

## Martial Unity 601

### Chapter 601: Key

Rui didn't even hesitate in refusing the last option that Senior Ceeran had provided to him. Rui simply had no interest in the various ways that the Martial Union could grant him influence, wealth, and power.

At least, that wasn't the kind of power that Rui was interested in. Rui wanted to dedicate his life to pursuing his Martial Path and developing his Martial Art. If anything, positions in the Martial Union would burden him with explicit and implicit responsibilities and burdens that he simply didn't care for and would also hinder him from focusing on what he wanted to focus on.

He didn't want long periods of training frequently intruded by responsibility calls from the Martial Union.

"Well, that's fine. Quite understandable actually, especially at your stage," The man explained. "There's plenty of time to change your mind when you get stronger and reach higher Realms."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "You make it sound like it is something that will inevitably happen,"

Senior Ceeran smiled melancholically. "Why do you think so many Martial Artists of the Martial Union spend so much time in Martial Sects?"

Rui scratched his head. "Because they want their field of Martial Art to receive more funds and capital for research?"

"Of course," The man nodded. "But my question had more to do with why this was the case?"

"Hm..." Rui scratched his head.

"An overwhelming proportion of the research and development happens in the lower Realms, after all, it is extremely difficult for research teams to aid Martial Artists of the upper Realms. These beings have reached such an absurd level of power across the centuries that they're no different from natural disasters. Just being in the same region as them is dangerous," The man explained. "So why is that

Martial Artists in the higher Realms get involved in this matter that has no direct relevance to them so fiercely?"

Rui didn't know the answer. In truth, he wasn't sure why these Martial Artists that were so vastly above such matters cared so deeply about the research and development allocations of the Martial Artist.

His first guess was that it was a matter of ego and pride. Perhaps seeing their field receive lesser capital than those of their peers was interpreted as an indication of inferiority, causing them to fight hard to get their field more recognition than they believe it deserved.

Yet for some reason, Rui didn't think that this was the case.

Were the Martial Artists of the upper Realms really that petty?

"It's because progressing becomes much harder the higher the Realm of the Martial Artist," The man sighed. "It's almost impossible to maintain the rate of progression in the higher Realms than it is in the lower Realms. This is true for any two successive Realms. You reached the Squire Realm after spending around four years in the Apprentice Realm, this is impressive and very optimistic but it is hardly unheard of. However, I can assure you that you will almost certainly not reach the Senior Realm in the next four years, or less than three, since you have already spent around eighteen months in the Squire Realm."

Rui could already feel that. He started out at grade three thanks to how potent his Martial Art was, and his extra-enhanced body, however, his rate of progress across the Squire Realm was slower than he had expected. He could especially feel that when he learned that mastering a synergetic grade-ten technique along with a permanent augmentation potion wasn't necessarily enough to move up a grade.

He would probably spend many years in the Senior Realm before he could take a step into a higher realm of power.

"But what exactly does this have to do with higher Realm Martial Artists joining factions and being involved with the Martial Union?" Rui scratched his head, confused.

"It has to do with the difficulty of treading down your Martial Path, individuality generally becomes much harder to come up with. It's like climbing a mountain, easiest at the bottom, but gets continuously

harder as it grows steeper," The man explained. "Oftentimes, Martial Artists hit into nigh-insurmountable barriers. In times like these, the innovations and creations of the humblest of Martial Artists can often serve as the key to progressing forward. These Martial Artists have a high capability to deconstruct the essence of lower techniques and adapt it to their need. One of the variables that decide the availability of such techniques is the amount of capital for research that the Martial Union allocates to their fields."

"I see..." Rui narrowed his eyes in thought. "So it is, at least, partially fueled by personal and self-centered reasons."

"Correct," The man nodded. "Martial Artists that reach this level are highly driven, it takes an immense amount of perseverance to transcend your limits multiple times and reach the upper Realms. That is why these Martial Artists are willing to look any and everywhere to obtain inspiration or solutions. I can tell you that someone very high up and special in the Longranger Sect is particularly interested in your Pathfinder technique. Joining the Martial Union is ultimately something all Martial Artists find great value in doing."

He gave Rui a measured look.

"Well, if and when that day comes, I'll consider joining the Martial Union," Rui sighed, throwing him a bone.

"It's always good to keep an open mind," The man smiled. "And that just about brings us to the end of the brief overview of the services that the Martial Union offers. The one million martial credits have already been deposited in your account, and you may spend them how so ever you deem appropriate."

Rui nodded. "Thank you for your help, Senior Ceeran, it is much appreciated."

"No," The man shook his head vigorously. "I'm the one who should be thanking you, young man, you have shown me a new path forward that I had never even known existed. In comparison to that, the aid I provided you is rather trivial."

Rui had plenty to consider on the way back home. He had a huge array of choices to spend his million Martial credits on, and he didn't want to be too hasty.

('I'm not under a tremendous amount of pressure in any regard at the moment.') Rui sighed. ('I can take my time to think it through. Hell, I don't even think it is ideal to spend all of it on one go.')

It was best to keep a smaller proportion in his account as a part of his savings, or he could even give it to the Quarrier Orphanage and allow them to spend it on things that even the income supplied by both Rui and Julian would normally not allow.

('I should prioritize spending the credits on something that will aid my Martial Art and my power.') Rui decided.

Those two were different, albeit very closely related. Progressing his Martial Art made him stronger, but becoming stronger did not necessarily progress his Martial Art. The clearest example of the latter was the perma-augmentation potion that augmented his physicality but did not impact his Martial Art in any way.

