

Martial Unity 571

Chapter 571: Success

It was a windy day.

Rui squinted from atop a tall hill as he stared at a distant small tree that was no more than a collection of dots in even his superhuman vision. He couldn't make out too many details of it due to the distance between him and the tree.

He closed his eyes, relying instead on his two long-range sensory techniques, Tempestuous Feel and Seismic Mapping. He overlapped both images together, forming one image with remarkable detail and clarity despite the distance between them.

He had been training hard to gauge distance accurately through Tempestuous Feel and Seismic Mapping. This had taken him a while as he tried various methods of obtaining an objective evaluation of distance. He tried using his body in his own senses as a measuring tape, he tried comparing it to the max range of his sensory techniques, among other things. The problem was none of these were truly objective since his height certainly wasn't constant, and the maximum range of his sensory techniques also wasn't necessarily constant.

Instead, he carried a small rigid ruler on his person at all times. This allowed Rui to gain an objective measure of the distances of things that he senses by referring to his ruler and scaling the actual distance from that. It was not convenient, but he was willing to tolerate it. As a Martial Squire with a superhuman physique, the weight of a single ruler was beyond negligible and didn't hamper him in any way at all.

"Five hundred and eight point two meters, forty-three point one degrees of inclination below principle axis," Rui noted before plugging the data into the latest iteration of the first phase of the ODA System. He quickly computed the outputs, gathering the relevant launch data that told him how to launch his Sonic Bullets for a perfectly accurate aim.

However, this didn't take into account atmospheric conditions. That was what the second phase was for. He closed his eyes once more, diving deep into the Tempestuous Feel technique. He felt the air currents, the pressure shifts, the temperature, and other environmental parameters. He inhaled and exhaled deeply, sharpening his focus, gathering his mind, and refining his concentration.

Had a human been there, they may have already fainted from the tremendous amount of pressure that he was generating.

When he was ready he immediately took the sensory readings of the Tempestuous Feel technique before throwing them into the second phase of the ODA system, processing them as quickly as possible. Unlike with the first phase, he was on a restrictive time limit. If he was even a moment too late, then it would be too late as the data would have grown outdated by then.

Just when he finished, his expression dropped. "Tsk! Too late, I'm not as used to this yet."

Thankfully, he didn't need to begin with the first phase, which didn't have a relevancy lifespan, not a short one anyway. He immediately began with the second phase once again, furiously completing the already highly simplified calculations.

Suddenly he swiftly positioned himself appropriately before lightly opening his mouth.

THWOOM

A sound projectile flew out of his mouth, traveling forward with a certain inclination down. Less than two seconds later.

POW!

The little tree's stump exploded in the middle, as several baseball-ball-sized holes and a deep hole in the ground appeared in the trees behind it.

A perfect shot.

"YES!" Rui leaped hundreds of meters into the air in unrestrained celebration. "It only took more than half a year for the very first successful execution of Project Sniper!"

Even as he tried to compose himself, he couldn't stop a wide grin from appearing on his face. It couldn't be helped, the sheer satisfaction and pure joy that came with succeeding with a project after nearly seven months of work was immense.

This marked a new chapter in his Martial Path, a new milestone. This was his first truly original Martial Art technique as a Martial Artist. While it was true that there were other instances of individuality and

"Ok ok... Calm down, it's just one success amidst a lot of failed tries. I still need to reach a point where I succeed one hundred percent of the time, only then is this project an absolute and true success in every sense of the word."

Rui sky-walked over to the target site, wanting to get a closer look. Now that he got over the joy of success, he was fully cognizant of just how incredible the feat he just performed was!

Almost half a kilometer under windy conditions and he launched a sound bullet that traveled and struck the target accurately.

The sheer difficulty of such a feat could not be overstated!

Rui was extremely certain that extremely few, if not zero, Martial Squires in the Kandrian Empire were capable of such accuracy at such a large distance away from the target. His feat would likely shock even Martial Squires whose Martial Paths were centered around long-range accuracy! Regardless of which system of technique they relied on.

('This is the power of synergy and individuality.') Rui's eyes glinted with a deeper understanding.

Project Sniper and the ODA system that he had created were extremely synergetic with him, they were born out of his understanding of science, and were only viable because of his monstrous ability to process a large amount of data necessary in a short amount of time.

Its very existence was born out of his strengths and its very functioning required his strengths. Strengths that no Martial Squire in the entire Empire possessed!

In return, it gave him frightening long-range accuracy!

Now, Rui could fight enemies from an extreme distance, sniping them with accurate Sonic Bullets while his enemies would have no way of fighting back! This was a broken strategy that not many could viably overcome.

However, its greatest strengths showed up when its targets were unaware that they were being targeted but were still highly protected and secure.

Chapter 572: Implications

The Martial Union received a flood of all kinds of commissions every day. Among these were those of the antagonistic kind, the kind that fell into the offense class or the shadow class of missions. The offense class dealt with head-on missions that involved aggressing straightforward conflict. The shadow class dealt, in part, with missions with the same goal, but done covertly and secretively.

That was the key difference between the offense and shadow class of missions. Killing someone straightforwardly in front of anyone after rushing towards them directly, or killing someone extremely covertly, secretively, and concealingly.

Rui had completed missions of the former, like when he dragged and murdered King Fujilin in public in front of everyone. However, he had never had the opportunity to undertake missions of the latter kind. Mostly because he never had the necessary skillset.

Now, however, that was no longer true. He had the skillset to kill covertly and concealingly, thanks to Project Sniper.

As the title of the Project explicitly said, it allowed him to snipe his targets from a great distance away. It allowed him to kill his targets from an exceedingly high distance away. Higher than would trigger the alarms of sensory bodyguard Martial Artists keeping a watchful eye around their target of protection.

"That's not all," Rui muttered as he recalled another trait that made it highly suited for sniping assassinations.

