

Martial Unity 591

Chapter 591: Invitation

The difficulty of mastering the Pathfinder technique could not be overstated. While the data processing needed to use the Pathfinder was still not as extreme as that of the VOID algorithm, it was far from something a Martial Squire could accomplish.

In fact, if it wasn't for the fact that Rui had mastered the technique, it could probably be considered a Senior-level technique!

After all, by definition, Senior-level techniques were techniques that only Martial Seniors and above could master. If not for Rui, it would most likely be the case that Martial Squires simply didn't have what it took to master the technique.

Of course, he had no idea what Martial Seniors were actually capable of, so he couldn't be sure that Martial Seniors were actually capable of using it either. But he didn't even dare to assume that Martial Seniors were incapable of mastering the technique. If the gap between Martial Squires and Martial Seniors was even remotely as large as the gap between Martial Apprentices and Martial Squires, then such a technique would most likely not be too problematic.

However, within the Squire Realm, the technique was probably a grade-nine or a grade-ten long-range accuracy technique.

('This is the power of synergy.') Rui reminded himself.

Mastering an ordinary grade-ten long-range accuracy technique was beyond him in ordinary circumstances, but thanks to the synergy between the technique and himself, he could overcome this barrier and take that step.

He let his thoughts as he finally reached the Hajin branch, quickly heading in to complete the post-mission protocols. He needed to fill up a report and write down statements.

Rui made sure to give just enough information about the technique to inspire the greed from the Martial Union. An alternative method and system of aiming in the form of the ODA system was nothing short of revolutionary, after all.

('I wonder what the Martial Sect centered around long-range techniques thinks about this.') Rui wondered, realizing he had almost forgotten about them.

He was certain that there was a Martial sect centered around long-range techniques. After all, if something as obscure as symbiotes could have their own sects, then surely long-range techniques, which were much more common, would also have their own sect.

Furthermore, it was probably large enough that it wouldn't be considered an unorthodox sect like the Symbiotic Sect. Though it would certainly be smaller than the Fire, Earth, and Lightning Sects.

Once he finished up his paperwork, he quickly left the Martial Union after confirming his pay. He had earned some money from the commission and intended to spend it on himself and his family. He also wanted to take some time off and stick around for whatever the Martial Union's response to his report would be, as much as he wanted to go on another mission.

He didn't think that the Martial Union would show up at his door immediately. He had submitted the report normally, which meant that it would undergo a normal process. There was probably some evaluation team that evaluated the degree of accuracy and honesty of the report based on the intelligence supplied by the intelligence department.

Perhaps the parts regarding the description of the technique would be highlighted and passed on to the relevant experts; such as the long-range Martial Artists that were either retired or simply partaking as a consultant in an issue that required their expertise.

Once the long-range Martial Artist read Rui's report and verified the existing intelligence on the matter themselves, that was when Rui's technique would truly catch the notice of the right eyes.

After all, what long-range Martial Artist competent enough to partake in confidential consultants wouldn't be part of the long-range technique Martial Sect?

This individual would most likely alert the Martial Sect of the technique that Rui described compellingly in his report. The Martial Sect would verify the report and the intelligence once over itself before digging more into Rui in their database.

Once they learned the various things that Rui had accomplished even as a Martial Apprentice, the veracity of his claims became a lot less questionable. Only then would they look at his personality and character evaluation. They would most likely run into the fact that Rui had rejected the invitations of Martial Sects much more powerful than themselves. This meant that they would naturally come to the conclusion that there was most likely nothing that they could do to convince him to join their sect.

Rui had made it clear that he didn't want to forsake his desire to be an all-rounder in order to join a Martial Sect.

Beyond this point, Rui had a harder time predicting their actions. It all depended on variables that he had no way of accounting for. Either they would lessen the conditions that deterred Rui from joining a Martial Sect, or they would focus purely on obtaining the Pathfinder technique more than anything else.

In the case of the former, he wasn't sure what he ought to do. He was not averse to making favorable deals that benefitted him, but he wanted to make sure that he wouldn't be forced to do things he didn't want to. The Fire Sect required him to place greater weight on offense than other fields, which was instantly an impossibility for Rui.

The second possibility was a lot less demanding. Selling the technique for something worthwhile in return was definitely worth it. Though he lacked far too much cognizance in regard to what could be offered and what was good and what wasn't. Value was one thing, but he wasn't sure how far he could push.

('Meh, I'll cross that bridge when I get to it.') Rui shrugged. ('Besides, technically, this is all still speculation.')

He didn't even know if the chain of events that Rui had predicted would occur, would actually occur.

Just then, his accouter beeped.

He pulled it out, scrolling through the message inbox.

[Squire Rui Quarrier, this is an official invitation to the Hajin branch of the Martial Union regarding matters surrounding the latest mission that you have completed. Please be sure to come at 16:00 on the 40th spring.]

Chapter 592: Ceeran Deriol

"Well, that was quick," Rui murmured out loud as he sipped some tea.

It hadn't been that long since he submitted his report, just a few hours. He had barely gotten any time to relax, in reality.

"Do they really process through reports this quick?" Rui scratched his head.

He didn't think this was the norm. Unless the Martial Union had a ridiculously loaded administration and staff, it shouldn't take lesser than a day, at least, for all of the procedures and due process to be completed.

"Assuming that's true, then would that mean my reports underwent a different stream of processing?" Rui wondered aloud.

It wasn't impossible.

For the Martial Union to have finished processing his report quickly made him suspect that perhaps his profile was flagged for priority, though he couldn't be sure about that.

('Not that it matters.') Rui sighed.

Time passed until the time for his meeting had arrived. Rui quickly sky-walked to the Hajin branch of the Martial Union.

"Excuse me," Rui addressed a staff member on the Martial support counter.

"How can I help you?" She offered a courteous smile.

"I actually have a meeting scheduled with the Martial Union," Rui replied, showing her the message.

"May I see your Martial license, please?" She requested as she accessed her terminal.

Once Rui obliged, she began fiddling with her terminal, before finally looking up at Rui.