Of course, this was not bad, not by any means at all. But Rui would rather have an option that made him stronger by making his Martial Art stronger. But, of course, there was no straightforward way to make progress in your Martial Art, it certainly was not something that could be purchased. No potion boosted one's Martial Art.

('Still, it is an option worth considering,') Rui noted.

The Martial World was dangerous. That potion could mean the difference between life and death where he would not have been able to overcome an opponent had he not consumed said potion. Thus, Rui was very open to considering consuming said potion.

('Although there is nothing that can straightforwardly strengthen my Martial Art, there's a variety of smaller things that should be able to aid.') Rui realized.

Things like being able to purchase a lot of research data surrounding a field to learn more about it were certainly quite useful. He had done just that when he purchased information relating to the compatibility between poison and symbiotes.

The next time that he wanted to obtain information surrounding a field that was relevant to a technique development project that he was working on, he could be much less reserved in the amount of money that he spent on it.

Doing so would increase the probability that he would obtain some degree of success in regard to the project that he was working on, or, if the project was not viable in the first place, then he was less likely to waste time on that avenue of development.

He could also be much less reserved when spending on training resources in the Martial Union, for one. After all, with the sheer number of Martial credits he had sitting in the bank, he didn't need to worry about spending too many training resources.

Rui could even commission Martial Artists of higher Realms like Martial Seniors to aid him if he ever experienced any difficulty with training or a particular technique.

Martial Artists of higher Realms possessed knowledge and experience that far surpassed that of a relatively young Martial Squire like himself. There were insights and wisdom that came with the sheer quantity and quality of experience in regard to Martial Art that these Martial Artists possessed that could not be replaced by anything else.

Of course, he highly doubted he could commission them too many times before even his expansive reserves of Martial credits emptied up.

('It's probably best to spend a certain degree of Martial credits on immediate boosts such as the perma-augmenting potion while keeping the rest to be available for future expenditure on continuous purchases that can help the growth of my Martial Art in many ways.') Rui nodded.

Ultimately, this was the most prudent way to handle the way to spend these funds. While the goods and services of the Martial Union were no doubt quite impressive and alluring, ultimately, they weren't something that Rui was too willing to spend much capital on. He didn't particularly need or want most of

them, and while there were no doubt products that could aid his mission completion, he was content with augmenting his physical prowess.

Anything else was simply too temporal and would grow obsolete as time passed. There was no way that he could retain most of these products when he stepped into the Senior Realm, but the permanent augmenting potion would certainly aid him throughout his entire journey.

By the time he gathered his thoughts on the matter, he had already arrived at the Quarrier Orphanage. As he sky-walked down, he found Max and Mana sparring fiercely outside the Orphanage. Thankfully, he already had the mind mask on, thus his arrival didn't draw their attention. The two were so intensely focused on their combat sparring that they didn't even notice Rui descending from the sky.

It was only after they paused of their own volition that they finally saw Rui smiling at them from a distance.

"Big brother."

"You're back."

"Have you finished your business in the Martial Union? It sure took a while."

"I did," Rui nodded. "How is training going?"

"It's going as tough as it usually does, but we can handle it just fine," Max replied.

Rui had been paying close attention to them as he has been increasingly putting them through the VOID algorithm training, sparring with them with an adapted style produced by the VOID algorithm, using the bare minimum amount of energy and power that he needed to beat them, while also replicating their own styles against them.

He had watched as time passed, the two of them had gained an immense amount of self-awareness about their fighting styles, learning their affinities and capabilities at a remarkably young age, the kind of

thing that one would really learn about only in the exploration stage that students went through in the Martial Academy.

#### Chapter 603: Team

('Of course, this alone probably isn't enough to discover one's Martial Path and break through to the Apprentice Realm.') Rui noted.

For example, if their Martial Path happened to be related to a non-standard field like poison, then no amount of self-awareness of their existing style and combat would be able to allow them to discover their Martial Path until they were actually exposed to poison.

Of course, it was highly unlikely that they had Martial Paths related to poison. Now that Rui had gained access to some lesser-known secrets of the impact of one's personal experiences throughout their life on their Martial Path, he knew that their life experiences would almost certainly not morph their Martial Path into something niche and esoteric.

Furthermore, Rui already had some suspicions about their Martial Paths.

Max was likely going to have a Martial Path centered around offense or power, or both. His combat style contained a lot of both, thus it was not unreasonable for Rui to suspect that the boy would be going down this path.

Of course, Rui could not specifically say what his Martial Path would be. Both offense and power were extremely broad fields of Martial Art, and there were a large number of possible specific sub-fields that his Martial Path could be.

The same could be said for Mana, who seemed to excel in all-around maneuvering and agility. Even within those fields, she could end up pursuing numerous particular sub-fields.

He decided to, at the very least, give them decent levels of exposure to various unorthodox fields, it would expand their Martial Art worldview and give them a better understanding of the various kinds of Martial Art there could be.

"Big brother, can you spar with us again?"

The two of them looked at him expectantly.

"Alright, fine." Rui sighed, relenting.

"Alright!"

The two took their positions and stances while Rui simply stood where he was, waiting for them. He took his time to observe their stances and movements in slow motion.

Yet more than that, what drew his attention was their demeanor and impression. Rui recalled that a few months ago when they attended the Martial entrance exam, while they were certainly passionate and excited, he couldn't help but think that they were quite childish and naïve.

However, ever since their loss in that exam, the two had grown a lot more determined and worked much harder and fiercer than they did before. They lost their childish demeanor rather quickly as they persevered through much more intense training than before.

Rui had to admit that he was quite proud of them.