The projectile he was launching was the Sonic Bullet technique. The advantage of this technique was that concentrated sound pockets like the Sonic Bullet technique were difficult to detect directly and ahead of time. The reason for this was that a sound wave or pulse did not produce any of its own sound that could be used to detect it ahead of time. Sound could be used to detect and sense other objects and phenomena that produced sound, sounds in and of themselves could not be detected through that same method.

Similar to how light could be used to perceive other objects that reflected or gave off light, light itself was not something that could be perceived in the same manner because it did not give off light itself.

This meant that detecting the Sound Bullet technique after it had already been launched was difficult. The disadvantage of the technique was that its launch was very easy to detect even without sensory techniques. As long as it happened close enough, the breathing and generation of the sound were detectable phenomena as long as they happened close enough. The process to generate such a concentrated sound pulse was very intense and simply could not be missed even by normal humans.

This was the reason that the Sonic Bullet was normally unfit for assassinations. Normally, it drew too much attention within a certain range.

Normally, that is.

"That doesn't apply to me." Rui grinned.

The reason Rui was exempt from this drawback was that he was launching from extraordinary distances away!

It was not possible to distinguish the launch of the technique in the background of meaningless sensory input or 'white noise', because it blended and melted entirely! This was what happened over extremely long distances.

Thus, Rui's strengths allowed him to overcome the greatest obstacle preventing the Sonic Bullet from becoming a force to reckon with in the assassination industry.

This meant that Rui could potentially get away with assassinating people that no Martial Squire could possibly assassinate!

Although he didn't enjoy the act of murder, he did enjoy exercising the results of his hard work and making a concrete impact in the world with it.

('There's still some time before I can reach a stage where I can use it in missions, however.') Rui sighed.

He needed to build the muscle memory of executing the ODA system's protocols as fast as possible, otherwise, he would not be able to guarantee that he would get an accurate shot one hundred percent of the time.

('Well, I've worked enough on this for today.') Rui noted as he looked down at his pocket watch. ('It's about time for her to arrive soon enough, I suppose.')

And he was right, soon enough, Squire Casen had arrived.

"Squire Quarrier." She told him as she landed from the sky. "I got your message about your training commission to me ending soon."

"That's right." Rui nodded. "As I'm sure you've realized, I've come quite close to mastering the technique that I've been training with you. Once I've obtained the satisfactory degree of mastery that I'm looking to achieve, the commission will end then."

"I appreciate you informing me about this in advance." She told him. "How long do you suspect it will be before the commission finally ends, precisely?"

"Well, we can find out today," Rui replied nonchalantly as he took his stance.

"Very well."

She too took her own stance. The air froze under the pressure that the two Martial Squires emanated, Rui had recently requested her to go increasingly all out with her striking offense with each session. Today she didn't intend to hold back at all to help Rui gauge how far away he was from obtaining the degree of mastering that he hoped to achieve.

Suddenly, she lashed out toward him with remarkable velocity, leaving behind shockwaves in her path. She threw a powerful straight right at Rui.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he intercepted the attack with his palm, going with the attack, while simultaneously executing the Reverberating Lance technique with his back leg. As her attack moved forward, pushing his increasingly resistant palm, Rui pushed himself downwards with her attack.

RUMBLE

The ground shook as Rui's back leg successfully permeated all of the impact deep into the ground.

Squire Casen's eyes widened as she felt the energy and impact of her strike being harmlessly dispelled away. It was a bizarre sensation, she threw all her power into the strike, yet from the moment Rui touched it, she felt her attack becoming weaker and weaker.

It was only now that she understood what Rui had been working on for more than half a year!

Chapter 573: Test

She grew more serious as she threw swift yet powerful jabs. Her Martial Path was centered around agile momentum. She placed equal weight on speed and power, allowing her to land a great deal of solid strikes quite quickly. The reason she had chosen to accept this mission in the first place was that her Martial Path suited the needs of the mission quite well.

She was quite curious to see what Rui had actually accomplished after training with her for so long. She decided to use the entirety of her arsenal to test his current prowess.

POW POW POW

Rui intercepted all of the strikes with palms while effectively spamming Reverberating Lance with his back leg, while also pushing himself down every time she intercepted a strike.

Squire Casen twisted her core as she landed a devastating roundhouse kick.

CLASP

To her surprise, Rui managed to intercept and dispel the momentum that she had painstakingly gathered with the torque of her body.

RUMBLE

The very land shook under the sheer amount of power that Rui was permeating across its depths. Of course, this didn't even hamper either of the Martial Squires, the vibrations were occurring so slowly in their perception that it may as well have not been occurring at all.

As Rui put himself on max alert and focus to dispel the energy of all her attacks, he purposely avoided using the VOID algorithm to build a predictive model and adapt to her entire Martial Art. The point of this training, and of this particular exchange was to test how well he had mastered Project Bounce.

Bringing in the VOID algorithm would ruin that because it would take the burden off him and make it too easy to defend against her attacks. Even if he was imperfect with Project Bounce, the VOID algorithm was simply too powerful, he would be able to counter her so easily that he would not notice any imperfections in the master of the technique.

Thus, for the time being, he consciously avoided building a predictive model on her.

Of course, once he verified that he was doing just fine as far as proficiency went, he would not hesitate to use it with the VOID algorithm. After all, using it with the VOID algorithm was how he would be fighting against his opponents and enemies normally.

Rui almost wanted to abandon his abstinence and immediately begin using the VOID algorithm to see just how incredibly powerful his defense had no doubt grown thanks to the synergy between the VOID algorithm and Project Bounce.

He could feel it in his bones that the sheer amount of defensive prowess he would no doubt gain due to the synergy between the VOID algorithm would be far beyond anything he would obtain through any of the defensive techniques in the library.

Yet he managed to reign in his urge.

('This... is ridiculous!') Squire Casen, on the other hand, was incredibly impressed by his current prowess. ('It's like I'm fighting a defensive Martial Squire of a higher grade!')

BAM

She landed what should have been a devastatingly impactful dropkick right on top of his head she found that even such an attack was entirely dispelled. It was utterly confounding to her.

