

Martial Unity 381

Chapter 381: Discussion

"Hm." Headmaster Aronian nodded. "Interesting letter. You don't want Squire Dylan to be penalized for his actions?"

"Yes sir." Rui nodded, affirming. "He certainly didn't mean any harm and the accident wasn't truly his fault. I'm certain I could force a similar reaction out of every Martial Squire that wasn't aware of that capability of mine."

"You can, can you?" Headmaster Aronian chuckled.

"I'm certain that I can." Rui reaffirmed, projecting confidence.

In truth, he didn't truly know that for a fact. But he wanted to make sure to convey that Dylan wasn't particularly at any fault.

"Your statement will be taken into consideration. However, not only can I not promise anything, I cannot divulge any information on the matter to a mere student." Headmaster Aronian firmly said.

"I see, thank you for hearing me out regardless, headmaster." Rui sighed. He couldn't really do anything beyond appealing for Squire Dylan.

"As for the other matter mentioned in the letter." Headmaster Aronian glanced back at it.

"I believe it's time for me to leave the Academy. I just wanted to consult you on the matter." Rui confirmed.

"Hoho." He chuckled in response. "I do not have any input to offer outside of encouraging you to do what you feel is best."

"I see..." Rui murmured. "In that case, I would like to graduate as soon as possible."

"Alright then." Headmaster Aronian nodded. "That can be arranged. Your learner's license will be updated to a full-fledged Martial license once you do graduate and the debt you undertook when you enrolled in the Academy will be in effect in the new contract you sign with the Martial Union. You do recall the terms and conditions of the contract, yes?"

"A quarter of my earnings of the fifty-fifty split goes to the Martial Union until the debt is repaid" Rui nodded, sighing.

This meant he would receive only thirty-seven-point-five percent of the total commission paid for every mission he successfully completed. The silver lining of the matter was that the Martial Union did not charge any interest over debt. As long as Rui paid back the exact amount he had borrowed, the debt was considered settled.

This was an odd policy on the surface, but Rui understood the reason for it. The fundamental and most important goal of the Martial Academy was to produce as many competent Martial Artists as possible, not to make as much money as possible. Crippling young graduates with a brutal interest rate that would compound over the years and suffocate them for more than a decade was not the intention of the Martial Union.

Enacting such a policy would only reduce the power of these young Martial Artists due to their inability to purchase techniques and training resources due to being crippled by debt. It would also result in an increase in the mortality rate of young graduates while completing missions due to hindered capability to purchase necessary and vital tools needed for completing missions, like potions.

This was a disastrous outcome for the Martial Union. Thus, the debt did not compound interest. Nor was there a time limit to the debt. It did not shackle the young graduates, merely put pressure on them to complete missions at a higher rate.

"It's a good thing you have accumulated a lump sum of Martial credits." Headmaster Aronian chimed in. "Credits can be exchanged with the Kandrian currency, and you're going to need funds immediately after you graduate."

Rui nodded. Once he graduated, he could no longer mooch off of the Martial Academy for providing the resources needed for completing missions. He would need to purchase every tool, potion, mask, and other item mandated and recommended to be carried by the Martial Union.

All this time, the Martial Academy had funded the supplies for those resources, and the debt he had incurred included the cost of three years' worth of supplies of needed resources. It would take him a long time of sustained missions to repay all of the debt he owed the Martial Academy and the Martial Union by extension.

"Have you decided what classes of missions you are most interested in?" Headmaster Aronian asked.

Generally, Martial Artists used their time in the Martial Academies to get a good understanding of each class of missions before sticking to one, sometimes two classes of missions. Generally, offense-oriented Martial Artists stick with offense-oriented missions, and occasionally hunter-class missions. Defense-oriented Martial Artists did the same with defense-class missions and hunter-class as well. However, the situation was usually more complicated for non-specialists, especially non-specialists like Rui who was an all-rounder.

He had no particular affinity to any of the classes of missions in particular. Since his last training stage, he had mastered techniques that would allow him to be competent at even shadow-class missions.

"I'm afraid I haven't decided yet." Rui said. "I think I'll just stick to all classes, I don't have any particular affinities within them and I do think I would be better off if I periodically completed missions from all of them. I was especially surprised at how well a lot of miscellaneous missions suited me." Rui noted.

The representative missions with Nartha gave him a chance to test himself against a wide variety of Martial Artists. He had served as her representative fighter many a time.

"I see." Headmaster Aronian nodded. "That is a model that most all-rounders like yourself adopt, however that needn't be the case with you."

"Why do you say that?" Rui asked inquisitively.

"Because you have garnered a large number of personal commissions." Headmaster Aronian replied simply. "Thanks to that you have gained access to commission opportunities that most Martial Artists won't."

"Ah..." Rui scratched his head awkwardly.

His commission inbox had blown up with commissions from many elite and wealthy clienteles across the nation. There were a number of reasons for this. His fame as the Martial Contest finalist, his fame in the Martial Games, and the fame he acquired thanks to killing Squire Freelia Caella. He had become a bit of a celebrity in the Martial circles of the Kandrian Empire.

Chapter 382: Inspection

"It's true," Rui admitted. "Personal commissions are quite interesting and unique many a time."

"Indeed. They're generally quite lucrative." The headmaster added. "Though their difficulty is usually higher too."

"Although I enjoy personal commissions, I prefer international missions more." Rui chimed.

"Oh?" Headmaster Aronian raised an eyebrow in interest. "Why is that?"

"Well. I learn more about this world through them." Rui replied. "It's a big wide world out there, I don't want to limit myself to the Kandrian Empire. I also want to visit the Beast Domain on a mission this if possible."

"Adventurous, aren't you?" The headmaster smiled, amused. "The Beast Domain is quite dangerous. Be prepared, or else you will die."

"I will, headmaster." Rui nodded.

The jovial headmaster humored Rui for some time before their conversation came to a halt. They discussed a few more things of greater note, such as Rui's graduation, before the headmaster concluded their talk, bidding Rui farewell.

"Thank you for all your help not just with these matters, but also for everything in the past three years."
Rui bowed deeply with sincere respect and gratitude.