"Begin."

The two of them rushed at him once he uttered the word. Mana reached him first, launching a remarkably swift kick to his chin. What impressed Rui was that she did not even shift her body to launch the attack, her knee reached her shoulder as her leg flexibly flew up unhampered.

WHOOSH

Rui stepped back five centimeters slowly, having begun the moment her attack began. Her kick missed him narrowly, disheveling his hair with the gust of wind she generated.

She sidestepped as Max charged in with a powerful blow charged up, swinging it with all his might against Rui.

POW

Rui partially redirected the strike while also partially dodging, applying the bare minimum amount of power needed to successfully defend against the attack. He leaped to the side, putting some distance between them as he analyzed their teamwork.

('She reached first, launching a swift attack, yet her goal was only to give Max enough time to charge up all the momentum and power so that he could launch it in a single attack.') Rui noted as he watched them turning towards him in slow motion.

Rui glanced at Max.

('Maybe Max's Martial Path will be a combination of offense and power in the form of maximizing one-hit power. He doesn't seem to have much of an interest or knock for grappling.') Rui mused.

Rui had taught them both Brazilian jiu-jitsu, a martial art that Max was not too very fond of.

He watched as the two of them rushed at him again, using all kinds of tricks and coordinated maneuvers to try and maximize their chances of pushing Rui farther than they ever had before. Rui noticed that, since the entrance exam, the two had really begun to specialize their combat styles even more. Max focused mainly on landing the most powerful impacts that he possibly could, while Mana created opportunities that allowed Max to land his powerful blows on their opponent.

They made a good team, as far as their specialties were considered. Furthermore, they had a lot as a team. Though Rui also made sure that they trained and sparring individually as well. Ultimately, it would be quite dangerous if their combat styles became too dependent on each other. This would hinder their path forward to the upper Realms.

Furthermore, it might warp the development of their Martial Paths in an unhealthy manner too, which was worse than just being hindered. Thus, Rui ensured that both of them spent more than half their sparring training, sparring one on one, rather than two-on-one.

Still, teamwork was useful, especially when they were trying to crack one of the most difficult Martial exams in the country.

Rui just had to ensure that there was a balance. Teamwork would still be useful even after they join the Martial Academy if they did choose to form a party. They could complete missions together, allowing them to leverage the many years that they had been fighting together. Although their fighting styles would certainly evolve as time passed, as long as they spent a healthy combination of individualistic growth and team growth, they could become formidable Martial Artists in the future.

It was a future that Rui was looking forward to. He definitely took pride in them as both siblings and students. Every time he trained with them, he made sure to give it his all as a mentor and as an older brother.

Chapter 604: Spendings

THUD

The two of them collapsed to the ground, exhausted.

"Good job you two," Rui remarked with a smile. "The two of you have grown stronger."

"But we still couldn't even land a proper blow on you even though you were moving at a normal speed!" Max complained, earning a nod from Mana.

Rui had held back his movement and reaction speed to human level by deliberately delaying his movements to match those of normal humans, yet despite his raw movements being that of a normal human being, and often slower than them, they were unable to land even a single clean strike on him!

Max and Mana were dumbfounded at how Rui was able to accomplish such a feat. Their understanding of combat had not yet matured to a level where they could actually grasp the means by which Rui was able to pull off such a feat.

"I've told you many a time, have I not?" Rui chuckled, amused. "Accuracy of timing and placement matter more than raw speed."

"But what does that actually even mean?" Mana raised an eyebrow.

"I can predict your movements rather easily, I just need to evade or deflect at the right time and place that I know will be enough to deal with predicted strikes," Rui shrugged.

"Can you teach us how to do that?" Mana asked, intrigued.

Rui shook his head. "Most Martial Artists obtain the ability to predict simpler and primitive combat styles like yours after lots and lots of experience. Although there are exceptions, I am afraid they cannot apply to you."

The two of the children sighed, looking crestfallen.

"Cheer up, the two of you are making respectable progress," Rui tried to coax them, much to no avail.

He decided to try and give them some good news.

"I've decided to switch your Apprentice mentor," Rui explained.

The two of them looked at Rui with knitted eyebrows. "But why?"

"I want to expose you to all kinds of Martial Art," Rui explained. "It helps to broaden your perspective regarding what the two of you aspire to pursue. I'm going to be commissioning all kinds of Martial Artists with all kinds of Martial Art for you to experience. And let me tell you, there aren't just a few. Aren't you excited to see just the kinds of things that Martial Artists are capable of?"

The two of them lit up with eager interest at Rui's words. As avid admirers of Martial Artists, the two of them were quite excited at the prospect of meeting all kinds of Martial Artists.

Of course, the reason Rui did this was that he wanted to hasten the discovery of their Martial Path. This required both external and internal exploration. Rui had been doing a great job of significantly hastening their internal exploration by exposing them to the VOID algorithm turned down to match their prowess.

However, he hadn't given them too much of the latter. They needed to be exposed to different kinds of Martial Art, otherwise, they would likely never come to the realization of what their affinity out of all these possibilities was.

In fact, that might have been the reason why Crea broke through earlier than Mana and Max despite receiving less tutelage from Rui than those two. While Rui greatly accelerated her self-awareness regarding her patterns and combat style, her strong foundation as the daughter of a Martial Senior who was also loaded, gave her vastly more exposure to Martial Art than Max and Mana, who, up until now, had only met two Martial Artists in their life.

('Tsk, had I come to this realization earlier, they might have already broken through by now.') Rui sighed.