"You have an appointment with Senior Ceeran Deriol," She informed him. "He's a Martial deputy director of the long-range development department of the Martial Union. The appointment is scheduled in his office."

"Which is where exactly?" Rui asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Here." She gave him a sheet of paper with the address of the large branch of the Martial Union and a map with the route indicated on it.

"Thank you.," Rui walked away as he studied the sheer of paper.

('Martial deputy director of the long-range development department, eh?') Rui scratched his head.

Unfortunately, his lack of familiarity with the hierarchy of positions within the research and development department of the Martial Union impeded his understanding of exactly how high up the totem pole a Martial deputy director was.

However, the fact that he was a 'Martial' deputy director gave him some clues. If the logic behind its presence in the title of the occupation was the same as that of the military ranks, then it would mean that Senior Ceeran had the power and authority that came with being a Martial deputy director, but none of the nominal management, administrative and research-oriented responsibilities that came with a deputy director of a rather significant research department.

This made sense as Martial Artists were not usually trained and equipped to handle administrative duties. Furthermore, it was a waste of their time and energy. A Martial Artist's greatest asset and avenue for contribution was in their Martial prowess.

The best thing that a Martial Artist could generally do for themselves and the people they were an asset to, was become stronger. This was the rationale behind the emergence of a separate equivalent hierarchy of positions without the duties and responsibilities that came with said positions despite retaining the authority that the position nominally held.

Thus, Rui was sure that most Martial Artists that were retained by the Martial Union did not really engage in ordinary work that other employees of their equivalent position would be expected to.

Just as he finished that train of thought, he arrived at the office. Outside were two guards Martial Apprentice guards that blocked his path, despite them being a Realm below him. Though Rui d

"I have an appointment with Senior Ceeran," Rui simply explained.

"Please provide us with the authorized invitation," They simply replied.

Only once Rui showed them the digital invitation did they open the door to his office.

"Ah, you're here." A tall dark-skinned man greeted him with a courteous smile, reaching out for a handshake. "Squire Rui Quarrier, It's a pleasure to meet one of the most promising young Martial Squires of the Empire. You're more than just a little well-known in the Union and even in the Martial community, you know."

"So I've come to realize," Rui smiled wryly. The fact that a Martial Senior, who was also a Martial colonel, had chosen to commission him to train his daughter had given Rui an inkling that he was probably more well-known than he might have previously suspected. Colonel Geringan should have had the capital and the connections to commission even experienced Martial Seniors to train his daughter.

However, he had ruled all of his plentiful options to instead commission Rui, a rather new Martial Squire with no accomplishments in the Squire Realm at the time.

This was far from ordinary.

"Come," The man gestured to the lavish couches adorning his ostentatious office. "Let us have a seat."

Rui inspected the room as he took a seat. Immediately, he made several observations, concluding that his previous understanding of Senior Ceeran's role as a Martial deputy director was not inaccurate.

It wasn't hard for Rui to deduce that this office was sparingly used. It was well-maintained, but it lacked the signs that would indicate regular prolonged usage and occupation of it.

His table was devoid of anything suggesting regular usage or that he spent much time at it. There wasn't even a digital terminal, so what kind of work would someone as high up as Senior Ceeran even accomplish at such an empty table?

Furthermore, he could feel that Senior Ceeran was out of place and unaccustomed to the office despite it being his.

"So, Squire Quarrier. We have much to talk about." He began. "Almost don't know where to begin."

"The invitation mentioned my most recent mission," Rui helpfully replied.

"I suppose that is set this into motion," The man replied with an amused smile. "Your report was more than just a little surprising. When I was alerted to some excerpts of your account, I was naturally more than just a little surprised."

"I can imagine," Rui smiled wryly.

Chapter 593: Carrot

"I'm not in the habit of beating around the bush too much, Squire Quarrier." Senior Ceeran eyes narrowed a little as his demeanor grew more solemn. "So I will ask you directly. Is your account of the

execution of the mission accurate? Did you truly, with a technique of your own creation, accurately hit the target of the mission from nearly a kilometer away?"

Rui remained silent for a moment, before nodding. "My report is the whole and complete truth. I stand by every word written in it."

The man stared at Rui for a few seconds, trying to assess how sincere Rui was being.

"Your claims are more than just a little surprising. They're frankly shocking. What you claim to accomplish shatters known and established paradigms when it comes to long-range accuracy." He explained to Rui. "If true, they are a cause for celebration. Just discovering a new path to accomplishing high degrees of accuracy is a great contribution to the Martial World. It proves that there are other paths forward for us to pursue in the field of accuracy."

"Assuming, of course, that you're telling the truth." He added. "If you aren't... You will find our implementation of the penalties of deceit in reports and such to be fierce. So, having cleared that, do you still maintain your claims?"

The air grew frostier. The mighty Martial Senior did not even attempt to exert any pressure on Rui. Just the sheer latent sense of danger that Rui felt from him due to his sharp senses alone was greater than even his most powerful Mind Mask!

Rui sighed. "Director Ceeran, I am not a fool. Why would I blatantly make up fairy tales and serve them to the Martial Union when I know I would not be able to escape its consequences? I assure you, my report is the whole and complete truth."

"For one, please address me by my Martial Artist rank if you will, rather than my position within the Martial Union. I identify with my identity as a Martial Artist more than anything else." He smiled, lightening the atmosphere a notch or two. "Secondly, I am of the personal opinion that you are sincere. My warning was more of an expression of the official stance of the Martial Union, more than anything."

"And, if I may ask, what is your stance?" Rui asked, curious.

"That you're a prodigious genius who has made an extraordinary breakthrough." Senior Ceeran's eyes lit up with greed. "Tell me everything. How does this technique work? What are the principles and mechanisms of this technique? How does it allow you to accomplish what you did?"

Rui paused for a moment, considering his reply. "This is a bit abrupt. I thought the Martial Union respected the autonomy and right to privacy of the Martial Artists, Senior Ceeran."

Senior Ceeran's enthusiasm dampened a bit as he studied Rui with a measured look. "Are you unwilling to share the development of your technique with the Martial Union?"