Although she had been watching Rui for nearly half a year, the level of understanding she had managed to develop about his intentions wasn't actually that deep. Part of it was because she lacked the scientific background to understand exactly what Rui was doing.

In her eyes, Rui had simply gone from sending himself flying with each strike to sending himself digging into the ground with each strike to suddenly magically dispelling all of the power of her attack into thin air!

It was an utterly ridiculous transition from her perspective. Where was the power of her strike going? How could it vanish so easily?

('Something like this might very well be a grade nine defensive technique!')

She did not speak vainly. Her biggest nemesis was the solid active defensive technique.

Rui immediately sky-walked into the sky. "Come. I wish to test my defensive prowess in the air."

She nodded, lashing out toward him high in the air.

Rui grew even more serious. Dispelling the energy of the attacks in the sky was harder because the air was not as much of a conductor of impacts the way the ground was.

She ran towards him, throwing a powerful kick.

VMMM!

Both of their faces morphed, surprised. When Rui dispelled the attack into the air, a strange sound was produced.

('I see. My vibrations are partially turning into air currents, but also sound when I use Reverberating Lance to dispel the impact in the air.') Rui realized.

It made sense, sound was nothing but vibrations in the air, thus Reverberating Lance, which generated vibrations, also generated sound when used to dispel attacks in the air!

He didn't normally notice this effect because he only used Reverberating Lance at the moment of impact with another body, thus sound was never generated because the attack permeated into the body of his opponent, rather than into the air.

VMMM!

BRMMM!

RNNNN!

What Rui found most interesting was that the pitch of the sound seemed to be proportional to the pitch of the sound generated. The stronger the attack, the higher the pitch and frequency of the sound generated.

EEEEEEEE!

Rui winced as he felt a shiver go down his spine. The sound was particularly high-pitched which was extremely irritating and painful, like chalk on a board.

('I need to keep that in mind.')

WHOOSH

Rui chose to evade another attack as he returned to the ground. Squire Casen chased immediately after him from a height above. She sprinted downwards at absolute top speed, gaining a tremendous amount of speed and momentum as several sonic booms recoiled across the sky. As she approached the ground, her leg stretched all the way, before striking downwards with incredible power.

This drop kick combined one of her most powerful strikes that were greatly empowered by the immense momentum she had generated!

Chapter 574: End

RUMBLE

The land around them rocked violently under the devastating power of the strike of the Martial Squire. Rui gritted his teeth as he did his best to successfully dispel the power of the strike entirely.

THUD

Squire Casen landed aside heavily, shocked at how Rui, yet again, managed to somehow make all the power she generated disappear into thin air.

Rui, on the other hand, was thoroughly pleased with the prowess of the technique he had created. The fact that a single technique was able to accomplish this much was already incredibly impressive. It would definitely become the mainstay defensive technique of his Martial Art.

In fact, he could thoroughly forget about Inner Divergence in one-on-one fights, at least. Only if his arms were extremely preoccupied with other matters would he be in a position where he was forced to use Inner Divergence instead of his new technique.

They continued sparring for a few hours, as Rui tested the performance of his new technique in the heat of battle. Thankfully, it seemed that she was quite the diverse offensive striker capable of all kinds of both simple and complex striking attacks. Furthermore, when used with each other back-to-back, they were much different than when they were used individually and isolated.

It allowed him to ensure that there weren't any chinks in the defense provided by his new technique. For instance, he got to test the technique against a double-blow combo where the two attacks were launched in opposite directions.

He also discovered that he could dispel multiple attacks at once as long as he made sure that the vector of the inherited momentum always faced downwards.

He realized that against piercing attacks that he couldn't afford to take head-on, it was best to catch the attack by the wrist and apply the technique that way, which worked just fine.

By the end of the training session, he had ironed out all the foundations and the basics, satisfied with the degree of proficiency and effectiveness the technique had.

"Alright, that brings us to an end for today's session." Rui glanced at his pocket watch. "Thank you for all the aid that you've provided over the past half year, you've helped me finally reach where I've wanted to reach."

Squire Casen stirred, understanding his message. "Does that mean...?"

"Yes, I think today will be the last training session. Frankly, I thought it might take a little longer, but I've arrived where I've wanted to be." Rui gently replied.

"I see..." She sighed. "Well, I guess this is it."

"I guess it is."

"Before I leave..." She hesitated. "I'd like to thank you."

"What for?" Rui's eyebrow rose.

"For inspiring me to take the initiative to walk my own path." She replied. "Watching you build such a remarkable technique from absolutely nothing has been enlightening. You are truly the ideal Martial Artist, and all of us pursuing our Martial Paths should take after your example. I, for one, intend to."

"Thank you, I'm glad to hear I made a positive impact doing what I love most." Rui smiled. "Good luck, and goodbye."

"Goodbye." She nodded, before skywalking away.

Rui's thoughts immediately turned back to Project Bounce.

('I need to stop calling it that.') Rui mused. ('Project Bounce has succeeded, and the technique that I will be using from now on has also been created. It needs its own name.')

Rui wanted to pick a name that did the technique justice, one that had just enough dignity to do a technique that powerful justice, while also ensuring that it was an accurate representation of the technique.

"Flux Earther."

It was a simple name, not the most straightforward, certainly, but Rui liked how it sounded. The former half of the name came from the fact that Rui essentially absorbed an influx of kinetic energy before transmitting it out to the environment as an outflux of energy. The latter half came from the earthing systems used to ground electric charges and current to get rid of them. It wasn't too dissimilar to what Rui did with the attacks of his opponents.

Thus, Flux Earther was what he chose to dub the name.

Now that he had successfully completed the technique to the point that it was deployable in combat, he felt an immense wave of satisfaction. A part of him immediately wanted to pick out a mission where he could test the technique against a real opponent that was trying to kill him.

Yet his better sense stopped him.

He still hadn't fully completed Project Sniper. It would be extremely detrimental to abandon the project when it was just one step away from completion, all he needed to do now was refine the final stages of the technique before he could achieve the degree of proficiency with that technique that he desired.