"Hoho, not at all." Headmaster Aronian. "Be careful and never forget; always be true to your Martial Path."

"Yes sir." Rui nodded. "Goodbye."

He turned around, leaving the headmaster's office as he sighed in relief, massaging his head. Headmaster Aronian was a pleasant person, but as a Martial Master, the pressure he exerted on Rui was not small. Rui felt like a weight had been lifted off of his shoulders.

"What now?" He wondered aloud.

He strolled around the Academy aimlessly as he immersed himself in his thoughts. "Hm..."

His mind fell back to the spar with Squire Dylon. He had learned a lot about his new combat prowess in that sparring match thanks to facing an opponent who could actually take him on and defeat him soundly, although he was defeated more soundly than he had hoped for.

Still, there were plenty of conclusions that could be drawn from it. "The Mindmirror brain really is something else. It was an absolutely perfect move on my part to purchase that technique."

He didn't normally toot his own horn, but the Mindmirror Symbiote had turned out to be such an extraordinarily powerful and compatible technique that purchasing it was probably the second most important purchase of a technique he had ever made. The top spot, of course, went to the Mind Palace technique which was the only reason the VOID algorithm was viable in the first place.

He had cleared most of the difficulty of the grade-ten difficulty of the technique as well. The only existing negative impact was his sleeplessness tolerance. He sighed as he painfully recollected that this would be the last time he could purchase and master six techniques in six months.

He could quite clearly feel the strain that the Secondary Brain permanently exerted on his brain from the moment he finished his Mind Embed fully. Normally, the host of the symbiote would need to sleep for an extra few hours so that the brain could use that rest time to recover from the fatigue caused by the strain that the Mindmirror Symbiote exerted on his brain. However, his mind was capable of bearing the strain without needing extra sleep. However, he would no longer be able to go for long periods without sleep now.

"Still, it was worth it." Rui shook his head. The sheer boost in the perfection with which he used the VOID algorithm alone was worth it. But the general overall boost to his combat prowess was not small. With his current prowess, Rui was truly a cut apart from his peers.

However, the Mindmirror Symbiote wasn't the only thing he had mastered in his training stage. Although it had certainly stolen the spotlight, it wasn't the only technique he had mastered.

The Mind Mask technique was also a spectacular success. It was a shocking success. At the very least, he had come prepared with what to expect with the Mindmirror Symbiote, but he had been absolutely shocked by the results of the Mind Mask technique.

How on Earth could he have known he would have projected Squire-level danger and pressure? He had simply done his best. The interaction between the Mindmirror Symbiote and the Mind Mask techniques was almost unfairly effective.

"Putting those two freaks aside, the other techniques were also quite solid." Rui nodded.

The Shadow Step techniques was a very good technique by itself, however, when he paired it up with the Mind Mask technique, its effectivity rose significantly. Together they were on par with grade-nine techniques rather than the grade-seven technique that it originally was. Furthermore, if used in combination with Blink, then it was truly a force to be reckoned with. Although it still felt short of Kane's Void Step technique, Rui could take pride in his stealth capabilities.

"The Final Breathing technique was also effective." Rui nodded. He had used it when Squire Dylan had walloped him away with a Squire-level attack, it had mitigated the damage significantly even after he lost consciousness. It was a technique that could be used even when unconscious.

"The Reverberating Lance was certainly good... But unfortunately, Martial Squires aren't the right opponents to get a good understanding of it." Rui murmured.

Martial Squires were essentially hyper-evolved human beings as far as physique went. Unlike Martial Apprentices, their inner body wasn't weak and easy to hurt as a Martial Apprentice. Therefore the Reverberating Lance technique did not have too much relevance when he, a Martial Apprentice, used it against a Martial Squire, it simply wasn't as effective as it was. Thus, he didn't get too good of a grasp of how strong the technique was.

"Should I hit Nartha up?" He wondered, before shaking his head.

The Martial Apprentices of the Martial Games weren't weak in general, but they certainly weren't a threat to him at his current level.

"People are either too strong or too weak." He sighed. He wondered if there were other Martial Apprentices out there who were also perhaps quasi-Squire level like he was.

Chapter 383: Graduation

"Maybe there are beasts in the Beast Domain who can suit my needs." Rui pondered aloud. If Martial Artists weren't able to cut it, then maybe powerful Apprentice-level beasts could.

After all, wasn't the whole purpose of purchasing the Reverberating Lance technique to be able to harm beasts with great body mass?

Rui shrugged. "Alright, why not?"

He put that on his checklist. He had planned to enter the Beast Domain before he entered his last training stage.

"But there's still something left to do before that..." Rui murmured.

A week passed.

The many Martial Apprentices of the Martial Academy had gathered at the main hall of the Martial Academy before the elevated podium. Upon the podium was Headmaster Aronian. He gazed at all the Martial Apprentices before him, before addressing them.

"Today we gather to celebrate the graduation of a peer of all of you. A fellow peer who joined the Academy and is now ready to step out and move forward with his life." He began, before continuing. "The Martial Academy is a haven for Martial Art. It fosters the foundations needed for Martial Art in the Foundation Stage while also creating an environment within which all of you could immerse yourselves within yourselves and Martial Art before discovering your Martial Path."

He paused, before continuing. "Yet there comes a time when your Martial Path grows too deep for a mere academy to contain. Someday all of you will depart this place that has sustained your growth, as you follow your Martial Path. Someday this place will cease to be a haven and turn more into a shackle. When that day comes, you will leave, as you must. Today is that day for Apprentice Rui Quarrier. He joined this Academy three years ago, and today is that day. The day he departs this Academy and becomes a true full-fledged and independent Martial Artist. Please welcome Apprentice Rui Quarrier for his farewell with a round of applause."

Headmaster Aronian gestured at Rui as he walked on stage, drowned by a wave of loud applause. It took more than just several seconds for the applause to die down. The Martial Apprentices of the Martial Academy had come to develop an immense amount of respect and admiration for him, and it reflected. He was a source of inspiration for many who had witnessed his astronomical rise in the span of three years in the Academy. There were more than just a few Martial Apprentices in the crowd who were part of his batch of students of the Martial Academy, although that fact did not matter once students reached the Explorer Stage.