"I haven't really given it much thought." Rui lied. "But I am open to it, I was just a little overwhelmed."

"It is true that the Martial Union does not force its Martial Artists to divulge their techniques and Martial Art." Senior Ceeran. "We obtain their techniques through the carrot, rather than the stick."

Rui had already figured out why. While the Martial Union was, no doubt, powerful enough to bully nearly every Martial Artist and extract their secrets from them, this would be highly detrimental in the long run. The most negative consequences would involve a mass migration of Martial Artists from the Kandrian Empire to other sovereign states that were more pliable and less tyrannical.

Especially other super-nations like the Britannian Empire, the Republic of Gorteau, and the Sekigahara Confederation. These nations would more than happily accept the influx of Martial Artists, growing stronger while the Kandrian Empire and the Kandrian Martial Union both would grow weaker.

No Martial Artist would stay in an organization that proclaimed to be for Martial Artists but had no qualms about employing violence against the Martial Artist class to obtain what it wanted. This would reduce the rate at which it obtained techniques quickly and would severely weaken the foundations that the organization had worked hard to build.

There was nearly no technique that was worth officially breaking this important norm and setting a dangerous precedent that would break the trust that it had earned from Martial Artists.

Of course, Rui was not a naïve fool. He was relatively certain that as long the incentive was great enough, the Martial Union would shatter this norm without any hesitation to obtain whatever they wanted.

Like, for example, a way to significantly increase the rate at which Martial Artists emerged from the population would massively increase the number of Martial Artist population in the long run. Such a training technique would hold the strategic equivalence of a tactical intercontinental ballistic missile. Obtaining it was paramount. That was why Rui didn't dare reveal the possibility of the VOID algorithm accomplishing this to the Martial Union.

Of course, he was much less concerned about revealing his Pathfinder technique. That technique was valuable, no doubt, but it wasn't enough to get the Martial Union to take unscrupulous measures to obtain it. Especially if Rui already intended to share it in exchange for benefits.

"I'm aware," Rui nodded. "I am willing to share the Pathfinder technique with the Martial Union. However, only if the Martial Union fully appreciates the value of my Pathfinder technique, and that reflects in the remuneration and the recompense that the Martial Union is willing to trade."

"Pathfinder..." He murmured. "Interesting name, though it also sounds like a sensory technique to a certain extent."

He paused for a few moments. "No need to fret, young Squire. The Martial Union's evaluation of the value of a technique is fair and objective. We evaluate the value of a technique based on its individuality, potency, difficulty, and dissemination viability. In practice, it depends on how impactful your technique is on the Martial World."

Chapter 594: Impact

"Impact... is it?" Rui considered his words, understanding what he meant.

"Impact," Senior Ceeran nodded. "Allow me to briefly explain the four parameters, that I just described, deciding the 'impact' of a technique. Individuality is one you should be familiar with, considering you're overflowing with it. Individuality is considered an attribute that encompasses both uniqueness and originality. A technique that has zero individuality is not that valuable, because it adds no value.

Anything a technique with no individuality has to offer, we can already be certain is already ubiquitous, almost by definition."

Rui nodded, this was rather straightforward.

Why would the Martial Union try to acquire something that is neither unique nor original? Such a thing would not be able to offer anything that everything else didn't. This was an important parameter to consider when evaluating the value that a technique had, perhaps even the most important and foremost parameter to consider.

In this regard, Rui was quite confident that his technique would blow the minds of the Martial Union. The ODA system was probably nothing short of game-changing as far as its uniqueness and originality went. It literally stood for the Objectively Deduced Accuracy system, a means of obtaining accuracy outside of intuitive judgment and muscle memory, which was the only known paradigm for accuracy, Rui was sure.

"The next is potency," The man explained. "Potency is just as important as individuality when evaluating the value of a technique. It's all fine and dandy for a technique to be unique and original, but it would still be worthless if it was extremely weak and had no potential to be potent. It is simply a measure of how much a technique is actually able to accomplish."

Rui nodded. He was rather confident that the Pathfinder technique would do well in this parameter as well. After all, the potency of the technique was what drew the Martial Union's attention and interest in the first place.

A technique that allowed one to snipe targets accurately from nearly a kilometer away was far too potent.

"The last two are related to each other to some degree," He explained. "Difficulty and dissemination viability are two parameters that decide how much the potency of the technique can be propagated. A technique that cannot, to any degree whatsoever, be passed on to others or even modified to facilitate other applications from it is not a particularly valuable technique. After all, these two parameters are ultimately what decide the actual impact that degree will have for its potency and individuality."

Rui nodded unhappily.

A technique with grade ten difficulty was something an extremely minute proportion of the Martial Artist population could possibly master. Thus, the impact it had was limited. One thing Rui knew for a fact was that the technique was extremely difficult to master. The ODA system was extremely taxing and demanding of its user for it to be useful. Most Martial Artists stood no chance of conquering the sheer number of calculations that needed to be made.

Dissemination viability looked at the factors influencing how easy propagation of the technique was. Really harsh conditions such as requiring the Mindmirror Symbiote to perform it drastically reduced its viability.

Of course, Rui's dependence on the Mindmirror Symbiote had reduced significantly since he ascended to a higher Realm of power. His own brain had evolved to a large degree compared to the much meager boosts that the symbiote had received.

Still, he was different, he did not think that the average Martial Squire could come even close to mastering the ODA system without some kind of mental processing boost, at the very least. Mastering the Mind Palace technique was the bare minimum to achieve this. Even Rui would not be able to use the ODA system without the Mind Palace technique.

"Having explained all of them, we can proceed to actually talk about the evaluation of your technique," The man explained. "Only once we have done this can we actually talk about the remuneration and recompense that we will trade to you in exchange for an exclusive license to use, distribute and adapt your technique and use it however we may deem fit."

"So it will be treated as intellectual property?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Yes, at least all the information about the technique will be considered intellectual property that is owned by you, and only you," He nodded.