Unfortunately, he was at the stage where he couldn't shorten the process with ingenuity. He was at the stage where he needed to burn the ODA System into his mind and muscles with repetitive hard work and practice. There was a limit to how much of the conventional path to accuracy he could replace with accuracy.

The ODA System, specifically the second half of the technique, was something that had a very small window of operation. Even just one beat late would mean that his work was futile, he would need to start over. In the middle of combat, or even when assassinating a target, he could not afford to fail, thus he could not ever afford to be even a beat late.

It could mean giving his opponent just the window they needed to leap in from the great distance between them and turn it into a close-quarter fight where Project Sniper was almost entirely useless. The ODA System was useless when the target was within a certain range since Rui's inherent accuracy was good enough to be able to hit them right even without the ODA System.

"Once I'm done mastering Project Sniper, I can finally go out into the field and apply what I've painstakingly built!" A glint of excitement appeared in his eyes.

Chapter 575: Pathfinder

Rui narrowed his eyes as he followed the movements of a Hermitian Squirrel. This species of squirrel, which was known for its remarkable senses and illusive agility and speed made for the perfect sniping practice target. It was an Apprentice-level creature in a forest in the Mantian region

It sniffed around, winding about a tree, it was never static for more than a second. This would normally make it practically impossible to snipe for more than half a kilometer away.

Yet Rui was attempting to do just that.

He kept track of the squirrel with the help of Tempestuous Feel and Seismic Mapping, of course. He had also already built a predictive model of its movements, having observed it for a while. It was difficult to build predictive models of targets outside of combat, especially erratic creatures like Hermitian Squirrels, but as long as Rui had enough time and data, he could pull it off, it just wouldn't be as effective as ones made out of and for combat.

Suddenly, his eyes widened as he executed the ODA System with the predictions of the VOID algorithm. Just a moment later, his mouth opened, and a dense sound projectile escaped from it, flying straight towards his target.

THWOOM!

The projectile coursed forward at the speed of sound, before nailing the target in the head.

SPLAT

Even though the energy of the projectile had undoubtedly decreased over the large distance that it had traveled across, it still was more than strong enough to crush the bodies of Apprentice-level creatures. The head of the squirrel exploded into a confetti of blood and tissue.

"YES!" Rui exclaimed, rejoicing as he managed to execute an exceedingly difficult snipe. It was more than just a little difficult to snipe hermitian squirrels from that distance, any Martial Squire would laugh and call him a liar if he claimed that he was capable of such a feat.

"It's finally done!" Rui pumped his fist. "Seven months is all it took!"

That was partially sarcastic and partially genuine. Seven months for developing a technique, or two techniques, was much longer than it took to master two techniques of the Martial Union that had been refined, and had a well-constructed training regiment as well as the necessary training resources to master it. Yet, it was also an incredibly short amount of time considering he created a potent brand-new technique out of nothing.

Rui had to suppress the urge, once more, to sprint to the Martial Union, and immediately pick out a mission.

"Wait, hold on." He stopped himself "I still have shit to do."

He needed to name this technique as well. He was quite satisfied with his previous name, and thus wanted to come up with something just as good.

"Pathfinder."

It was a simple name that bore allusions to the purpose of the technique. Ultimately it was one that satisfied Rui, and that was all that mattered.

After seven months of effort, he had finally created the Flux Earther and the Pathfinder techniques, the two latest additions to his Martial Art, strengthening it tremendously.

"Alright, now that I've finished training, I have to go pick some missions that will allow me to use these techniques in the field."

Finding missions that would allow him to use the Pathfinder technique was easy, all he had to was go pick some assassination missions and that would most likely allow him to exercise the technique.

As for Flux Earther, ideally, he would be on a bodyguard mission when a striking-oriented Martial Artist tried to assassinate his target of protection, and he would be able to exercise the Flux Earther technique.

However, the most ideal circumstance would be a striking-oriented Martial Artist trying to kill him. If he was protecting someone, he couldn't fool around and prolong the battle because he wanted to test the limits of his techniques. That would be unethical and also a violation of the agreements that every Martial Artist had with the Martial Union.

It wasn't as easy to be able to perfectly choose a mission that would specifically allow him to test the Flux Earther technique or any other single technique in his Martial Art. Especially one that technique addressed only one aspect of combat when combat will naturally include all aspects unless both Martial Artists were extreme specialists. But even then, even the most extreme defensive Martial Artists needed to attack, some way or the other, to win, and even the most extreme offensive Martial Artists needed some way to defend or evade to not lose.

In comparison, the Pathfinder technique could be used outside confrontations, giving it greater versatility in utility. In comparison, the Flux Earther technique could only be used for defense against strikes and absolutely nothing else.

"Not that that's a bad thing," Rui noted.

The Flux Earther did the one thing it was supposed to do extremely well. The defensive prowess that this technique gave him was much greater than Adamant Reforging and Inner Divergence combined. Normally, his limit with the difficulty and potency of techniques was grade seven, at least, as far as techniques offered by the Martial Union went.

However, because of the synergy this technique had with his capabilities, it effectively performed at much higher grades of potency. Its difficulty was not low either, if anybody else tried to master the Flux Earther technique, they were almost guaranteed to fail.

Because they lacked Rui's unique strengths that allowed him to master and execute the technique with admirable proficiency. That was why his defensive prowess had suddenly become on par with a defensive Martial Artist despite being an all-rounder in every sense. It was much more difficult to bridge

the gap between all-rounders and specialists in the Squire Realm because the gap between their bodies was enormous in addition to techniques that were synergetic with their bodies and capabilities.

If not for the fact that Rui had created a truly impressive defensive technique, it would have been impossible for him to match the defensive prowess of a defensive Martial Squire.

Chapter 576: Also

There was a very concrete example of this. In his previous mission at Mt Zurtun, he had run into a powerful defensive Martial Artist who could entirely negate the entirety of Rui's offensive arsenal. He had, to some degree, turned into the motivation and inspiration for Project Bounce.

