her emotions.

Rui felt awkward. He had zero experience with comforting emotional young women. He was quite happy that she spoke Sanskrit, however. For now, he just tried to move things along as smoothly as he could

"Calm down miss." Rui said. "Take things slowly. I believe you wished to speak to me before the mission was commenced?"

She seemed to pull herself together at those words. "Yes, please come in."

Rui crouched as he bent to fit into the small doorway. His growth spurt in the past three years had done wonders for his height. But it was more of a hinderance in situations like this, but he was surprised she was able to live in such small accommodations.

"Please take a seat." She gestured at a disheveled torn sofa that looked like it had been extracted from a land dump. "Would you like something to drink?"

"No thank you." He was thirsty, but he didn't want to get sick on an international mission, and he didn't trust anything in the entire district to be hygienic.

She took a seat opposite to him, staring him in the eyes. "Sorry for my outburst earlier... It's just that I've been through a lot, all for this very day."

"It does seem that way, it's not a matter to apologize about." Rui placated her.

"Thank you. Unfortunately, I had been informed that my commission had been accepted although they refused to share any details about you to me asides from your grade." She said.

"I'm afraid I cannot share any details about myself either." Rui told her. He hadn't taken off his mask even once the moment he left the Martial Academy.

"Are you really a grade-ten Martial Artist?" She asked, concerned. "You seem very young."

Rui had consciously maintained extreme composure, this was a technique every Martial Artist naturally learned as they grew stronger and stronger, in order to suppress and limit their aura and pressure. Martial Artists were so powerful that their very presence could trigger the subconscious sense of danger in normal humans, and could exert a lot of pressure on them that way. Restricting emotional expression was one way they could limit the pressure they exerted on others.

The light grew a shade darker as the air grew tauter and perilous for just the briefest of moments, before returning to normal.

Rui had loosened his control on his emotions just a little. However even that tiny bit inspired an immense amount of terror in Fria as she understood the Martial Artist before her was anything but ordinary

"I've earned my grade." He told her. "Rest assured that I'm more than qualified to undertake this mission."

Fria's expression molded into relieved elation, before her emotions gripped her once more. "Please. Please save my family, my people, my village. I cannot imagine how much they've suffered in the past eight months. I had just barely managed to escape that night, migrating to the Kingdom of Grahal. And it took eight months of working as a maid by day and a prostitute by night, living in this filth to cut down expenses until I had finally saved enough money to commission you."

Her voice cracked at the end as she choked as she stared into his eyes. "You have to. You have to save them. Our village is not poor, that's why those Royluken bastards targeted us. If you succeed, we'll give you a lot of money! I'll give you everything I have, even my bod-"

"I cannot promise you of my success." Rui cut her off before she could finish her words, crushing a pang of lust his hormonal teenage body felt. "What I can promise you is that I'll do my absolute best. This, I can absolutely guarantee. My grade is a bit higher than the difficulty grade of the mission, which means the Kandrian Martial Union believes I'm more than qualified to undertake this mission, therefore the probability of success should not be low."

Rui's words inspired confidence in her, lighting up hope in her eyes.

Rui on the hand, understood why she went out of her way to request a meeting with him even though it would have increased the cost of the mission, being that this was an international mission.

She wanted to incentivize and motivate him to succeed by offering him money and sex, so that he would take the mission very seriously and do everything he could to succeed.

He also understood how she managed to afford such an expensive commission. The last eight months must have been a living hell for her as she did everything she could to amass the money needed to commission a powerful Martial Artist who was capable of fulfilling her wishes.

Her story earned his sympathy, as well as his respect and admiration for her dedication and perseverance for the sake of her people.

"If there's nothing else." He said, getting up. "I'll be setting out to fulfill your wish."

#### Chapter 310: Observation

"Thank you, and good luck." She got up, bowing. Yet, just as Rui was about to leave, she stopped him.

"Wait. I have something to give you."

Rui tilted his head as she reached for her neck, taking off a string necklace with what looked like a claw attached to it.

"This is the claw of a skyfringe eagle." She told him. "It protects the crops by hunting the pests and critters that destroy the crops. In our village we wear it around our necks for good fortune."