"Ahem." Rui cleared his throat as the applause finally died down. "I won't bore all of you with a super long boring speech, especially since this will probably be the last time I see many of you. In the past three years, I have shared countless spars with all of you. We have all forged ourselves with the heat of our peers and we have all grown stronger as a result. I do believe that I would not be here today if not for you, my peers, and especially those of you that I truly consider friends."

He said as he grinned at the beaming faces of his Kane, Fae, Nel, Hever, Milliana, and Dalen down at the crowd.

"I would like to thank all of you, not just my peers and friends, but also all of the Squire instructors of our Academy for all the tutelage and guidance you have showered me with as I pursued my Martial Path and developed my Martial Art. I would like to extend a special thanks to instructor Kyrie and instructor Dylan for the aid they have provided me with in my time in the Academy." Rui mentioned both of them. "I would like to thank headmaster Aronian who has aided me with his wisdom whenever I was in need of it. I would like to thank all of the staff of the Martial Academy for ensuring this gigantic and complex institute is always running smoothly. Thank you all for all you've done for me. I will now be taking the next step into the next phase of my life and I hope that all of you succeed in the pursuit of your Martial Path. Thank you, and farewell."

He bowed deeply as not only the Martial Apprentices but all those who had attended the convocation began clapping loudly. A thunderous applause resonated across the hall as Rui rose before making his way off the podium and into the crowd.

He interacted with all of them, accepting their congratulations and well wishes until he reached his friends.

"So." Kane sighed. "You're leaving already huh?"

"You're supposed to say 'congratulations Rui' there." Fae threw a disapproving look at him.

"Wait till I graduate!" Nel grinned. "I'll be even stronger than you!"

"Good luck with your further endeavors." Hever calmly wished him, nodding.

"It feels quite surreal to think that you'll be leaving the Academy," Dalen muttered.

"Congratulations." even the normally mute Milliana wished him.

"Thanks." Rui laughed, before reassuring all of them. "Nothing much changes, if you ask me. We can still hang out and even complete missions together regardless."

They bantered a bit before he bade them an emotional farewell before heading back to his dorm room with Kane.

On his bed lay the same old cloth back that he had brought with him when he first joined the Martial Academy three years ago. The sight of it still brought back waves of nostalgia from back then. He felt wistful about leaving the Martial Academy, yet his eagerness of being an independent full-fledged Martial Artist was even greater.

"So you're really leaving huh?" Kane sighed.

Rui turned to face him. "Hey man, cheer up. You're still my best friend. We can still hang out and do missions together."

"Yeah, it's just going to get duller without you here anymore." Kane sighed. "Maybe I ought to leave the Martial Academy too."

Chapter 384: Return

"Are you ready to leave the Academy?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

Generally, students graduated when the Academy no longer provided much utility to them, or when they were no longer merited to remain in the Martial Academy. In either case, the Martial Academy would graduate them and they would go on to operate as full-fledged Martial Artists.

"No," Kane admitted, sighing. "I need to grow stronger if I want to be able to forcefully gain my independence from Arrancar Family. Furthermore, if I leave now I'll just end up under their clutches."

"Right." Rui nodded, sighing. "Do what's best for your future Kane, that's what's most important at the end of the day."

"Yeah, I know, it's just a shame we won't be able to hang out anymore," Kane remarked.

"Like I said, we can still take missions together," Rui told him. "So cheer up, it's not all that bad."

"Yeah, I know." Kane sighed gloomily.

Soon it was time for Rui to depart the Martial Academy. He took his time bidding farewell to the many acquaintances he had made in his time in the Martial Academy. His close friends, peers, instructors, and other staff. Finally he stood at the gate, ready to leave.

"Man." Rui muttered. "I'm going to miss this place."

He turned around and walked past the gates of the Martial Academy, no longer a student.

From now on, he was a full-fledged independent Martial Artist. And now the burden of debt that he had incurred over the past few years would not actually be placed on his shoulders. The net sum had been calculated and given to him before he departed, and the sheer amount was not something that could be repaid in any short amount of time.

"For now, I should forget about staying independent." Rui shook his head.

He immediately began jogging towards the Quarrier Orphanage. This is where he would be staying until he repaid all his debt, at the very least.

It didn't take long for Rui to reach the Quarrier Orphanage. He was greeted the second he reached the gates.

"RUUUU!" Alice squealed energetically when he reached the Orphanage, as she pulled him for a hug. "You've grown so tall!"

"Thanks." Rui squeezed. "Good to see you too, Alice. You're choking me you know."

"Ahhh~ my bad my bad." She laughed as she let go of Rui. "Come in. I'm so glad you're back!"

Rui let her drag her in with an amused smile as the other members of the Orphanage. The children and the adults of the Quarrier Orphanage quickly swarmed him as they greeted him.

"Congratulations on graduating from the Academy." Farion smiled as he hugged Rui.

"Hehe, so you've become a full-fledged Martial Artist now, eh?" Nina smiled.

"Congratulations Rui." Julian smiled welcomingly. "You've truly come a long way."

"Big brother!" Max and Mana greeted him as the children followed suit. "You're back, teach us Martial Art."

"Alright alright." Rui laughed. "Good to finally be back with all of you."

"Rui." Lashara called out to him.

"Mom." Rui walked towards her.

"My precious baby." She pulled him for a hug.

He remained lowered until she was finally satisfied, letting go. "You'll be staying here?"

"For the foreseeable future, surely." Rui confirmed.

The orphanage fawned over him some more before finally letting him be.

"Phew." He collapsed into a couch.

"So." Julian sat across from him. "What do you plan to do from here on?"

"Nothing much has changed really." Rui shrugged. "I don't believe I'm too far from the Squire Realm, and that is my immediate goal."

"I see." Julian sipped some tea. "Will the debt hinder you too much?"

"Hmmm..." Rui pondered. "It will impede me to a certain extent I would imagine, but it doesn't change too much. At the end of the day, I still plan on completing missions and that doesn't change regardless if I'm in debt or not."

"What about the cost of training and growth resources?" Julian asked.