Of course, this was not necessarily true. Rui didn't really possess the funds to commission Apprentice mentors full-time back when he was a Martial Apprentice. He had commissioned a mentor for them pretty much as early as he could financially afford to.

If it weren't for his debt, he would have been able to pay for tutelage much earlier.

('Oh wait, I completely forgot about my debt.') Rui immediately realized.

It couldn't be helped, because it didn't have a time limit and didn't snowball interest, it didn't put too much pressure outside biting a chunk of all of his paychecks, however, once he got used to that it simply became normal.

('Currently, I actually have the funds to get rid of my debt in full... Should I?') Rui wondered.

On one hand, it would eventually get cleared even if he didn't do so himself, as he grew stronger, he would be completing higher grade missions that would yield even greater income than he currently had and he was already able to manage with what he currently had. There was no need to spend a solid chunk of revenue on paying back his debt.

On the other hand, there was a saying that a man in debt was never truly free. The psychological freedom of getting rid of his debt alone was worth it at the end of the day. It was not nice having to constantly remember that he had a large sum of money to pay back to the Martial Academy for his time in it.

('That alone with the perma-augmentation potion, as well as the tutors for the kids will be my initial spending.') Rui nodded inwardly, having made up his mind regarding this issue.

He didn't intend to spend the rest of his Martial credits immediately, however, he was not opposed to spending them on pricey things here and there that he needed that he otherwise might not have deigned to purchase due to a lack of funds.

For now, however, he intended to get back into completing missions, rather than jumping into training back again. He was eager to put his new techniques to the test.

('Perhaps I should undertake a mission that allows me to use the Flux Earther technique in the field for once.

It was a less flashy and shocking move and also a mundane part of normal combat, thus it wasn't as impactful as the Pathfinder technique, but it was something Rui looked forward to using.

## Chapter 605: Administer

Rui headed back to the Martial Union soon enough after he made up his mind on how to initially spend a proportion of his one million Martial credits.

"Yes, how can I help you?" A support staff member at the Martial counter inquired.

"I would like to purchase the Benetein Blood potion," Rui informed her.

She quickly accessed the inventory database, typing, before turning back to him.

"That costs about one hundred and thirty-seven thousand Martial credits," She replied. "The administration procedure costs nine thousand Martial credits, and the pre-administration blood test to confirm that you are compatible with the potion costs five hundred Martial credits."

The fact that the administration procedure cost that much meant that it most likely wasn't a straightforward injection into his body. Though, because of his augmented physique, just piercing his body to inject blood into it required special measures, thus that wouldn't be as cheap as it was when he was in the Apprentice Realm.

He wasn't too concerned about the pre-administration blood test. It was only to ensure that Rui didn't have any blood conditions that would make administering the potion into his bloodstream harmful.

"I have taken numerous blood tests that the Martial Union should have a record of," Rui pointed out. "Wouldn't that suffice?"

"As long as they're within two years of the administration of the potion, they are viable." She confirmed.

"Good to hear, then I shall proceed with purchasing the potion and the medical services that are necessary along with that," Rui nodded.

Rui wasn't sure if it was because the Martial Union held him in higher regard than it used to before, but the process happened quite rapidly and the procedure was immediately ready.

"Squire Quarrier, you're just on time. I'm doctor Brenix and I'll be overseeing the procedure," The doctor waved friendlyly when Rui entered the operating room.

"Pleasure to meet you, can we begin the procedure soon?" Rui asked impatiently.

Part of the reason that he wanted to get the procedure done and over with as soon as possible was because he knew it would take a little while to get perfectly acclimatized and used to his new power.

Of course, it wouldn't take much time, perhaps a week or two at most. Far less time than it took him to get acclimatized to the Martial body that he got breaking through to the Squire Realm. After all, the former was just a fifteen-percent boost, while the latter boosted all metabolic processes by a factor of one hundred on average!

It was no wonder that Rui needed three months of habilitation for the latter. It was a revolutionary experience that changed everything.

Fifteen percent required only enough training to learn to apply just a little less power on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, with how much he held back on a regular basis when interacting with regular humans, a fifteen percent increase in his held-back power wouldn't even lead to nearly as much of a drastic consequence as opposed to being unable to control any of his power at all like when he first broke through.

Thus, it was unlikely that Rui would be held back for a habilitation phase like he had when he broke through to the Squire Realm.

"Ah Squire Quarrier, all the preparations are ready. We have gone through your bloodwork after you became a Martial Squire and have found no elements that would make you incompatible with the potion." The doctor informed him.

"Good to hear," Rui nodded. "Let's begin immediately."

"Absolutely, please sign this consent form." The doctor provided him with a sheet of paper and an ink pen. "It's just a statement declaring that you are aware of the discomfort and pain that the administration process may cause to you and that the Martial Union isn't liable for any suffering so incurred during the process."

"Is such a thing really necessary?" Rui voiced out loud as he signed the form before handing it back.

"It wasn't necessary a while back until there was an issue with a Martial Apprentice who filed an official complaint regarding the pain of a different potion administration procedure." The doctor sighed, talking openly. "Ever since then, it became a mandatory protocol to follow for all such procedures."

"The Martial Union heeded to the complaints of a single Martial Apprentice?" Rui frowned. "That doesn't sound right."

"I'm afraid it very well does when the Martial Apprentice is from an important Martial Family that occupies several high positions within the Union." The doctor sighed, resigned.

"Ah, that makes more sense," Rui nodded. Arrogant elitists were a thing of both Earth and Gaea, it seemed.

"Alright, please lay down on the operating bed inside the chamber and we'll strap you down." The doctor requested.