"Does that mean I will earn a cut every time this technique is sold?" Rui asked, curious.

"Of course, about fifty percent in general. The technique may be yours, but ultimately the Martial Union is the one that engages in lots of research and development to increase its dissemination viability by making the technique easier or developing highly effective training regimes. All of this costs money,

which is why we take at least fifty percent. Though if the technique is adapted to something that is very different from what was originally purchased, then we will be obliged to take an even higher cut."

Rui found the system to be interesting, though he didn't particularly care all that much about the money being earned through the commission cut.

"If you have no further questions, then let us proceed to the evaluation process of the technique." Senior Ceeran impatiently coaxed him.

"How does the process work, exactly?" Rui asked.

"You will begin by giving a scrupulously detailed report about the development period of the technique; the manner in which you came up with it, before finally divulging every ounce of information on the technique, even if it is just remotely relevant. Once that is done, you will be subjected to a bunch of tests that will gather the data which, in conjugation with the aforementioned reports, will allow us to have a clear idea of exactly how valuable the technique is. Once that is done, the Martial Union will be sure to offer recompense that is commensurate with said value. The details can be negotiated as there are plenty of exclusive techniques, goods and services, opportunities and avenues that the Martial Union can provide in return."

Rui's eyes lit up in interest at those words.

Chapter 595: Excited

The Martial Union was an immensely powerful organization in more than just one way. Its most powerful asset was, of course, its tremendous Martial power. As an organization that retained almost eighty percent of all Martial Artists in the nation, the Martial Union was unmatched when it came to individual power. To the point where it could match and perhaps even surpass the military power of the Royal Kandrian Family in some circumstances.

However, that wasn't the sole extent of its power. It had a large and extensive intelligence network and had unique intelligence-gathering methods through Martial Art that only an organization as Martial Art-centric could possibly have. Information ranging from mundane reports on the state of affairs to extremely significant information that would cost a small fortune to purchase. These were also part of the goods and services that it was capable of offering.

Beyond that, it could offer many highly useful and attractive benefits that would certainly appeal to Martial Artists. The tutelage and wisdom of high-ranking Martial Artists, reserved confidential techniques that were not publicly available, extremely effective and valuable yet rare training and growth resources.

Furthermore, as an organization with a tremendous amount of influence over society, it was also capable of offering power and authority. Martial Artists already passively possessed such influence, but with a high-ranking position inside the Martial Union, the entire nation was within your reach.

That was why Rui didn't underestimate the potential recompense that the Martial Union could offer him in return for the Pathfinder technique.

The two of them chatted a bit more before Rui was guided to another facility and made to sit at a table as he was given a typewriter to document the development process of the Pathfinder technique.

Yet before he could begin, he felt a Squire-level presence approaching him.

"Hm?" Rui glanced up as his eyebrows furrowed.

"Squire Quarrier, this is Squire Friedrich." An assistant staff member. "He will be ensuring that the development procedure and the information surrounding the technique is sincerely being documented."

"A mental sensory technique?"

"More than one, actually." Squire Friedrich replied casually. "Ensure you're conveying the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, else I will find out, I assure you."

The man issued a warning in a blank tone to Rui.

Rui even believed him. The man was concealing his mental pressure, but Rui could still sense that he was still not someone Rui wanted to make an enemy of.

Funnily enough, that made him want to fight him even more, to test his Martial Art against him.

Instead, Rui wordlessly turned back to his work and began describing the development process of the Pathfinder technique as well as all the information associated with the mechanism of the technique.

Within an hour, he finished, having managed to pump out a large amount of information thanks to his super speed.

Squire Friedrich had not voiced out a single complaint the entire time, which Rui found interesting. It appeared that the 'whole truth' was not necessarily a strict demand. The Oda system was partially inspired by the way that he developed the VOID algorithm, though Rui did not mention that, yet Squire Friedrich either did not notice or did notice but didn't deem it significant enough to reprimand him for.

It was half an hour before he met Senior Ceeran.

His demeanor was a lot less restrained than in their first meeting.

"I have gone through your report and I just feel the need to say, if even half of what you have described is accurate, then your mind must work in ways that I cannot even fathom. To be able to obtain such a high degree of accuracy not through intuition and muscle memory as nearly everybody else does, but through mathematical calculations is unheard of! There is no Martial Artist on the damn continent that I know of that can replicate your feat!" He excitedly exclaimed.

"I'm glad you recognize its value, I would have been a lot more concerned if you didn't seem to," Rui smiled.

"How could I not?!" he exclaimed. "In fact, I can't wait to try mastering this technique and incorporating its principles into my own original techniques!"

Rui raised an eyebrow at those words. "I take it you have a long-range centered Martial Path?"

"Correct," He nodded. "My Martial Path is long-range trajectory manipulation. It's a very niche subset of long-range offense, making me one of the few of my kind."

"Interesting," Rui furrowed his eyebrow. "What exactly does your Martial Path and Art actually entail, in practice?"

"My Martial Art is centered around a style of fighting where I manipulate the trajectory of my attacks once they've been launched to suit the situation. I accomplish this using various mechanisms and principles, some of which I myself have developed." He stated with more than just a hint of pride.

Rui's eyes widened. "Manipulating the trajectories of long-range attacks after they're already launched? Is such a thing even possible?"

"Of course it is!" He laughed good-heartedly. "There are a few means to do so. Manipulating the atmosphere is the most common way. Things like heat, air currents, and such can be used to alter the trajectory after release to dramatically increase the probability of the attack hitting the intended moving target."

"I see..." Rui furrowed his eyebrows as he considered the implication of the man's words.

The man was probably a medium to long-range fighter and fighting him was probably a pain in the ass. Avoiding attacks was extremely difficult, and with the knowledge that he had the ability to land his attacks thanks to this homing feature, he probably had several lethal long-range attacks that made defending against them very difficult!

"Truly incredible... Considering that this is your Martial Path and the fact that you're the Martial deputy-director of the long-range research department... You must surely be part of the Martial Sect surrounding long-range techniques. Am I right?"