The man's defensive prowess came from techniques that were synergetic enough with his rubberized Martial body. Together, his defensive prowess was far greater than that of an all-rounder Martial Squire like Rui, than it would have been had both of them been Martial Apprentices.

Yet, now that Rui had created the Flux Earther technique, he didn't think there was a significant gap between their defensive prowess at all. Rui was very confident that the Flux Earther technique could replicate all of the feats that the defensive Martial Squire had accomplished in their fight.

One disadvantage that he had was that the defensive technique was an active defensive technique that required his judgment to function while it seemed as though the defensive Martial Squire that he had fought operated with passive techniques.

Still, this could also work out in his favor, since excellent judgment would yield excellent outcomes in the case of active techniques. The same could not be said for passive techniques which were static and largely unchanging generally.

"We'll just have to see whether that will happen or not." Rui shook his head, before turning away and taking off.

Yet he didn't intend to go back to the Quarrier Orphanage. He headed straight toward the town of Hajin. It had been far too long since he had undertaken a mission. Seven months of no real-life action that

could make his nerves tingle and his heart pound made him feel like his instincts were dulling. No amount of training could replace the genuine fear of death and uncertainty.

It stimulated a Martial Artist's potential better than any training could possibly do so. Nothing pushed Martial Artists beyond their limits than the possibility of losing the most important thing to them all.

"Yet before that, I have an appointment to be at." Rui smiled, as he looked at his pocket watch.

Soon.

He immediately sped up, heading towards the town of Hajin, before arriving and landing outside a little café, of sorts.

He was early, but he didn't mind waiting.

After all, it had been a while since.

"Hey, you're early." Kane greeted him as he descended from the air, skywalking.

Rui wordlessly smiled as he scrutinized Kane's new form.

The first thing that he noted was the low-end Squire-level sense of threat that Rui felt from Kane with the help of Primordial Instinct.

"You've arrived." Rui grinned, replying with a measured tone. It was intended to be a double entendre. Kane certainly had arrived at their rendezvous, but he had also arrived at the Squire Realm.

"I have," Kane smirked.

He exerted a faint sense of danger to Rui, yet it was unlike anything he had sensed from a Martial Squire. It was the kind of pressure that one felt when one noticed a viper camouflaged in plain sight. OR

the kind of pressure that one felt when one noticed the scales of a croc at the edge of the lake that one was standing too close to.

Kane had called Rui several months ago, informing him of the fact that he had become a Squire candidate, and would be undergoing the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

He had also mastered the modified Mind-Switch technique that Rui had given him, realizing its use after he had mastered it. However, he only learned of its genuine value after he underwent the seminar explaining the process of breaking through to the Squire Realm.

Several months later, he finally contacted Rui again, informing him he had successfully broken through and had become a Martial Squire who was also in control of his power.

"How was the Squire habilitation process?" Rui asked.

"Tedious and tiring." Kane sighed wearily. "I cannot tell you how fucking relieved I am to actually be without that suffocating restrictive suit every second of the day. Hell, that was my single best motivation to finish the Squire habilitation phase as soon as possible. More than anything else."

"I felt the same way, though I did enjoy regaining the feeling of control over my power and my body once more so it was worth it." Rui nodded. "Though it was still nothing compared to the suffering of the breakthrough to the Squire Realm."

Kane winced at the very mention of it. "That was mind-shattering."

"How long had it lasted?"

"About a week." Kane sighed. "I cannot believe yours lasted for almost a month, how is your sanity not utterly destroyed from suffering and enduring that pain?"

"I think Martial Artists have a much higher fortitude when it comes to mastering these techniques. After all, ordinary people cannot learn even Apprentice-level conditioning techniques because the strain of the pain erodes their mind, but our Martial Path protects us from that." Rui mused out loud.

"Well, I'm sure your Martial Path did you a big favor with that one," Kane grumbled. "You might just have suffered less if it hadn't."

"Are you saying I was better off dying in that procedure?"

"Hey, those are your words, not mine."

"What do you plan on doing now?" Rui asked with an amused expression.

"I need to relearn the core of my Martial Art," Kane replied, shrugging. "Can't do without certain techniques."

"Do you plan on re-mastering Void Step?" Rui asked, interested in Kane's decisions. He was in a bit of a different spot than Rui for whom almost no single technique of the Martial Union was of vital importance to his Martial Art. The same couldn't necessarily be said for Kane who possessed numerous techniques that defined the core of his very approach in combat.

"Definitely." Kane nodded. "That and a few others, but I don't think I'll be mastering everything. I've learned that there are reasons not to fall back into the same learning patterns that I had as a Martial Apprentice."

Chapter 577: Realms

"Synergy matters a lot, or so I've been told." Kane shrugged. "Also more individuality is needed apparently, more so than when we were Martial Apprentices. Yay, that's fun. Just what I was hoping when I reached the Squire Realm."

Rui chuckled at the oozing sarcasm from his tone. "Trust me, you want to have both of those. I recently got a successful taste of both, it's actually startling how important both of them are, and how much value they can impart to you."

Kane raised an eyebrow. "You've already developed your techniques from scratch? I guess that shouldn't be surprising considering that you've already done that even before you became a Martial Squire."

"That was a modification." Rui reminded him. Of course, Rui had definitely created techniques from scratch when he created the VOID algorithm, but that took a ridiculous amount of time to fully accomplish.

Besides, he wasn't even sure if the VOID algorithm would count as a Martial Art technique. It felt more accurate to say that it was his Martial Path.

"So?" Kane asked expectantly. "What did you come up with?"

"A long-range technique and defensive technique," Rui replied simply.

"Knowing you, I bet neither of them is anywhere near normal techniques, are they? Go on, spit it out. I bet that long-range technique can kill people across the country while that defensive technique can allow you to withstand attacks from Martial Seniors, correct?" Kane smirked, amused.