Rui nodded, having already expected this. Martial Squires were generally in control of there, even involuntarily thanks to the extensive habilitation training that he had undergone. However, the risk of Martial Squires massacring the entire medical team due to an outburst reaction to immense pain was something that was not insignificant. Even shockwaves made by the movements of Martial Squires could kill regular humans.

Thus, it was almost standard practice to isolate Martial Artists as far away from the medical team as possible to ensure safety.

Rui settled in as mechanical cuffs restrained his limbs and head.

"Squire Quarrier, we will begin soon." The doctor's voice could be heard projected into the chamber.

"Any time," Rui replied, having already mentally prepared himself for the pain.

The pain was generally described to be like a searing hot liquid being injected into your body. It sounded horrific, but Rui wasn't too concerned, he was confident that he would be able to bear the pain.

And he wasn't wrong.

The description of the pain was accurate, Rui judged, once a syringe pierced into his body and injected the potion. He grimaced as he felt the painful heat flowing across his entire body, making him feel like all the blood in his body was boiling.

#### Chapter 606: Outcome

Rui gritted his teeth lightly as pain flowed through his veins, simultaneously, several syringes piercing into his limbs, injecting another liquid seemingly, having a cooling effect on the pain sensation, lessening it as time passed.

Soon, it was entirely gone, causing Rui to heave a sigh of relief.

"Squire Quarrier, the procedure has been completed, we will be unshackling you. However, the chamber will remain closed for a while as per protocols. As long as you can demonstrate that you have sufficiently high control over your new state, you will be released."

"Understood," Rui replied.

CLACK

All of the mechanical shackles opened.

('Fifteen percent less effort than usual,') Rui noted.

He exhaled before sitting upright slowly.

"Woah," Rui muttered.

He felt much lighter than before, though nothing too debilitatingly different.

After all, this was an overall fifteen percent boost, not a fifteen percent boost in every single physical parameter identically. The difference was manageable.

Rui turned slowly, as his feet touched the ground. He exhaled before getting up on his feet with as little effort as possible.

('This isn't that bad,') Rui realized as he landed on his feet just fine.

STEP

He carefully took a step forward.

VRMMMM

The operating table disappeared into an opening in the ground that promptly closed to serve as ordinary flooring, giving Rui more space.

The chamber was just large enough to allow him to test elementary control.

STEP

He took another step forward.

STEP

STEP

STEP

"Oh this is easy."

Of course, he could feel that he wasn't nearly as comfortable with his body as he normally was, but his motor controls were largely retained because the effort he put in wasn't too different from what he needed to, and what he normally put in. He was stronger, but within reason where he would retain all of his muscle memory as long as he got used to his new body.

"You are showing good hand-eye coordination, the fact that you haven't made a single imperfect movement thus far is a very good sign of control. Still, you will be guided out of the Martial Union in a different route to minimize risks. Good luck and goodbye, Squire Quarrier." The doctor bade him.

"Thanks for the treatment doc," Rui called out.

VRMMM

A door opened in the wall on the other side of the chamber, it was a hole in the ground that led straight down.

Rui shrugged, jumping down.

THUD

There was a path that led to the exterior of the Martial Union complex, with a pair of Martial Squires guarding the opening out.

They did not say a word to Rui as he walked out.

Rui, for one, felt amused. He had basically taken something of a secret route out of the Martial Union complex. He walked over to the closest gate carefully before exiting the branch office entirely.

Rui recognized the risks of sky-walking immediately after the procedure, but he couldn't care less, he just wanted to see what the difference would be like.

"Woah."

He unsteadily rose into the air as he pedaled against the atmosphere. Sky-walking required skill to leverage the power of the Martial body to apply Newton's third law of motion to generate a constant but low thrust to increasingly escalate into the sky.

Rui could truly test how far he was from his normal degree of comfort, familiarity, and accuracy he was by sky-walking.

"Not bad at all," he muttered as he increasingly regained all of the finesse he had with sky-walking

WHOOSH

He managed to nail a somersault midair.

"A few rough patches here and there, but not bad at all." Rui nodded.

The few awkward motions could be fixed quickly enough, there was nothing glaringly wrong, and Rui was becoming more proficient by the second, reaching very close to his previous level of accuracy and precision.

There were only a few minute problems that could easily be fixed in a short amount of time.

"The benefits far outweigh the downsides," Rui grinned as he enjoyed the feeling even lighter than before.

He could feel that his body was much more powerful than before while still maintaining the physical configuration of his Martial body. He would not dare purchase a potion that disrupted the parametric configuration of his body, and he highly doubted whether the Martial union would even offer such potions to Martial Squires in the first place.

The martial Union, of all organizations, would know the importance of not selling products that would disrupt the parametric configuration of the Martial bodies of Martial Squires. This was something that could ruin their future Martial Path, thus Rui had been very stringent regarding this issue, going to great lengths to ensure that the potion would not affect his configuration in any way.

Rui inhaled deeply, before opening his mouth lightly.

THWOOM

An incredibly charged and powerful Sonic Bullet blasted across the atmosphere at an incredible speed.

"Nice," Rui nodded, satisfied. The attack was definitely more powerful than what he would have been capable of prior to the Benetein Blood potion being administered to his body. "The boost in power alone is worth it.

He faced down, looking at a distant rock in an uninhabited area a great distance away. His eyes narrowed as he executed the ODA System, completing the calculation rapidly before a small, but potent, Sonic Bullet was launched out of his mouth.

THWOOM

BANG

The Sonic Bullet struck the target head-on, blasting the rock into smithereens before digging a hole more than a hundred meters deep.