Previously, the cost of the training and growth resources were all covered by the Martial Academy outside of the cost of gaining access to techniques. Rui could simply walk in and purchase the techniques that he wanted and immediately begin training with the training equipment and resources that he needed while being guided by a veteran Martial Squire with a large amount of experience in guiding Martial Apprentices with the training and mastery of those particular techniques. He could use all the rejuvenation potions he wanted in the world without a care.

"Well..." Rui scratched his head awkwardly. "That's going to be much harder than it used to be."

The Martial union offered essentially the exact same resources the Martial Academy did, but all of them cost the Martial Apprentices. These resources weren't cheap.

"Thankfully, my training and growth resources needs have reduced tremendously." He told Julian.

"Oh?" Julian frowned. "Why is that?"

Rui proceeded to tell Julian everything about the Mindmirror Symbiote.

"Fascinating." Julian's eyes lit up with interest. "That's quite remarkable. I know of symbiotic Martial Art, but I've never heard about the Mindmirror Symbiote before. It's genuinely shocking to know that such extreme symbiotes exist."

"Yeah." Rui nodded. "I was pretty shocked too."

"In that case, the reduced training and mastery speed might actually be perfectly timed." Julian speculated. "Since you no longer have the ability to train for free, it's quite likely that the debt you're enduring will also prevent you from training at your previous speed. So your financial constraints match your mental constraints."

Rui nodded. "True, this is one of the considerations I had when I picked the Mindmirror Symbiote for my previous training stage. I knew I would be leaving the Martial Academy once the training stage ended. Thus, it would coincide very well with my debt constraints and I would avoid wasting potential that could have been used to grow stronger faster."

"That's quite wise of you." Julian nodded.

The two of them conversed for quite some time before it was time for lunch."

Chapter 385: Purchase

Rui spent a few days with the Quarrier Orphanage as he took his time to settle in. The Quarrier Orphanage had grown a lot thanks to the number of adults working in the orphanage that had grown since Rui was a child as well as Julian's funding and support. Rui got his own room in the Quarrier Orphanage, which was certainly something he needed. Although he loved his family dearly, he had become extremely accustomed to privacy in the Martial Academy and was not willing to go back to the dormitory halls if he could have avoided it.

Even in his previous life on Earth, he had valued his privacy immensely. In the early years of his second life, he had willingly tolerated the dormitory hall because of the fact that he was still a child. But now he was a contributing adult and he had the right to his own room. His being a Martial Artist was also quite helpful in that Martial Artists had a special status in human societies.

After a few days of getting acclimatized to living in the Quarrier Orphanage, he had decided it was time to resume his mission undertaking. He headed over to the Martial Union headquarters early in the morning that day, looking for missions.

"Excuse me." Rui addressed a staff member after having reached the commissions' department. "May I gain access to my inbox of personal commissions?"

"Of course." She replied. "Is there something wrong with your accounter?"

"My accounter?" Rui frowned. "What's that?"

"Ah, you aren't aware." She surmised. "An accounter is a device that allows you to access your account at the Martial Union that allows you to access the information pertaining to you in the Martial Union such as your profile, data on the missions you've completed, your inbox, and other aspects of you as a Martial Artist. It also allows for easier communication between you and others to contact you whether it be from within the Martial Union or clientele interested in contacting you. It's not mandatory or necessary, but generally, Martial Artists with a need to have quick and easy access to this information purchase one."

"I see." Rui's eyes lit up. "Where can I purchase one?"

"You can purchase them at the commercial wing of the Martial Union." She replied.

"Thank you."

Rui immediately headed to the commercial wing. It was an entire chunk of the Martial Union, extending over a wide area. There were various sections within the commercial wing selling all kinds of products for Martial Artists including potions, garbs, masks, monoculars, and other tools Martial Artists generally carried or used when completing missions.

"Wow." Rui murmured. He felt as though he had entered one of the gigantic shopping mall complexes from Earth. "Guess this won't be the last time I come here."

From this point on, he would need to purchase his own supplies by himself from the shopping wing. No longer would things be handed to him on a silver platter.

"Excuse me." He addressed one of the support staff members in the digital device section of the commercial wing. "I'm looking for an accountant."

"Of course." She replied. "What kind of an accountant are you looking for?"

"My knowledge of the devices is extremely shallow, but I would like one with longevity and high functionality in the basic features of an accountant. Meaning I can reliably access my profile and inbox and contact people reliably at all times. However, I do not require any additional features."

"Understood, in that case, I would recommend the SM-16 to you." She brought out a box with a product in it. "It's part of the standard model series developed by the Martial Union itself specifically meant for its reliability in the basic features that it has. It's one of the most common no-nonsense type digital accountants that allow you to rely on it at any time."

Rui nodded. "How much does it cost?"

"About ninety-three gold coins and seven silver coins." She replied. "About two thousand four hundred and forty Martial credits."

Rui winced at the price, before slightly shaking his head. This largely confirmed what he had always suspected about digital technology based on esoteric resources. Fifty-three gold coins were an immense sum for a single digital device. A single gold coin was worth ten silver coins and a silver coin was worth a hundred bronze coins.

The lower echelons of the Kandrian Empire earned and spent bronze and silver coins. Middle-class citizens earned and spent silver and gold coins whereas only the upper class of society could really afford to splurge ninety-three gold coins on a single digital device such as an accountant of this sort.

This reinforced the fact that the cost of production of digital currency was high, too high for it to be viable for mass production. It was quite likely the cost of the esoteric compounds that allowed for the digital device to function were valuable and uncommon. This was really the only plausible reason why it cost nearly a hundred gold coins for a digital device that, on Earth, wouldn't have cost him more than fifty dollars.

Once he made the purchase, she quickly set up the device and registered him into his account, and showed him how to use it.

The display technology was not nearly as refined as the display technology of Earth, but it served its purpose. It was a little choppy and rough compared to high definition display technology of Earth.

"...And this is how you view your inbox." She finished her explanation. "It runs of energy cells that need to periodically be replaced. It is recommended that you purchase an extra cell and keep it on your person at all times so that you can easily replace it if the cell dies during an important time. It has a warranty of three months so be mindful of that as well."

"How much does the cell cost?" Rui inquired.

"About twenty-five gold coins." She replied straightforwardly.

"..."