"Of course," The man nodded, before turning to Rui. "I am most certainly part of the Longranger Sect."

"The Longranger sect... is it?" Rui considered the name, not having heard it before.

The Martial Sects were not public knowledge, one only learned about them if one reached a certain level of political or economic status, or if one was a Martial Artist. Furthermore, learning more about any one of them required actually entering a Martial Sect, or being approached by that Martial Sect.

Rui didn't fulfill those conditions until now, explaining his ignorance of what was surely an important Martial Sect.

"That's right." Senior Ceeran. "We Longrangers fight for an increased weightage on long-range techniques than they are currently given. Long-range techniques have very simple but potent advantages and benefits that ought to be more capitalized. Our techniques are simply superior to short-range striking."

Rui raised an eyebrow at those words. "Both ranges have their strengths and disadvantages, as I'm sure you'd agree."

"This is not false, of course," He nodded. "But the more accurate truth is that long-range techniques have better advantages to offer and lesser disadvantages to hinder the Martial Artist from using them. If you are in a sparring match or a duel where you and your opponent start meters away from each other, things may seem more equal, but in practice, such circumstances are quite rare. Especially in circumstances of war, having long-range offense has been shown to be dramatically more successful than engaging in close-quarter brawls."

Rui wanted to retort, but he paused, considering the matter.

It was not easy to refute the man's words. Especially when Rui had lived an entire lifetime in a world where projectile weapons with range were demonstrably more impactful in combat than close-quarter weapons.

This was especially true in larger-scale conflicts where there were no rules of any sort. Even bows and arrows and spears were historically more potent in warfare and became a main staple in conflicts. Most genuine conflicts began at a distant range, thus long-range offensive measures always gained the advantage of inflicting damage before shorter-range weapons could. Many a time, this was the difference between life and death.

Still, Rui rejected the notion that long-range offenses needed to be given higher priority relative to short-range offensive measures. For once, the distance shortened, long-range offensive Martial Artists would find themselves at a disadvantage!

For Rui, maintaining a good balance between both was key. Increasing both his long-range and short-range offensive capability was a prudent measure to take.

('Maybe I should look into the trajectory manipulation techniques that he specializes in,') Rui considered.

The synergy between the ODA system and such a technique was incredible, maybe he could expand the Pathfinder technique to include a long-range manipulation technique to turn the Sonic Bullets into homing projectiles!

('Then the technique would truly live up to its name!') Rui's eyes widened.

The pathfinder's effectiveness would increase substantially. Rui had to admit that Senior Ceeran was on to something with trying to integrate the ODA system with his Martial Art.

"Reading the development process of the Pathfinder was even more interesting than the actual technique itself," The man noted. "Truly, you'd just fine in the Longrangers."

"Are you attempting to recruit me, Senior?" Rui smiled wryly.

"I'd be lying if I said I wasn't interested, but..." He shook his head. "We've gone through your profile. You've already rejected the invitations to Martial Sects much more alluring and powerful than that of the Longranger Sect, like the Fire Sect, for example. Yet after all this time you still haven't joined a Martial Sect. We can safely conclude that you have qualms with the fundamental idea of joining a Martial Sect and everything it entails."

Rui nodded, they had hit the nail right on the head. "That is true. It's a shame that there isn't an all-rounder Sect."

"The focus of such a Sect is almost contradictory to the point of Martial Sects in the first place." The man replied. "That's why there are none. It doesn't make sense to advocate for all fields equally, that doesn't impact the budget spending in any way."

"True..."

"That being said, even if we don't invite you straightforwardly, we can still engage in transactions. Like the one we're engaging in right now." The Martial Senior smiled. "I promise you that the Longranger Sect will not be ungrateful for your technique, especially once we verify that the technique actually works the way you claim it does in the tests we are about to commence."

"I am intrigued at what you have to offer, truly." Rui raised an eyebrow.

"In good time." The man smiled, before gesturing forward. "We've arrived."

Rui turned, facing a large facility before him.

Inside was a sight that made even his eyebrows rise. Extensively long tracks over with all kinds of targets on the other end. Even the ceiling was remarkably high, meant to accommodate larger and wide area techniques.

Rui nodded in appreciation. "This is remarkable."

"It's something our Sect funded to facilitate the most thorough and rigorous research and development of long-range techniques in all parameters to the extreme. Now then, let's begin, shall we?"

He gestured as he walked forward.

At a particular station in the vast facility was a team of researchers, engaging in some technical work with various devices and machines of all kinds.

"Ah, Senior Ceeran, we just finished all the preparations for the testing experiments that you ordered us to." An elderly greeted him, bowing deeply when they reached her. "We can begin any time."

"Great, we'll begin immediately!" The man smiled excitedly., before turning to Rui. "This is it, be sure to give it your best."

"What do I need to do precisely?" Rui asked.

"You simply need to hit the targets we instruct you to hit. We will be testing the range, frequency, and precision limits of your static and dynamic accuracy while controlling for factors such as target size, position, and inclination of the target as well as atmospheric and sensory conditions..."

As they conversed back and forth, Senior Ceeran was incredibly impressed that Rui was not only capable of keeping up with the concepts employed in empirical research but was able to demonstrate an understanding of it that surpassed even his!

Chapter 597: Test

This gave Senior Ceeran an even greater impression of Rui. He watched, impressed, as Rui spoke with the researchers of the Longranger Sect directly as Senior Ceeran was no longer able to keep up with him in the conversation, deferring to the experts of the process.

Once the doubts were resolved, the tests began immediately.

"Test RQst5s100 will commence soon." One of the researchers spoke into a recording device. "This test entails testing static accuracy of the Pathfinder technique of the subject at a range of hundred meters with a target of size five."

He turned towards Rui, nodding.

Rui turned, looking at the target a hundred meters, quickly executing the ODA system effortlessly before firing a Sonic Bullet in the distance.

THWOOM

BANG!

In less than a second, the bullet struck the red center of the target.

A perfectly accurate shot.

No one was surprised, hundred meters may be extremely difficult for Martial Apprentices, but Martial Squires and their evolved brains atop the boosts provided by the advancement of their Martial Paths allowed them to achieve this degree of accuracy fairly handily.