"Stop." Rui's glare was half mirthful and half real. "You just make what they actually are sound unimpressive when you make such exaggerated guesses. Not the two techniques don't feel like much in comparison to your guesses. Do you have any idea how difficult creating them was? Stop taking away my sense of accomplishment."

"That's hilarious." Kane laughed. "I'm sure they were mind-breakingly difficult to create, knowing you."

"You have no idea." Rui sighed. "No wonder only a small proportion of Martial Squires break through to the Senior Realm. If it's this difficult to take a single step towards that higher Realm, most Martial Squires simply won't be able to reach that distant Realm within their lifetimes."

"Stop." Kane sighed exasperated. "I haven't even started yet and you've already made me dread it. Can't I just enjoy being in the Squire Realm without having to worry about yet another climb from one Realm to another? Does it ever even end?"

Rui could sense a hint of real frustration behind the flippant tone. He found it hard to sympathize, on a personal level, with it. This was one avenue where Kane and Rui differed significantly, more than any other area. The long Martial Path that each Martial Artist had to walk, climbing Realm after Realm was a delight to Rui.

Back on Earth, there was a very hard limit to both power and skill that every human had. There was no seemingly endless path that one could walk as far as individual and personal power went. As the biggest fan of martial arts and unarmed combat, this was always a shame to Rui, but he could not change reality.

That was why he was exhilarated and excited when he arrived in this world and discovered that only the sky was the limit for individual power. To Rui, this was something to celebrate and be grateful for. He loved the idea that he could pursue his Martial Art to brand-new and greater heights for a lifetime.

As for Kane's last question, he didn't know whether the journey ever ended. The information regarding Martial Artists of higher Realms grew increasingly scarce and vague. For example, when he was a Martial Apprentice, he found it very difficult to obtain any specific information on Martial Squires. He had to literally memorize foreign research data on the breakthrough to the Squire Realm of a different language, then master said language, then translate the research data before getting Julian to study them, and finally tell him the secret.

Those were the lengths he had to go to in order to obtain what he was looking for. And now, he hadn't the faintest idea what the actual breakthrough to Senior Realm was. No clue whatsoever. Colonel Geringan had always been very careful to make sure that he wasn't revealing something inadvertently in their conversations.

As for the higher Realms, they were even more inscrutable. Rui had no doubt that any information on Martial Masters and Martial Sages was highly strategic confidential information.

And then, of course, came the highly illusive Martial Transcendent Realm.

This Realm was so far removed from Rui that he didn't even dare to make guesses about what these legendary beings were capable of. He had no reliable way to find out. The Panama Continent was not like Earth where vast amounts of information that beggared the imagination flowed throughout the planet that could be accessed instantly. There was no internet on the Panama Continent where Rui could Google what all these Martial Art ranks were and could do.

He didn't even know of the existence of even a single Martial Transcendent. He had never heard anyone credible utter anything meaningful or insightful about them. Rui could only assume that these Martial Artists had reached such titanic heights that they were no different from gods that were far removed from mortal squabbles and civilization that there were very few channels to obtain reliable information on them.

Rui's glazed over as he wondered what all the Martial Artists of higher Realms were capable of. If the difference in power of Martial Artists between successive Realms was the same as that of the difference of those between the Apprentice Realm and the Squire Realm, then the Martial Master and Sages, as combat assets, were no different from tactical nuclear missiles and bombs.

Rui could scarcely imagine what these exalted beings could do. Master Aronian strongly withheld his mental pressure when interacting with lesser Martial Artists, yet even the tiny portion of his mental pressure that leaked out was tremendous, he could probably easily annihilate every single Martial Apprentice in the Martial Academy simultaneously with minimal effort.

Chapter 578: Leave

"Hey!" Kane snapped his finger in front of Rui, drawing his attention. "Are you even listening?"

"Ah." Rui jerked back lightly. "My bad, I zoned out a little. You were saying?"

"I was saying that I was considering leaving the Empire someday." Kane sighed.

Rui's eyes widened. "But why?"

"To get away from all of this," Kane replied with a tired tone. "My family, the politics, all of it."

"I thought you had more or less resolved the matter regarding your family?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "By joining the Lightning Sect."

"I thought so too, but I realized that the Wind and Lightning Sects were just as suffocating as my family." He sighed. "They protect me from my family, but that gives them lots of leverage over me. Put that on top of the fact that they naturally have very high expectations from the start due to my potential and talent, it makes it hard to live the way I want."

"Damn..." Rui's eyes narrowed slightly.

Now, this was an issue that Rui could completely understand and sympathize with. Rui absolutely valued his autonomy, without a doubt, he would not tolerate being beheld by another group with interests that weren't entirely in line with his.

Kane had worked really hard to obtain power that he could use to leverage to obtain the freedom he sought. But he realized that merely breaking through to the Squire Realm was not enough. While was true that the breakthrough to the Squire Realm was an important milestone in his Martial Path and journey, it was not enough to grant him the freedom he sought.

Perhaps if he was alive half a millennium ago, this would have been enough. After all, the birth of Martial Squires a millennium ago was what allowed Martial Artists to break free of the power of the state and the power of many. Furthermore, there were no refined Squire-level techniques considering Squires hadn't been around for a very long time. Furthermore, the evolution process probably would have been much weaker and far more incomplete than it is today.

Kane, even with his current prowess, would have undoubtedly been the most powerful human in that era and could have easily earned the freedom he sought.

But in the modern world, where Martial Squires were just on the second rung of a ladder that had six steps, there was a limit to how much he could accomplish with his own individual power.

He had realized that he either needed to get much, much stronger and obtain the power needed to take the freedom he wanted, or he simply needed to leave the wide ecosystem in which his interests were threatened.

It was no wonder that he considered leaving the Empire. That was probably much easier and far more straightforward than becoming strong enough to defy his family without the help of the Lightning Sect.

"It's not going to be as easy as you might be thinking." Rui sighed.

"How not? I just leave and that's that." Kane folded his arms.