Chapter 386: Interesting

Rui took a seat after he purchased his accouter. He scrolled through his profile in interest.

"Grade ten." He murmured. He felt the grade was no longer apt for his current level of power. He was a grade-ten Martial Apprentice even before he grew significantly stronger thanks to the previous training stage.

He scrolled through his profile, glancing over all the details it specified before going over his inbox. He had opened his inbox for commissions a while back when he came out of training.

"Woah." His eyes widened. "Three hundred and twelve personal commissions?!"

Rui's fame had pierced into the right circles in the Kandrian Empire. There were many with more than enough wealth to commission him, who were willing to splurge in order to gain the services of one of the best Martial Apprentices in the Kandrian Empire.

Of course, the only reason not every single clientele in the Kandrian Empire coveted him was because there often was a thin line between peak Martial Apprentices and Martial Squires in so far as whether wealthy clientele wished to hire the former or the latter. If a mission was difficult even by grade-ten standards, then many wealthy clientele would rather not take any chances and hire a Martial Squire who is guaranteed to succeed.

Rui sat down as he took his time browsing through the many personal commissions made for him. They were, as always, diverse and varied.

The sheer number of personal commissions he had received were not something he would be able to finish in a short period of time. He quickly began screening them one by one.

"Man." He muttered. "There are so many personal commissions for a personal fighter."

Ever since his identity got revealed in the Martial Games he had eternally been flooded by commissions to represent the clientele as their representative fighter in events similar to the Martial Games across the Kandrian Empire. The many elite participants of the Martial Games had finally learned of his true identity and sought to commission him with hefty bonuses, hoping to rope him in.

Of course, Rui wasn't all that interested in permanently participating in the Martial Games. The Martial Games was perfect for him a year ago, but at his current level of power, he was too strong for any Martial Apprentice he had ever faced.

He ignored all representative fighter commissions for the time period.

He also threw away all defense-class missions. Frankly, they weren't worth the time in his opinion. These missions despite their difficulty never fully guaranteed conflict that would give him the real combat experience that he was looking for. Unless he was absolutely certain he would see action, he would rather avoid bodyguard missions if he could.

"There is a surprising amount of shadow class missions." His eyes lit up in interest. "Maybe I'll take one of them this time around."

He didn't expect to be personally commissioned with shadow class missions because they were usually the most divergent and demanding class of missions as far as the skillset necessary. One needed to have good stealth and information-gathering capabilities. Rui had no history or experience with stealth, nor was it indicated in his profile that he had such capabilities, thus he was a bit curious as to why anyone would commission him for a shadow class mission.

"Espionage, eh?" He mused as he read through the information volunteered by a clientele.

[Shadow class mission: Espionage

Clientele: Hruvalian Inc.

The target of Mission: Freefel limited.

Difficulty grade: 7

Mission commencement: immediate.

Successful remuneration completion: 60 gold coins.

Mission execution location: Freefel limited branch office, the town of Kining, Kingdom of Verlis.

Mission summary: To gather classified and confidential information on the research and development projects of the Freefel limited corporation.]

"Interesting." Rui murmured. "The clientele is based within the Kandrian Empire, but the target is in a different country."

Rui shook his head. Although he was interested in undertaking shadow class missions, he did not want to engage in something as boring as corporate espionage. It was one of the most boring kinds of missions that only exercised stealth and information-gathering capabilities. It wasn't a field that would give him the real combat experience he was looking for.

It was also the type of mission that required an immense amount of patience. He was simply unwilling to engage in non-combat-oriented commissions unless he really needed to.

His need for direct head-on conflict conflicted with how shadow-class missions worked, fundamentally. The defining condition for a mission to fall into the shadow class was the necessarily covert nature of the mission. The missions needed to be furtive and clandestine. This usually meant head-on open conflict was automatically not an option unless absolutely necessary.

He kept scrolling until he ran into an interesting mission.

[Hunter class mission: Surveillance

Clientele: Ministry of Environment and Ecology

The target of mission: The Serevian Plateau, Beast Domain

Difficulty grade: 9

Mission summary: A variety of mysterious and unnatural environmental and ecological changes have occurred within the Serevian Plateau. These changes include changes in migration patterns of fauna, changes in flora density and distribution, unnatural seismic radiation, and other phenomena. The cause is suspected to be singular and thus simpler to identify. The mission goal is to primarily identify the cause and eliminate it if possible.]

"Interesting..." Rui murmured. This was the first mission pertaining to the Beast Domain that he had ever come across before. What was interesting was that this wasn't a personal commission but rather a mission recommendation from the Martial Union as far as compatibility went.

"I suppose the mission does suit me to some extent," Rui admitted. A phenomenon that required sensory capability, specifically when seismic radiation was involved was one that he possessed the skill to handle.

Furthermore, the Beast Domain was dangerous even for Martial Apprentices and only the upper echelons were qualified to enter even the outskirt regions such as the designated mission location of the mission at hand. Rui stared at it contemplatively, it was certainly an attractive choice.

Chapter 387: Comprehension

"Well, let me look at some other options before I decide." he shrugged.

He skimmed through his inbox, carefully going through the other missions.

The kinds of missions in his inbox were diverse. The most common class of missions he got was the defense-class missions followed by the hunter-class and finally; the offense-class missions. The offense-class missions were the fewest due to the restriction of offense-class missions

Eventually, he stopped, shaking his head.

"It's not that these missions aren't good, they're just not new or interesting to me." Rui murmured.

It had been nearly two years since he had begun completing missions, and he had gained plenty of experience in the offense, defense, hunter, and miscellaneous classes of missions. The only missions truly outside of his experience were the Beast Domain and the shadow-class missions.

Although he certainly intended to try his hand at shadow-class missions, for now, he wanted missions that would put him in head-on straightforward conflict. This way he could bolster his current Martial Art with experience.

Even if the Beast Domain mission was a surveillance mission, the fact that it was the Beast Domain and was a grade nine mission meant that the mission was certainly going to put him to the test. Normally, grade nine missions were too easy for someone of his caliber, but that applied to human missions. The

VOID algorithm's incompatibility with non-human conflict meant that he would have a harder time with this mission than he would for any other human mission of the same grade.