However, the expressions of the team and Senior Ceeran grew increasingly more excited as the experiments progressed.

By the time Rui reached five hundred meters, Senior Ceeran already had a smirk on his face. It was quite evident that he liked what he was seeing. He paid close attention to Rui as Rui fired each shot, especially his demeanor. He noted that Rui's exhibited the kind of behavior one would exhibit when one was engaging in mental math, which is what Rui was actually doing, as opposed to someone hyper-focused on the target.

At seven hundred meters, even the voice of the researcher narrating the outcomes and the proceedings was starting to get disaffected as he became increasingly impatient and excited.

At nine hundred meters, Senior Ceeran had a small outburst of energy as Rui succeeded in striking the target from that distance. The same distance he proclaimed to kill Herguson Meine from. This was irrefutable proof that everything he uttered was the truth and that this was truly and wholly the real deal!

At one thousand meters, a bead of sweat trickled down Rui's forehead as he just barely managed to get the shot on target, clenching his jaws as he strained himself to the limit.

It was only at one thousand and one meters that his expression fell as he finally missed the target entirely.

"Tsk, seems that this is my limit, for now," Rui sighed.

"You should be ecstatic, jumping in the air with pride," Senior Ceeran chuckled at Rui's disappointment.

"Perhaps, it's just a little irksome because I know that this isn't my absolute limit, I can do better as time goes on," He sighed.

"The fact that you're starting off this well is an extremely good sign, young man. I don't think there's a single eighteen-year-old Martial Artist out there who can even dream of accomplishing what you just did!" He exclaimed. "Your future is bright, and your potential is limitless!"

"Thank you," Rui nodded.

The remaining tests progressed smoothly. Rui's Pathfinder technique was tested in ways that even he hadn't tried prior. By the end of the evaluation, Rui had walked out with a much greater understanding of his own technique than ever before.

There were some things offered by a systematic scientific approach that he simply could not replace with his sharp observation, no matter how shrewd he was. The power of the Pathfinder technique was undeniable. Senior Ceeran had lost the dignity that a Martial deputy director was supposed to maintain as he lost himself immersing himself in the study of Rui's techniques.

"Just watching you has given me tremendous amounts of inspiration, more than I know what to do with it." The man had a hard time restraining his excitement. "I just need one more step to the Master Realm and you may have provided me with a solution!"

Rui raised an eyebrow. "One step away from the Master Realm?"

"I am a Master candidate." The man nodded absentmindedly. "I've been at the zenith for nearly two decades, trying to figure out how I ought to take a step to the higher Realm!"

Rui jerked back in surprise as he took a good look at the man. He looked remarkably young, most certainly not as old as a man who had spent more than ten years stagnating at the peak of the Senior Realm.

Rui narrowed his eyes. ('Has he consumed a longevity potion?')

Rui was aware that entering the Squire Realm prolonged life to a certain extent, but it would not justify the youth the man seemed to display. Was there perhaps a similar effect when one entered the Senior Realm? The information surrounding the details of Martial Artists of higher Realms was so inscrutable that many such details were entirely out of reach of someone like Rui.

The man however continued mumbling to himself, pacing back and forth, unaware of Rui's confusion.

"Uh, sir?" Rui cautiously coaxed.

"Hm?" He looked up.

"The various tests are over." Rui reminded him. "Is there anything else that needs to be done before we can negotiate the recompense and remuneration?"

"Oh, silly me. I almost forgot about that part, having been so absorbed in my own thoughts." He shook his head. "Of course not, let us head back to my office immediately, we have much to discuss, young man."

Rui suspected that the Martial Union, or rather the Longranger Sect, would not be insincere with their recompense. The terms of this deal would singlehandedly decide whether Rui would ever be willing to sell his techniques to them ever again. If Rui felt cheated, they would never ever benefit from his brilliance ever again, and they probably knew it.

Hell, Rui wouldn't be surprised if they offered remuneration that was even greater than what the technique was worth, just to ensure he develops a particularly good impression of the Sect as fair and charitable.

Chapter 598: Remuneration

"Now then," The man began once they finally sat down in his office. "Let us talk about our end of the deal,"

Rui simply stared at him silently, waiting for him to begin.

"The evaluation of your technique isn't out yet officially, however, unofficially, I can tell you that we value the technique that you've developed immensely. However, our concern is the low dissemination viability of the technique due to the burdensome mental calculations that need to be rapidly executed within a short timeframe. This is an extremely high hurdle of difficulty. So much so that we see fit to grade its difficulty as nothing less than ten." The man commented.

Rui didn't bother refuting this, he knew that this would most likely be the case. He didn't think it could possibly be graded below nine due to how demanding the mental faculties of the Martial Artist aiming to use them were.

"Don't get me wrong, this does not take away from your personal accomplishment, in fact, it makes you even more impressive. But unfortunately, it does significantly reduce the impact the technology will have on the Martial world," He sighed, a hint of regret flashing in his eyes. "I don't know how many Martial Artists there are with the qualifications to attempt mastering this technique there are, but I can be damn well sure that they are no more than a minute portion of the Martial world."

Rui nodded, agreeing. "I take it this significantly impacts the value of the technique to the Martial Union, correct?"

"Yes, I'm afraid," He sighed. "Of course, every technique is valuable, and grade-ten techniques are no doubt extremely valued for increasing the peak of what Marital Artists are capable of. However, its direct impact is not as revolutionary as I truly hoped it would be."

"Won't the Martial Union work on researching ways to increase the dissemination value of the technique though?" Rui asked.

"Of course we will, but the outcomes of research projects cannot be guaranteed," The man sighed. "A preliminary research endeavor will be undertaken to gauge the difficulty of the project, depending on the results after a year of research, we may either proceed with it if it shows promise or abandon the research project if no progress is made even after a year. However, the research we conduct is not considered a part of the remuneration and recompense that the Martial Union will give you in exchange for the technique."