"Leaving only means that you're forfeiting your protection from the Lightning Sect. But it doesn't really mean much because your family is powerful and has influence within the Martial Union. You shouldn't underestimate the intelligence-gathering capability of the Martial Union particularly in regards to matters that are directly tied to its own interests, such as one of the most promising Martial Squires of our generation leaving the Union." Rui explained.

"But, I have the Void Step technique." Kane reminded him. "They cannot trace me that easily using regular tracking means."

"That is true," Rui admitted. "While the Martial Union does have sensory Martial Artists that are capable of detecting you, it's questionable whether they'll be deployed to catch you. Most of them will probably be of the higher Realms. The only Martial Squire I know that that can sense you is..."

He turned towards Kane. "Me."

Kane's expression grew more severe. He understood the underlying message, there was a chance Rui would be deployed to track Kane if there ever came a day when the martial Union wanted to track him.

"You'll either have to run extremely far away or use the Void Step technique a lot of the time if you're just going to hide in one of the small satellite states of the Kandrian Empire. You can also forget about revealing your Martial Artist status wherever you choose to reside."

"Why's that?" Kane asked curiously.

"Because it will instantly draw attention to you," Rui replied. "Martial Squires are fundamentally different from Martial Apprentices, Kane. I don't mean just physically. Martial Apprentices can and do appear out of the population somewhat naturally. But no Martial Squire has ever appeared naturally, we are all man-made products. Every Martial Squire was born out of some state or entity that possesses the means to break through to the Squire Realm. That combined with the fact that Martial Squires are far

scarcer than Martial Apprentices and draw more attention to themselves than Martial Apprentices means that they are far easier to track and keep track of."

"How does that work in a practical sense?" Kane asked him, absorbed.

"I would not be surprised in the least if it were the case that the Martial Union had a grasp of the general location and identities of almost all Martial Squires in the surrounding states within a large range. It is very likely that this is the case," Rui recalled what he had learned when he brought back the corpse of his Martial Squire opponent and the martial Union identified him in a jiffy. "What do you think the Martial Union would conclude that a brand-new unknown Martial Squire has appeared in a somewhat distant state who possesses remarkable agility and speed, right after you left the country?"

Kane's face paled a little as he finally understood what Rui was getting at.

"That Martial Artist would be pegged as a suspect and would be investigated. The only way you can avoid the situation I just described is if you never ever use your Martial Art, and distance yourself from all civilization."

Chapter 579: Choice

In an age of Martial Art, Martial Artists were undoubtedly given a lot of attention and importance. In the eyes of sovereign states, Martial Artists were walking strategic weapons. They were no different from living tanks, jets, bombs, and missiles that had their own interests and agendas.

Martial Squires, among them, held a somewhat unique place. They were strong enough to be important and of great strategic importance, while also just enough that their numbers made them formidable, but not too many that they could not be individually treated as valued assets.

And only irresponsible fools treated valued assets without care and caution. It was impossible for a Martial Squire to up and leave the nation without some repercussions or measures being employed by states. Rui was smart enough to know that Kane's hopes of leaving the country, cutting all ties, and living a peaceful and blissful life were far-fetched, and the price to be paid for success was high.

"I'm curious though," Rui asked while Kane considered his words. "All this talk about the feasibility of fleeing and hiding made me think of an obvious solution; Why do you still need to be protected from your family? Your Martial Path is not suited for the Fire Sect, but now even your Martial body isn't suitable for the Fire Sect. It isn't like your family will kill you now, or destroy your future, so why not try to reconcile?"

Kane snorted. "The Fire Sect isn't the one that is after me. It's my family. Yes, it's true that my father leads the Fire Sect, but he isn't employing the power and the influence of the Fire Sect to try and reign me in, he's employing his own personal influence and power and that of the Arrancar Family. The reason the Lightning Sect treats it as the Fire Sect infringing on me, even though this isn't the case, is because that's how it looks like to everyone else."

Rui quickly understood all the nuances of what Kane was trying to convey.

"The Arrancar Family isn't strictly associated with the Fire Sect, then?"

"Not exclusively, no. Ultimately, while Martial Paths can be subtly and indirectly influenced over a lifetime of the most gentle and subtle conditioning, it cannot be controlled and there is always a perfectly plausible possibility that the child of a certain Martial Family may end up having a Martial Path that is very different from that of what the family desired." Kane explained. "This is something that the Martial community has long learned and accepted. Thus, my having an evasive maneuvering-oriented Martial Path isn't enough for my family to forget about me. This is not an uncommon occurrence, and no Martial Family is willing to let go of a genius Martial Squire who discovered his Martial Path at the age of eleven just because their Martial Path diverges from that of the Family head."

"I see, that makes sense." Rui nodded.

His interaction and exposure to the Martial community were limited. At most, he got glimpses of it in the Martial Games held by the DiVilier Family. This caused him to have a limited understanding of how things worked in the Martial community, as opposed to Kane who spent his whole life in the ecosystem, no doubt.

"Well, then maybe you should consider running away." Rui thought out aloud.

"Didn't you just advise against it?" Kane frowned.

"I just warned you of the difficulty and the price that you need to pay, most likely, to succeed." Rui shook his head. "I never said it was a bad choice. Who knows, you might end up enjoying the solitude that comes from suppressing your Martial Artist status forever and leaving a simple life in a remote place."

Kane's expression fell upon hearing that. "This shit is rough."

"That it is." Rui nodded.

"Sometimes I'm really quite envious of you, you know?" Kane sighed. "Your life sounds awesome."

"It definitely has been thus far." Rui nodded. "Though what you disdain, I envy as well. I wonder how early I might have broken through had I the training and growth resources that you had, growing up."

Potions and other training resources were a huge boon in getting stronger. While Rui made do with what he could, it wasn't the same. He didn't even have proper training and sparring partners. The adults had always been too busy to play around with him for too long, while the other kids in the Quarrier Orphanage were nowhere near what Kane had. They could at best take elementary roles in aiding his development and growth.