"Its potency has also increased," Rui nodded, satisfied. "Executing the ODA System has also grown a little easier."

This meant that he could push the boundaries of the Pathfinder technique beyond what he already thought was possible.

"Man, if only Senior Ceeran was here to see this." Rui smiled, he could easily imagine the passionate long-range Martial Artist growing excited at the improvements in his execution of the technique that Rui just made. He would definitely have called Rui back to test his limits again.

Chapter 607: Spar

POW POW POW

Rui just barely managed to dispel the impact of three incredibly swift and powerful blows.

RUMBLE

The sheer might of two Martial Squires permeated across the land as a fierce maelstrom of pressure radiated from the two focused Martial Squires.

The two of them locked eyes before lashing out at each other once more.

Two weeks had passed since Rui consumed the Bentein Blood potion. He had received a significant boost to his combat prowess. In order to acquire the degree of control and accuracy over his body and movements that he had prior to the administration of the potion, he had commissioned a grade-five Martial Squire to serve as a combat training partner.

He wanted someone about as strong, or perhaps even stronger than himself to put a lot of pressure on himself to whip him into shape.

What he didn't fully comprehend was how strong a grade-five Martial Squire was.

In hindsight, Rui should have heeded Senior Ceeran's words regarding the size of the Squire Realm and the significant difference between grades of Martial Artists in the Squire Realm.

However, it was difficult to appreciate something one hadn't seen yet.

This was part of the reason he had commissioned a grade-five Martial Squire in the first place; curiosity.

Well, he got what he wanted.

His opponent was Squire Jamil, a man who had been in the Squire realm for nearly a decade, and he was not someone to be trifled with.

WHOOSH

Rui barely managed to avoid a devastatingly powerful roundhouse kick ducking backward. His eyes widened as the very air ignited due to the sheer friction caused by the blurring speed of Squire Jamal's attack!

"Tsk," he tutted before resuming his onslaught.

His large arms wound backward flying forward with incredible speed and power!

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui gritted his teeth as he pushed himself to the absolute limit trying to dispel the man's offensive prowess. If not for Flux Earther, Rui wasn't sure he would have been able to even handle the man's potent impacts.

Furthermore, he could feel that Flux Earther wasn't able to entirely dispel all of the kinetic energy of Squire Jamal's power. He could feel the pain pulsing in his arms every time he intercepted and negated an attack with Flux Earther.

This would have been a much greater problem if not for the fact that Rui's healing factor had risen considerably beyond human limits once he entered the Squire Realm. Furthermore, the Mind Switch technique that he had modified and mastered aided his recovery greatly.

The man swung an exceptionally charged strike at Rui, yet it simply landed on an empty image

WHOOSH

It was a well-timed feint.

BAM!!

Rui slammed his knee into the man's face, catching him off-guard at the perfect time. He had exploited a little opening in his attack patterns once he created the predictive model on the man, allowing him to thoroughly exploit it with Phantom Step.

"Hm?" Rui's eyes widened as he realized that he hadn't even budged the man's body despite a direct slam into his face.

WHOOSH

Rui barely managed to evade a bear hug, having predicted it with the predictive model based on subtle and tiny tells and movements that allowed him to deduce his future movements based on pattern recognition, as well as aid from Primordial Instinct.

If not for these two, Rui didn't think he would have been able to dodge the blurringly fast attack.

Squire Jamal rubbed his bleeding nose as he frowned.

Rui's eyes widened as his eyebrows knitted, his mind was at peak alertness, and he knew that he would not be able to keep up with his combat sparring partner if he did not give it his absolute most.

Despite his gargantuan physique, the man was extremely fast and agile, even more so than Rui. Seeing him launch himself forward as though he was as light as a feather was more than just a peculiar sight, Rui would not have seen such a sight had he been in the Apprentice Realm still.

Martial Artists were still limited by their mortal coils in the Apprentice Realm, sights such as juggernauts moving around like little birds, faster than someone like Rui was almost unheard of.

Yet in the Squire Realm, it was all but possible, and normal, even.

Rui could feel that the man's physical superiority over him was not just due to techniques, but also due to a superior physical body. His power, speed, and durability exceeded that of Rui's considerably despite the fact that Rui just consumed a potion that made him fifteen percent superior overall.

On top of that, the man had a wealth of experience in the Squire Realm and had no doubt devised a lot of techniques.

In fact, Rui was the one who was an anomaly for being able to keep with him in combat and even gain a tiny upper hand every now and then, even though he struggled to do so and had been bullied plenty by his opponent.

Ordinarily, he should have been crushed, even Rui understood this. His body was significantly inferior and his opponent had mastered a greater number of techniques. There was no question who the victor between them ought to have been.

But Rui was no ordinary Martial Artist.

('Double-hand drop strike; 98.7%!') Rui promptly began moving ahead of time, and yet;

BOOM!

RUMBLE

The land around them groaned as the full power of a Martial Squire struck it.

Rui just barely managed to evade the swift and powerful strike despite the boosts provided by the VOID algorithm!

Yet he pulled it off flawlessly, objectively speaking.

"Huff... Huff..." Rui panted, taking his stance one more, preparing for yet another strike.

Yet to his surprise, the man made a timeout gesture, indicating the end of the spar.

"Huff..." Rui sat down, exhausted.

"You truly are a confounding Martial Artist, Squire Quarrier," The man walked. "Today is the last day of the commission, come, I wish to speak with you."

#### Chapter 608: Talk

Rui had fully mastered the boost in physicality that he had received in the past two weeks under high-pressure combat, and both of them knew that this would be the last sparring session between them.