"That's fair," Rui nodded. Unless he was personally contributing to the research, he could not demand remuneration for the fruits of their research labor.

"Alright," The man nodded. "For a grade-ten Squire-level technique that is viable across even higher Realms and showing us a brand-new paradigm of accuracy that has produced shocking results, we have decided to award you one million Martial Credits!"

Rui raised an eyebrow.

That was an enormous amount of funds. Rui made less than ten thousand Martial credits with Squire-level missions. Meaning this reward was the equivalent of more than one hundred Squire-level missions.

Rui was extremely rich!

This degree of wealth would allow him to potentially commission Martial Masters for an extremely low-grade Master-level mission, who were among the most strategically powerful Martial assets of the Union and the Empire!

"I'm a little confused," Rui scratched his head, reacting in a way that Senior Ceeran did not expect. "I thought that the Martial Union would provide me with all manners of recompense that were exclusively offered to those who made contributions. I'm a little surprised at only being offered a huge sum of money."

Senior Ceeran chuckled, understanding Rui's confusion. "All of the various kinds of recompense that you're referring to can be purchased with the sum that we provided you with."

"So, anybody with money can purchase them?" Rui frowned.

If these goods and services were not exclusive to the Martial Artist, then the incentive to share techniques with the Martial Union was very little. Any rich douchebag could easily purchase all these services that Rui had to give up a precious personal technique to obtain.

"No," The man shook his head. "The exclusive goods and services that the Martial Union has can only be purchased by Martial credits. And Martial credits cannot be exchanged with Kandrian gold coins or any other legacy. The only way to obtain them is through contributions, such as missions, submitting techniques, training methodologies, intelligence, etc."

"I see," Rui sighed inwardly in relief. "I'm glad to hear that."

This meant that the one million Martial credits that Rui had were extremely valuable and could probably purchase him all kinds of goods and other services.

"As for what you can purchase..." The man pulled out a thick book from his shelf. "There are far too many things for me to convey to you in a conversation. This is a collection of all the various exclusive things that you can purchase from the Martial Union using Martial credits. I will only be going through a number of the most sought-after and significant things. You can go through the rest here, or you can access a digital version through your accouter."

The size of the book was large.

"I see..." Rui narrowed his eyes as he considered the matter.

"The Martial Union offers many things to its contributors. We generally divide them into a number of categories. I will be going through the broad categories, while you can indulge in a deep dive through them in your own time."

Rui nodded, paying close attention to his words.

He wanted to make sure he got a thorough understanding of everything the Martial Union had to offer before making a decision on how to spend them. Hell, Rui wasn't even the neediest person. He was doing just fine training and completing missions on his own. However, that made his decision even

harder. After all, now his choices weren't as obvious as before. He needed to work on choosing what fulfilled his interests the best.

Chapter 599: Product

"We divide our exclusive goods and services by their nature," The man began by explaining. "The first and foremost broad category is, of course, material products. This category very broadly includes goods whose value lies in the material physical product that we offer."

The man paused, before continuing. "Things like Martial gear, that you won't find in the utility department, that aids Martial Artists beyond what normal products can. You can think of extremely powerful versions of the gear that you already rely on. Particularly high-grade monocular, abnormally effective restraining gear, potent healing potions, even Martial garbs that can provide defensive protection against other Martial Artists or, in your case, Martial Squires!"

Rui widened his eyes. He knew that for something as small and thin as a Martial garb, providing any amount of defense against Squire-level power was definitely a difficult task!

"Why aren't such products more commonly available to Martial Artists?" Rui asked.

"Because the materials used to make them are strategically valuable," The man replied. "I'm sure someone as shrewd as you have figured out that the sheer quality of the material must be high in order to allow cloth fabric to provide any kind of defense against another Martial Squire, correct?"

Rui nodded. He wasn't stupid. The quality and quantity of a material determined what the limit of the product, created with that quantity of material, was.

If the quantity was very low, like that of a Martial garb, then the quality would have to be exceedingly high!

"If I'm not wrong..." Rui gulped. "Such a Martial garb would need to be made out of Senior-level materials."

"Correct," The man grinned.

Rui shook his head, chuckling weakly.

To think he could potentially purchase a Martial garb made out of a material whose tensile strength was an entire Realm above his own power!

This was certainly not a privilege that many Martial Artists could afford. Only weapon-oriented Martial Artists possessed such products, and only because it was necessary.

"That isn't all, however." The man smiled. "The Martial Union offers all kinds of products whose utility is not exclusive to field usage. For example, we offer potions that can permanently boost the physicality of a Martial Squire like yourself."

Rui's eyes widened. "By how much?"

"The effects vary," The man replied. "But it provides a fifteen percent boost on average."

"For a singular potion, that is incredibly amazing," Rui murmured in amazement. "Can it be repeatedly consumed to stack its effects?"

"I'm afraid not," The man shook his head with a rueful smile. "If life was that convenient, Martial Artists as a class would be far more powerful than we are right now. Most high-grade Martial Squires end up having consumed one by the time they've spent enough time in the Squire Realm, you are the only one who has an opportunity to consume one this early in the Squire Realm."

"I see..." Rui rested his chin on his hands as he considered the matter. "I bet with the combination of my latest technique and the potion, I'll be promoted to grade five very soon."

"I wouldn't be so sure if I were you," The man replied.

Rui furrowed his eyes in confusion. "Is there such a large difference between the grades? In the Apprentice Realm, I jumped between grades much more easily."

"The Squire Realm is generally far larger than the Apprentice Realm, young man. Our evolved, varied and customized bodies obtained from the breakthrough process make synergy between Martial Art, techniques, and Martial body a much more powerful variable, allowing for a greater difference between the base and the peak of the Squire Realm compared to the Apprentice Realm." Senior Ceeran explained. "Grade-ten Martial Squires are a sight to behold within the Squire Realm. Any one of them would utterly annihilate multiple of you simultaneously in combat, based on the mission records of yours that I took the liberty of going through. You cannot simply extrapolate your stunning rate of growth in the Apprentice Realm to the Squire Realm, I assure you your journey in the Squire realm will be long and grueling."