He couldn't even properly train in boxing and Brazilian Jiu-jitsu and other martial arts that went into training MMA, because he didn't have the time to train them on how to help him train!

Rui estimated that he very well could have discovered his Martial Path much earlier, perhaps not as early as Kane, but certainly earlier than he did. Definitely, before he entered the Martial Academy.

Of course, it was true that the suffocating and unpleasant environment of the Arrancar Family was probably nightmarish and torturous to children, but Rui wasn't a child.

However, despite that, he would probably choose to be reborn in the Quarrier Orphanage even if he did have a chance to change that. That's because they had already long solidified their place in his heart as family. It was hard to imagine a world where that wasn't the case.

Even if it wasn't particularly conducive to maximizing the rate of his growth, no matter how important his Martial Art was to him, he didn't want to forsake them. The memories that he had formed in his childhood would stay with him forever.

"What do you plan to do from here on out?" Rui asked.

He wanted to know what Kane would do in the short-term timeframe, and also in the long term. There was probably nothing he could afford to change in the meantime, he was simply too weak. He had just become a Martial Squire and was sorely unqualified to execute any radical plans.

Chapter 580: Class

"Honestly, I'm just going to have to get stronger, forging my own path and completing missions to gather more experience," Kane replied, sighing. "There isn't much else to do besides that, for now at least."

Rui nodded. "That's level-headed and prudent. For now, your situation is stable, albeit far from what you desire. It'll be a while before you have a chance to change that. Getting stronger by creating techniques that are synergetic with you is definitely a good initiative."

Kane nodded, before asking. "How do you even create techniques from scratch?"

"It's difficult," Rui replied honestly. "But you don't have to make it from scratch. For example, both my techniques use other techniques as building blocks. The long-range technique which I named Pathfinder required me to master two techniques from the Martial Union before I could incorporate them into the Pathfinder technique. My defensive technique also relies on Reverberating Lance, a striking supplementary technique that I learned as a Martial Apprentice."

"Wait." Kane jerked his head back lightly. "You constructed a defensive technique out of a striking technique? How is that even possible, that makes no sense."

"Be creative, Kane." Rui chuckled. "An offensive technique doesn't necessarily only have to be used to inflict damage on your opponents, how you use techniques matters just as much as the techniques themselves."

"Hm..." Kane's eyes narrowed as he processed what Rui told him. "What was the thought process for creating the technique like? Did you just think 'alright, I'm going to create this technique like this' or what?"

"I identified my needs and my strengths, and then aimed to create a technique that fulfilled my needs to a great degree by relying on my strengths to do so," Rui told him as he looked up in thought. "That was how I conceived of the conceptual basis of the two techniques that I created. One addressed my long-range inability and the other addressed my defensive needs. Both of them rely on my unique strengths to do so, and wouldn't be able to do it without them, that is true synergy."

"That actually makes a lot of sense, now that I think of it." Kane nodded. "My current needs are... frankly everything because I only have a few techniques right now. My strengths are my speed, agility, and evasive mobility."

"Also your affinity for techniques centered around those combat attributes." Rui pointed.

"But that isn't relevant if I'm trying to create a new technique rather than learn already constructed techniques, right?" Kane frowned.

"As I said, you can incorporate existing techniques into your new technique partially, or even wholly." Rui reminded. "As long as the concept of your technique truly stems from you, it will be individualistic enough to help you take a step towards the Senior Realm."

"Interesting..." Kane began to grow a little more interested in the matter. "It's incredible how you are probably the only person who can make me enjoy Martial Art. Talking to you is rather refreshing after the torment that I've gone through in the past few months."

"Any time." Rui nodded.

The two conversed for some more time before it was time to split up. After all, Rui had other plans and Kane had other things to attend to.

"Anyways, I'm glad to have spoken to you after I got out." Kane clasped Rui's hand in a partial hug.

"Me too, it's remarkable that you finished your Squire habilitation phase just before I picked my first mission in a while." Rui nodded. "Take care, Kane. And congratulations on reaching the Squire Realm. I've been waiting to congratulate you in person."

The two of them exchanged farewells as they went their separate ways. Rui headed straight toward the Martial Union. He could barely suppress his excitement as he swiftly made his over to the Hajin branch office of the Martial Union. He would not be delayed in the undertaking of a mission that would allow him to employ and exercise his new techniques in the field.

He swiftly completed the security check-in before immediately heading to the mission library.

Once he entered, he was plagued with the age-old dilemma of which class of missions he ought to go for. Thankfully, the fact that he had a more specific goal that he hoped to fulfill with whatever mission he ended up choosing.

('It is probably impossible to rigorously use both techniques in one mission.') Rui had already realized this.

The scenarios and circumstances in which the techniques would feasibly be used were almost entirely mutually exclusive from each other. The Pathfinder technique could only be thoroughly tested in circumstances where there was a great distance between him and his target or opponent. How could he exercise the Flux Earther technique in such a situation? It was practically unfeasible.

('I'll need to begin with a mission that allows me to thoroughly test one over the other.') Rui sighed. It was unfortunate.

Furthermore, one technique was easier to find missions very well suited than the other. The Pathfinder technique was born for sniper assassin missions and hunting missions. It would be quite effective and would shine in both of these circumstances.

On the other hand, the Flux Earther technique would work best in a bodyguard mission. However, that was only if the target of protection was actually under attack. Most bodyguard missions did not have intense life-threatening combat. Rui knew this from experience.

Bodyguards served as a deterrence more than anything. They severely disincentivized attacking the target of protection of the bodyguards because those bodyguards ensured that there were consequences for trying to attack their client. Rui wasn't sure he would actually get to use the technique all that often. In fact, he was more likely to use the Flux Earther technique in an offense class mission than he was to use it in a defense class mission.

After all, offense class missions guaranteed combat while defense class missions didn't necessarily do so. Rui would rather go for a guaranteed general combat application of the Flux Earther technique than the possibility of a specialized application of it.