Rui wordlessly accepted it as she put it around his neck.

"Good luck." She wished him.

"Thank you, goodbye" Rui nodded as he left her humble abode.

The Hefermaine village was located a little south of the Kingdom of Grahal. Rui thought about how he was going to do this.

The first thing he needed was information. Information on the exact number of gang members in the village. The tendencies and habits; things like where they spent most of their time, what they did with most of their time and how alert they were.

He would also have liked to get as much information about Vranil Fra as he could, although he didn't expect to get much as much as he would have liked. After all, he would need to see Vranil fight in order to gain any meaningful information.

"Maybe I can get him to fight." Rui murmured as a few ideas popped into his head.

A few hours later, he reached the edge of the Kingdom of Grahal on the western side, quickly jumping past the border as he sprinted away at top speed. He never lost track of the path that would take him most of the way to the Hefermaine village, but he never stayed close either.

It was possible that the Ruyloken gang had kept lookouts on the path to the Hefermaine village that would inform them of the arrival of a new Martial Artist, thus Rui chose to travel parallelly to it deep in the forest, he kept track of the path from afar with Seismic Mapping, which allowed him to map the environment and anything that had seismic radiation.

This way, there was absolutely no way the Ruyloken Gang could possibly know that there was a Martial Artist out for them. Rui had not given his identity entering or exiting the Kingdom of Grahal and now was keeping himself remote as he travelled to the Hefermaine village.

Thankfully, it wasn't more than three hours away by carriage, he managed to reach it in an hour.

He was quite paranoid about being found; thus, he took his precautions. When he was ten kilometers from the village, he stopped using Apprentice-level techniques. If Vranil had sensory techniques, he might have been able to sense Rui's approach, after all.

When he was one kilometer away, he stopped. He jumped to the top of a tall tree, pulled out a portable monocular as he used it to get a good look at the Hefermaine village.

Unfortunately, he didn't see much.

The Hefermaine village was large, because there were a lot of wide and large crop fields across the entire village. Meaning the village was as large as a small town, or multiple districts because of the size of the crop fields, despite the population of the village being low.

This made things harder for Rui.

However, he didn't want to take a risk and try infiltrating the village, if Vranil was a good sensor and detected him, then there would be problems.

The reason Rui was averse to just walking in wreaking havoc was because it was possible that the Ruyloken Gang would use the villagers as hostages, which inevitably would mean that they would die if he didn't surrender himself or something of the sort.

And there was no way he was surrendering himself, that was as good as signing his death warrant.

Although he didn't think the probability of Vranil being a powerful strong sensor was high, because otherwise, Fria would not have been able to escape the Ruyloken Gang, he still wanted to be careful. It was possible that Vranil simply didn't care that a single girl managed to escape.

If that was the case, that would make Vranil a bit careless and stupid, because that very well could lead to a bounty being placed on his head.

Like it basically did, with Rui aiming to take him down.

Rui began circling around the village from a kilometer away, occasionally jumping a tree and taking a good look with his monocular. He soon saw his first gang member.

('They're armed quite heavily.') Rui noted. They had muskets, knives and other blades as well.

It had taken him quite some time to circle around the village, gathering as much information as he could piece-by-piece, until he got a general gist of what was going on.

The villagers outnumbered the gang immensely. However, the gang members being armed as well as the presence of a powerful Martial Apprentice was more than enough to crush any hope of resistance.

The conditions of the villagers was not great, they looked a little malnourished, but were still healthy enough to keep working, which they had been doing non-stop.

('They're feeding them just enough so that they can keep working and tending to the yield and so that the money keeps rolling in.') Rui sighed.

Furthermore, he sensed groups of villagers holed in buildings with guards on the outside, preventing anyone from leaving. Rui's seismic sense was too far away to get him a clear picture of the people inside, but he already had had his suspicions.

('They're holding the elderly and young children hostage so that the working adults don't even dream about trying something. I bet they've killed a few of them as an example.')

This was the reason Rui didn't see too many patrollers from the gang, they already had a pretty good way of guaranteeing cooperation from the villagers. If the villagers were even half of what Fria was, they wouldn't do anything that put their families at jeopardy.