"Why do you say that?" Rui asked with a raised eyebrow.

"I've never seen someone as deviant as you, eh?" The man replied straightforwardly. "Your Martial Art, your techniques, and even your Martial body and your grade as a Martial Artist. They're all more than just a little confusing,"

Rui shrugged. "I have a high-grade Martial Art, and my body has received non-standard empowerment. That's all."

The man snorted, before shaking his head. "Your body is definitely strong, much stronger than I would expect of an eighteen-year-old Martial Squire who hasn't even spent two years in the Squire Realm. And the potion alone isn't enough to justify the difference."

Rui was surprised. The man had also noticed the boost in power that he gained thanks to the Mind Switch technique increasing his stamina beyond human limits, which he had then managed to sacrifice for greater physical parameters when he underwent the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure.

"Yet despite the fact that your body is stronger than someone who has only spent a year and a half in the Squire Realm, your body is actually weaker than what I would expect from a grade-four Martial Artist."

"Hm?" Rui couldn't help but frown. Despite the boosts that he had received, his body was weak for a grade-four Martial Artist?

"You are aware that Martial bodies grow stronger as time passes, correct?" The man asked, turning to Rui.

Rui nodded. He was aware of this basic fact, although he hadn't been informed of the specifics.

"Normally, Martial Squires with your youth in the Squire realm have bodies that are quite weak and immature. All Martial Squires would start out with what is informally classified as a grade-one body," The man explained. "You should have been in that category as well. Yet you have received empowerment that made your body stronger than that of someone of your age in the Squire Realm. Still, this would at most make your physical body as strong as that of the average grade-two Martial Squire. Yet your Martial Artist grade is grade four."

Rui immediately understood the source of the man's confusion surrounding Rui. Ordinarily, Rui should have possessed a body that the average grade-one Martial Artist would have because he had spent only eighteen months in the Squire Realm. However, due to the Mind Switch technique making his Martial body stronger than normal from the start, and the Benetein Blood potion he received recently made him stronger than a Martial Squire of his youth in the Squire Realm should have been.

Which meant that his body was probably much weaker than the average grade-four Martial Artist!

('Back then in the Zurtun mission, the Martial Squire I fought back then definitely had a powerful body. He could negate my strikes easily with a single technique and his body. Part of that must have been due to his superior Martial body in addition to synergy. No wonder he seemed so invincible!') Rui realized.

Rui knew that victory would have been quite unlikely had he failed to get a good strangle on the man and maintain it, a tactic that the VOID algorithm had given him.

That was also when his Martial Artist grade had upgraded.

('The Martial Union gave me a Martial Artist grade higher than my youth in the Squire realm would warrant because of the strength of the VOID algorithm!') Rui realized.

That's why he started out with a grade-three evaluation despite only possessing the equivalent of a grade-two body!

Rui narrowed his eyes, absorbed in thought. A lot of things that he hadn't given much thought to in the past were making much more sense with the information that Rui had managed to extract from just a short conversation with a much more experienced Martial Squire.

"You must have a truly potent Martial Art." The man noted. "That's what allowed you to keep up with me, even if barely."

Rui snorted. "I probably would have lost if the fight prolonged. Your stamina is greater and eventually, it would have been game over."

Rui now understood why Senior Ceeran had told Rui to restrain his expectations of being upgraded to grade five as a Martial Artist. In fact, he felt he was rather naïve and ignorant for making that strength in the first place.

"True, but... it has been both humbling and inspiring to see you fight. Makes me more motivated to work harder and finally lay foot into the Senior Realm." The man got up. "That challenges that need to be surmounted in order to step into a higher realm of power for a third time are not... trivial."

Rui raised an eyebrow as he looked at the man. "You know what it takes to become a Martial Senior?"

Rui hadn't heard so much as a peep about the actual breakthrough to the Senior Realm.

The man nodded. "It is truly profound."

"Why do you say that?" Rui casually said.

"Nice try," The man chuckled. "You're hoping I will divulge what I know, eh?"

"Tsk,"

"You're a tricky brat. Do not be impatient, when you become a grade-five Martial Squire, you will be eligible to learn more." The man nodded. "With your rate of growth, I suspect that that day isn't that far away."

Rui shrugged.

He was glad that he didn't need to wait until he became a Senior candidate or something, to learn more about what it took to become stronger. Now that he had witnessed the power of a grade-five Martial Artist, he knew that it wouldn't be easy to reach that level of power in a short amount of time, that was for sure. All he needed to do was progress forward, one step at a time and he was sure to reach not only higher grades but also a higher realm of power.

Chapter 609: Next

Once they finished conversing, the man sky-walked away. Rui considered the conversation that they'd just had. It was quite insightful, and he had learned a lot from the man.

"Now what?" Rui asked himself, having yet to get up.

In truth, he already knew the answer.

"I need to push myself to the absolute limit applying my power in the real world."

He had only gotten to use the Pathfinder technique once in a mission, and he was not satisfied with that at all. Furthermore, he had also gotten a boost to his body and thus wanted to test that as well.

"Well, off to the Martial Union I go," Rui shrugged.

Five minutes later, he had reached the Martial Union, quickly making his way through all the security check-ins before immediately heading towards the mission library. He walked towards the shadow class of missions, browsing through the missions.

Right off the bat, there were a lot of missions that would allow him to accrue more fame for his sniping capability, but Rui was looking for something more than that. He didn't want a simple elementary mission where he needed to get into position and take a shot before leaving.

He wanted a mission that would also allow him to exercise his capability as a Martial Artist.