That on top of the fact that he would be visiting the Beast Domain for the first time made it the most alluring mission in his inbox at the moment.

"Alright. Screw it, let's go ahead with it." He shrugged. It wasn't like he wouldn't get a chance to undergo the other kinds of missions. He was one of the most sought-after Martial Apprentices in the Kandrian Empire. Commissions would flood him regardless of whether he wanted them or not. Furthermore, the Martial union received a huge influx of commissions from across the country and from a large number of foreign nations surrounding the Kandrian Empire in the geographic vicinity.

He headed back to the commissions' department, approaching the support staff.

"Excuse me." Rui addressed them. "I wish to officially accept a commission that was recommended to me by the Martial Union."

He said as he showed them the commission that he wanted to accept, as well as all the details.

"Just one moment." She said taking down the details before operating her digital terminal. "Please provide me with your Martial license."

Rui reached for his pouch as he procured the shiny glistening license card and passed it over to her. His learner's Martial license had already been upgraded to a full-fledged Martial license when he graduated from the Martial Academy.

"It'll require you to sign some paperwork, sir." She told him as she passed him a thin stack of paper.

Rui sped through as he sped through the forms filling up the details that needed to be filled while signing the places that needed to be signed.

"Everything is in order." She nodded after verifying the papers that he returned, before stamping all of them with the seal of the Martial Union. "You are now the registered Martial Artist designated to this commission. Kindly wait as the mission bill is procured by our staff."

Rui nodded. It wasn't long before he was seated at one of the tables engrossed in the missions bill of the commission.

"Alright now," Rui muttered. "Let's get a closer look at this baby."

The mission bill gave him the context behind the commission after the basic details.

The Serevian Plateau was a part of the outermost layer of the Beast Domain that made contact with and even infiltrated into human civilization. It was a flat plain that extended tens of thousands of square kilometers. It was sort of a pocket of uninhabited natural land that had penetrated into the human domain and was somewhat far from the Kandrian Empire geographically, to the point that it was equally close to the other three first-world nations geographically.

This meant that if Rui accepted this mission, he would be traveling further away from the Kandrian Empire than he ever had. This was an exciting notion for him, he looked forward to being so distant from the Kandrian Empire for the very first time.

He turned back to the mission bill as he continued reading.

The Serevian Plateau was topographically flat and even, as plateaus always were. The minimum combat prowess capability required to survive in the Serevian Plateau was grade seven, as evaluated by the Martial union and the Ministry of Ecology and Environment, the clientele of the commission.

Rui raised his eyes at those words. ('Grade seven is the bare minimum needed to survive?')

He frowned. In ordinary natural habitats that weren't considered part of the Beast Domain, grade-seven Martial Apprentices would be usually at the very top of the food chain. Yet even in the outermost and safest parts of the Beast Domain, they were just marginally able to survive in the Beast Domain?

Rui recalled when he was a grade-seven Martial Apprentice, he had been quite impressive by general standards back then and had been able to reach the finals of the Martial Contest.

('The Beast Domain must be built different.') He noted while his eyes lit up with eagerness. He moved on after absorbing the general information on the Serevian Plateau, reaching the actual point of the commissions.

The Serevian Plateau had very recently experienced a rather bizarre and abrupt change in several ecological and environmental parameters including migration patterns, seismic radiation, temperature, and even weather.

Drastic changes in these parameters in a rather brief period of time were quite confusing and puzzling to the Ministry of Environment and Ecology which also overlooked the uninhabited natural habitats and environments anywhere even remotely within the geographic vicinity of the Kandrian Empire.

Chapter 388: Details

The Ministry of Environment and Ecology strongly suspects that the cause for all the environmental and ecological changes lies at the core of the Serevian Plateau based on the triangulation of seismic radiation, and extrapolating from the measurements of the intensity of changes across the entire region.

That was where Rui came in. The core of the Serevian Plateau was too dangerous to even grade-nine Martial Apprentices. Only grade-ten Martial Apprentices were capable of completing the missions. Furthermore, the number of grade-ten Martial Apprentices who had mastered something like Seismic Mapping was extremely low. However, that wasn't the only reason Rui was ideal for the mission.

"Fauna Flow must have been a deciding factor as well," Rui murmured.

Fauna Flow allowed him to communicate with fauna species. The effectivity of which depended on the intelligence of the creature, in particular, he was trying to converse with using the technique. This technique likely played a role in his suitability for the mission. Being able to gather information from the fauna creatures in the Serevian Plateau likely increased his compatibility with the mission.

The actual objective of the mission was primarily to gather information about the phenomenon responsible for the change. To detect, observe, and rigorously document said phenomenon and potentially eliminate the target if needed.

The Martial Union and the Ministry of Environment and Ecology provided him with the devices he would need in order to document the phenomenon with the required rigor that the Ministry of Environment and Ecology needed. He would need to operate the surveillance technology after he reached the core of the Serevian Plateau.

The mission bill specified that he was required to memorize the protocols as well as the means by which the surveillance and recording device provided to him was operated. He quickly inputted the data into his mind palace before quickly absorbing all the data on the functioning of the device.

"Interesting," Rui remarked.

This wasn't the first time a hunter-class mission required him to make use of surveillance technology to document his findings so that they could be referenced once the mission concluded. In fact, his very first hunter-class mission two years ago with the earthen basilisk required him to make use of similar surveillance technology.

Of course, the surveillance device that he would be required to use in this mission was much more capable than the surveillance device he had used back then. The surveillance device back then was no more than a head cam that took basic photographic evidence of what needed to be documented. Back then, the Ministry of Environment and Ecology only wanted to figure out the identity of the earthen basilisk that had been wreaking havoc across the Shaia Plains.

This time, it wanted to know the cause of a set of high abrupt and complex ecological and environmental changes to the Serevian Plateau.

This meant that Rui's job would also be considerably more complex. He had already confirmed that the operation of the surveillance device was not simple and it would require much more than just straightforwardly pushing a button.

Still, he had memorized the protocols perfectly and it wouldn't be a problem for him.

The secondary objective of getting rid of the cause of the environmental and ecological changes wasn't absolute. The Ministry of Environment and Ecology would inform him of whether it even had to be fulfilled or not.