"I see... To think that even a grade-ten technique and a fifteen-percent boost would not be enough for a jump in grade..." Rui sighed. He was being overloaded with information at the moment. He could consider this matter later, for now, he needed to focus on the discussion at hand.

"But this is all irrelevant," The man waved dismissively. "The point is you can gain an important boost to your physicality in the long run. Normally, Martial Squires have to spend many years grinding on missions to finally save up enough funds to purchase such potions."

Rui would be lying if he said he wasn't deeply attracted to this option. Gaining such a boost to his physicality was immense. Although fifteen percent may not seem that game-changing, it would allow Rui to become strong enough to decisively win against his previous self every time. The effective boost it provided to his combat was not something that could be dismissed so easily.

Of course, Rui had yet to hear about the rest of the goods and services that the Martial Union offered, but this was a solid competitor. However, Senior Ceeran hadn't even finished covering the first broad category. He looked back at the man with a measured look.

"As far as potions go, that isn't the only kind that we offer. We offer extremely potent potions that take significantly less time to work and can heal even critical wounds extremely quickly. Or mental rejuvenation potions that lessen the burden that prolonged lack of sleep causes on the mind. Even longevity potions that can extend your lifespan beyond even the evolved lifespan of Martial Artists."

Each of these was a highly desirable potion, especially the latter which was the dream of not just Martial Artists but also the human species in general. No one objected to being able to extend their natural lives beyond their limits!

Chapter 600: Internal

The man proceeded to lay out several sub-categories within material products. Many of them didn't even necessarily have anything to do with Martial Art, earning Rui's apathy due to that. He wasn't interested in products that didn't aid his Martial Path and Martial journey.

"That is a general overview of the material product categories," He explained. "You can go through the digital library available on your account to gain more information regarding specific details."

Rui nodded. "Will do."

"The next broad category is information and intelligence," The man explained. "This includes Martial Art oriented information such as techniques and research centered around Martial Art that you may be interested in for developing a new technique, for example."

Rui nodded. He had already expected this. The Martial Union invested a tremendous amount of its revenue into the budget for research and development of Martial Art techniques and training techniques, training regimes, and other training resources.

Unfortunately, just like the research and development in another field, not all avenues and projects of research and development were successful. In fact, many of them were not. Rather than allowing all of the research to be in vain, the Martial Union documented and stored the data and sold it to third parties that were interested in purchasing that data, particularly Martial Artists who may be able to successfully make breakthroughs in that particular field thanks to unique circumstances surrounding them and their Martial Art.

This was the most productive way to squeeze value out of failed research. Not only did it fetch them revenue, but it also increased the probability that Martial Artists would succeed in their endeavors of creating and developing new techniques that would ultimately funnel back to benefit the Martial Union even more.

"We offer a wealth of knowledge in our attempts to learn more and strengthen Martial Art much more readily and easily than we would to third parties that are not connected to the Martial Union in any way. This is the advantage of being a contributor to the Martial Union." The man smiled. "In addition to information related to Martial Art, the Martial Union also possess a library of information outside Martial Art, on all worldly matters, both general and specific knowledge within reason. Our extensive intelligence department and network have allowed us to grasp highly valuable and confidential information that would otherwise be very difficult to obtain. Of course, you do not possess the sheer required number of Martial credits to get your hands on the particularly juice stuff such as national secrets, confidential observations on the Beast Domain, etc."

Of course, Rui didn't care about this in the slightest. He was not going to waste money on something irrelevant to his goals and objectives.

"Now now, don't be too quick to dismiss this category of information," The man smiled, noticing Rui's lack of enthusiasm. "You can even commission a covert investigation and intelligence-gathering operation around a matter or a person, or to obtain information that you're looking for. For example, and forgive me if this is personal, but I read that your mother died when you were born, and your father is a complete unknown. Our intelligence department can dig up the truth about their identities, your heritage, and your roots if you want."

Rui raised an eyebrow.

It wasn't as though he had never thought about who his biological parents were. He wouldn't be human if he wasn't curious. He still had a memory of his mother before she died, though he never knew her name, as she had been taken in in an emergency. As for his father, he hadn't the faintest clue who he was.

Still, it wasn't enough for him to care too much. He had a family that he was more than happy with.

Rui shook his head. "Next,"

"Alright," Senior Ceeran immediately acquiesced, wisely not pressing further. "That pretty much sums up the information and intelligence category, it possesses only two sub-categories, but they are both immensely deep and wide with more information than you can fathom. This brings us to the next category; authority and power."

Rui raised an eyebrow.

"In order to explain this category of services, I need to explain the structure of the Martial Union and its relationship with its associated and constituent Martial Artists." The man explained. "Martial Artists like yourself are considered to be external members; Martial Artists who have only signed a partnership contract with the Martial Union where you complete missions and receive half the pay while the Martial Union receives the other half for all the services and systems in place that allowed for the transaction between client and Martial Artist to smoothly take place."

Rui nodded, following his words. He even understood where this was going, but he kept silent, allowing Senior Ceeran to finish his point.

"Whereas Martial Artists like myself, are internal members of the Martial Union. We do not merely sign a partnership contract with the martial Union, but also a conditional employment contract where we undertake few responsibilities and duties while also gaining more authority and power within the Martial Union, in the form of security clearance to access information that external members simply cannot purchase regardless of how many Martial credits one possesses. As well as commissioning authority; the authority to commission the Martial Artists of the Martial Union using the Martial Union's treasury to fund the commission instead of my own. Of course, this cannot be abused, but it still does give us internal members a lot of power."

"So..." Rui pieced together his implicit offer. "Are you saying I can purchase my way into the Martial Union's inner circle to obtain greater power and authority?"

The man eagerly nodded. "That's right. There definitely are some constraints and burdens, but it's not bad. There are several more benefits such as an even greater degree of impunity from the law and the penal code, as well as easier access to more powerful Martial Artists, you can leverage your position to-

"Thank you, sir, but I have no intention of becoming an employee, I value my freedom and autonomy too much."