This was different from the attitude they took during the earthen basilisk mission where the elimination of the cause was non-negotiable and the only thing in question was whether Rui was qualified to undertake that mission.

However, here, there wasn't necessarily as much of an imperative. For one, the Serevian Plateau was far outside the Kandrian Empire. The large geographical distinction between the locations of the two meant that it was extremely unlikely that the events occurring within the Serevian Plateau could ever affect the Kandrian Empire.

This was quite different from the situation of the Shaia Plains which was inside the Kandrian Empire. The Ministry of Environment and Ecology kept a tight leash over the environment and ecological state of the uninhabited natural habitats within the Kandrian Empire.

In comparison, the situation with the Serevian Plateau was more due to the professional interest that the Ministry of Environment and Ecology held.

('No, not entirely.') Rui shook his head. ('Although the probability of the Kandrian Empire being affected by the events of the Serevian Plateau, it's still not impossible. The earthen basilisk was originally from the Beast Domain. Yet, it migrated a gigantic distance and became a big problem, almost catastrophic.'))

He hadn't ever heard back from the Ministry on whether the earthen basilisk hatchlings had been successfully contained by the subterranean Martial Artists that had been gathered to hunt and exterminate all of them. However, considering there wasn't an epidemic of earthen basilisks in the Kandrian Empire, he could be relatively assured they had soundly succeeded.

He wasn't surprised of course; the operation was allegedly led by Martial Squires. He knew first-hand how strong Martial Squires were. Those earthen basilisk brats never stood a chance.

However, the earthen basilisks had allegedly migrated due to being too weak to survive in the Beast Domain. Whatever was affecting the Serevian Plateau was clearly not weak. If whatever was causing it,

being it living or non-living, were to affect the Kandrian Empire, the results would not be pretty. It was quite likely that Martial Artists from Realms even above the Squire Realm may need to be involved.

Rui shook his head, dispelling his pointless speculations. "The mission was to be commenced immediately. So I guess they won't have a problem if I travel there immediately."

The journey would take a while, even for him. "I'm going to need several potions."

He paused at his own words. "Speaking of which, I'll need to start paying for all of them starting with this mission."

He sighed. Potions weren't cheap and he was going to need more than a few when entering the Beast Domain. He just hoped his accumulated credit was good enough.

Chapter 389: Instinct

"Twenty-two gold coins for the recommended number of potions for this mission?" Rui winced. He was truly starting to feel the absence of the boons that the Martial Academy granted its students. Back when he was a student, he didn't need to care about the price of potions or missions. Although the cost of potions was usually covered in the post-successful completion commission fee, if he didn't have the money to purchase it ahead of time then he would not be able to commence the mission.

Furthermore, he used to receive the complete amount Martial Artists were normally entitled to without actually having to purchase them in the Martial Academy.

Rui reluctantly coughed up the funds as he placed the potion vials in his pouch as prepared all the other things necessary. The final necessary piece of equipment for this mission would be supplied in the dispatch facility.

"Apprentice Quarrier." A staff member bowed before gesturing him to a device on the table. "This is the bio-recon ES-263 device that you will be operating in your mission. The mission bill should cover all the information regarding this device but I shall still provide you with an explanation and demonstration. The device was designed by the Martial Union and the Ministry of Environment and Ecology in

partnership to make the device user-friendly enough for Martial Artists who do not possess a background in Environmental technology."

Rui nodded politely, letting her do her thing. He had found that staff members tended to waste their time less when he simply let them do as they pleased. Even when he had shown in the past that he mastered the Mind Palace technique, the staff members would pester him like he was a child who could be trusted.

('They must have been scarred by plenty of incompetent yet overconfident Martial Artists, surely.') He mused.

Thankfully, it didn't take long.

"Any questions?" She asked.

"Just one, can you show me the..." He proceeded to ask a random question to convince her he was paying attention.

Soon, it was time to depart.

The Serevian Plateau lay straightforwardly far west of the Kandrian Empire. It was a long journey on foot, even by Martial Artist standards. Rui would need around five hours to reach the location even if he sprinted the entire time.

It would take him quite a while and he would require himself to exert himself to a high degree. He immediately employed his maneuvering techniques as well as Wind Breathing as he zoomed across the Mantian Region, and eventually the Kandrian Empire. At his current level, it only took three hours to exist the Kandrian Empire and head in the direction he wanted.

He had momentarily paused as his departure was recorded by the gate security. Although he could violate the immigration policies of other nations, he could not do so for the Kandrian Empire.

However, once he stepped outside the Kandrian Empire, he picked up speed. It was always fascinating to leave the Kandrian Empire and witness the world outside the Empire to Rui. Back on Earth, the world was thoroughly connected with an extremely dense and strong bond of information exchange thanks to the internet.

However, the same couldn't be said for the Panama Continent. When he stepped outside the Kandrian Empire, he would come across truly isolated and disassociated people. People are disassociated with his knowledge and experience. There truly was a sense of novelty in his travels, a true sense of exploration, curiosity, and uncertainty. It was truly a euphoric experience.

The temperature did not deviate as much as one would expect, however it was clear that the other environmental parameters varied greatly. As Rui traveled, he experienced a wide variety of weather, atmospheres, and environments.

As time passed. Human civilization grew sparser and scarcer. The touches of human colonialization and inhabitation began reducing, bit by bit. It was only some time before he was running through what was effectively a forest before he even realized.

Five hours passed until he finally reached it.

"Huff... huff..." Rui crouched using his knees as a crutch as he quickly consumed a physical rejuvenation potion.

He glanced forward, walking slowly toward the edge of a sharp cliff ahead of him. The cliff sharply descended for hundreds of feet before hitting an even greater expanse of trees and other vegetation and topography constituting the jungle down below.

"So this is the Serevian Plateau," Rui mumbled. It was an extended piece of the Beast Domain that had infiltrated human civilization and had disconnected a bit from the mainland of the Beast Domain. It was the most dilute of what the Beast Domain had to offer, yet it was not something that Rui could dismiss very easily.

"This place..." Rui's eyes narrowed. His augmented Primordial Instinct told him it wasn't anywhere nearly as simple as it was.

"It gives off a faint sense of peril." He murmured.

He did feel a subtle danger from the Serevian Plateau. He was extremely trustful of his instincts, especially since he got the Mindmirror Symbiote technique which had evolved the technique to another level of insight.

Furthermore, it wasn't only that, there was indeed strange seismic radiation that simply did not occur naturally in normal environments. What was strange, however, was that Rui was actually having a hard time processing what the seismic radiation meant. Usually, he could interpret it the way he interpreted light. But in this particular case, he felt he had never quite perceived anything quite like it prior.

It was as if it was just meaningless noise and gibberish.

"Coming from deep within the Serevian Plateau." He murmured. He would need to reach the core in order to learn what the source of the strange seismic radiation was. Ultimately, that didn't deviate much from his plan in the first place at all. His goal was always to make it to the core of the Serevian Plateau, gather as much information as possible, and report back to the Kandrian Empire and the Ministry of Environment and Ecology.

Chapter 390: Entry

WHOOSH

Rui leaped off the cliff and dived straight down the cliff, plummeting hundreds of feet from above the ground. He inhaled deeply as he prepared a Tempestuous Ripple as he reached the ground.

WHOOSH

He released a Tempestuous Ripple downwards as he canceled his momentum, landing perfectly on the ground. It wasn't that falling from such a great height would kill him with his defensive techniques, but it certainly would hurt. He was far away from the Kandrian Empire and it was best he avoided anything that would affect his condition.

He pulled out a compass as he began jogging in the direction of the core of the Serevian Plateau. He had memorized the map of the Serevian Plateau that the mission bill had provided, thankfully. He couldn't afford to get distracted from his surroundings while travelling in an environment as dangerous as the Serevian Plateau.

"SCREEEEEEETCH." A painful high-pitch screeching roar drew his attention as a large figure dashed at him with remarkable speed.

WHOOSH

Rui dodged it as he tried to get a better look at the creature that had suddenly attacked him.

('A darkhide lizard.') Rui recognized the creature. He had memorized all of the known native fauna species that inhabited the Serevian Plateau. It was a dangerous predator with an incredibly powerful bite force and potent acid for saliva that allowed it cut through its prey's body effortlessly.

What surprised Rui was how incredibly swift it was. It could keep up with him despite the four Apprentice-level techniques he was using to evade it. It was not a low Apprentice-level beast.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH

Rui evaded it time after time as it lashed out after him.

BOOM!!

He landed a powerful Flowing Canon, amplified by Flame Breathing, Outer Convergence, Vital Pressure as well as the momentum generated by his three maneuvering techniques. It was his most powerful attack as far as impact went.

Furthermore, Rui used Reverberating Lance to permeate the devastating impact on the inside of the lizard's body. The impact permeated past the hard scaly exterior, and tough flesh and crushed the weak and vulnerable inners.

"SCREEEETCH!" The lizard roared as it staggered around in pain, spitting some green blood.

BOOM!!

The second impact downed it. The beast dropped to the ground, lifeless.

('Reverberating Lance is capable of fulfilling the purpose I bought it for.') Rui nodded, relieved. If he didn't have the Reverberating Lance technique, he would have had to pound at the lizard for God knew how long. But the Reverberating Lance technique was able to expedite the process significantly, allowing him to take the lizard down much earlier than he would have before.

He immediately turned around and began moving towards the center of the Serevian Plain, keeping Seismic mapping on high alert as well. He also used the Mind Mask technique to minimize his presence while using the Shadow Step technique to misdirect any attention away from him. What surprised him was how dense the fauna was in the Serevian Plateau. He ran into hordes of animals as he traveled. Thankfully, he usually avoided them cleanly with the help of Shadow Step, however, it wasn't an absolutely perfect solution. Occasionally, he would be detected and would usually be involved in a scuffle.

Wild dogs. Bears. Wild cats etc. He also ran into a bunch of fantastical creatures that were exclusive to the world of Gaia and didn't exist in the world of Earth.

Leucrocutas. Perytons. Catoblepas. Hippogriffs and a variety of other beasts were pure fiction in the world of Earth but were nothing short of actual in the world of Gaia.

('I see. So this is why only a grade-seven Martial Artist is the pre-requisite for survival in the Serevian Plateau.') He mused.

He had detected countless fauna creatures even within the first hour of his stay in the Serevian Plateau with the help of Seismic Mapping. What he found was shocking. The average power level of the fauna in the Serevian Plateau seemed to be extreme low-end of the Apprentice Realm.

This was absolutely stunning to Rui. This meant that Apprentice-level creatures were the norm, not the outlier. In more normal uncolonized natural habitats, Apprentice-level creatures were usually the apex

predators, like in the Shaia Plains. But in the Serevial Plateau, they were extremely common, at least low-grade Apprentice-level creatures were.

The fauna wasn't the only thing extraordinary about the Serevial Plateau. The Flora was quite astounding as well. The size of the fauna life was much larger than one would normally expect. These trees and plants were huge, growing up great heights and widths. What Rui was spooked by despite having read about was the carnivorous plant species that were common across the Serevial Plateau. These were huge plants that were otherwise ordinary but could lash out the hidden fangs and consume large animals that came too close with swift and powerful lashes.

This was one of the ways the fauna population didn't destroy the forest despite being so dense. It was because the forest consumed the animals as well. Truthfully, Rui would have been unable to avoid them all had he not had his enhanced Primordial Instinct. The two brains processing the technique allowed him to concretely evade ambushes from carnivorous flora species.

('I would have at least been injured multiple times without Primordial Instinct and the Mindmirror Symbiote.') Rui mused. The fact that it took a grade-seven and grade-ten technique working together for Rui to be able to guarantee to sense and evade the attacks was rather mind-boggling.

Even the average mid-grade Martial Apprentice would be in extreme danger in this place. Only higher-grade Martial Apprentices could possibly navigate the Serevial Plateau confidently.

The forest grew denser and denser as he traversed deeper and deeper into the Serevial Plateau. The same could be said about the fauna. This was something Rui found odd. There was no real reason for such a bizarre population density distribution. It was extremely unnatural and not something Rui could find an explanation for.