An assassination mission that would require fighting Martial Squires would be ideal for him, while he was excited to apply Pathfinder and show the world the power of his techniques, he was not an assassin. He was a Martial Artist, first and foremost. He could already feel himself itching for a good fight where he exercised his Martial Art, and he was growing more reluctant to do simple and static assassinations.

Doing it once was fine with the mission commissioned by Fauche, however, he had no interest in doing it any further.

However, there was just one problem.

('I cannot judge whether a mission of this kind actually involves me fighting other Martial Artists, after all, it sort of runs contrary to the point of Shadow class missions.') Rui sighed.

Shadow-class missions were all covert and clandestine by definition. Fights between Martial Squires were not covert by any means. Thus, the proportion of missions that involved straightforward clashes with Martial Artists was actually quite a few.

Furthermore, it was extremely difficult for Rui to judge whether a mission would entail him fighting other Martial Artists based on the publicized information available. These descriptions only offered the basic facts of the mission, they did not offer any details that would allow Rui to judge whether he would find the real combat that he was looking for.

Rui had to make a choice out of several options here. He could try to make the best judgment he could regarding whether the mission would give him opportunities to exercise both his combat and his assassination capabilities.

It was definitely extremely difficult, but Rui had a shot at doing so.

Another choice was to simply accept that finding both of these elements in a single mission was not really practical. What was much more practical was alternating between missions that definitely gave him one of what he was looking for. He could go for shadow-class missions that would give him the opportunity to exercise his assassination capabilities, and then go for an offense class or hunter-class missions that would allow him to exercise his combat ability as a Martial Artist.

That was much more reasonable than hoping to find both in a single mission.

('That seems quite logical,') Rui shrugged, it was the best option he had. ('Since I already picked a shadow class mission last time, I'll go with an offense class mission or a hunter class mission.')

Offense class missions were generally preferable because they allowed him to pick missions where he could be guaranteed combat against other Martial Squires, especially since he was now a grade-four Martial Squire.

('Well, since my previous mission was an assassination mission, I should go for an offense-class mission.')

Rui shrugged, walking towards the offense class section.

As always, the offense-class missions were either international or sanctioned by an authorized governmental entity. There were even a few authorized by the Martial Union as well, that also possessed the right to issue such missions within the Kandrian Empire.

Rui sauntered through the section in the library as he looked for a suitable mission.

[Offense-class mission: destruction mission]

Client: Feruir Cerni

Difficulty grade: four

Target of destruction: Supply shipment convoy

Target location: Fruid trade route; [45.3, 24.6 to 46.5, 23.2]

Remuneration: 11,000 Martial Credits / 418 gold coins

Mission summary: The target of destruction is a supply shipment convoy from the Kingdom of Violis heading towards the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana. The protection outfit assigned to the supply shipment consists of ten Martial Apprentices and a defense-class Martial Squire.]

('Interesting, a mission relevant to nations that I have already completed missions in before.') Rui mused.

The Kingdom of Violis was the nation where he had been deployed by the Kandrian Bureau of Investigation to capture Faraday Lowminer, while the Commonwealth Duchy of Vinfrana was the nation where he had been commissioned by the Martial Union itself to annihilate a hidden research facility that was researching the breakthrough to the Squire realm. It was thanks to the research data that he had procured from this mission that he had finally managed to learn the truth about the mechanics of the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

Both of these missions were quite memorable to him, and now he had the opportunity to undertake another mission involving both of these nations.

Of course, it wasn't particularly surprising. There weren't an infinite number of nations, so he was bound to run into the same nation as long as he continued doing foreign-based missions.

('Alright, I'll accept it, why not.') Rui shrugged, it wasn't as though this didn't fulfill the conditions that he had set. He plucked the mission bill out of the slot on the shelf before heading towards the mission application counter.

#### Chapter 610: Video

"Ah, Squire Quarrier. I'm afraid the client's commission contract includes the conditional-approval clause that requires them to approve of any and all Martial Artists that apply for the commission," The staff member apologetically informed him.

Rui sighed, he'd forgotten that this was closer to the norm in the Squire Realm than it was in the Apprentice Realm. The clients who had the capital to commission Martial Squires were much more particular about the qualifications and inclinations of the Martial Artists that they had commissioned.

"And will they contact me and give me a location to meet up with them?" Rui asked tentatively.

"I'm afraid not, Squire Quarrier. It seems they cannot physically meet you. They have offered to communicate via a video call as their most preferred means of communication." He informed Rui dutifully.

"Video call?" Rui's eyes widened. "That's a feature?"

Rui felt like a country bumpkin. At that moment, he regretted not knowing the extent of the technological development of this world, but alas, it was not easy gaining an understanding of the best of what technology had to offer.

Part of this was because the best of what technology had to offer was highly restricted, expensive, and highly resource intensive, even for a Martial Squire like himself prior to recently.

For example, the accouter that he was currently in possession of was considered a luxurious and high-class product that only the upper echelons of society could afford. This was because the resources required to construct the device and to maintain its functionality were prohibitively scarce. Yet, its

functionality was much inferior to even that of the earliest touch-screen phones produced at the dawn of the twenty-first century back on Earth.

Rui knew that his accouter was unable to perform video calls. However, he wasn't aware that the technological development of human civilization on the Panama continent had reached a level where they could achieve video calls.

It was surprising because it was highly unlikely that his client was particularly elite from the perspective of human civilization. After all, someone who chose to commission a Martial Squire was unlikely to be able to also commission Martial Seniors, which put a hard ceiling on how rich they were.

This meant that the general public and even ordinary rich people were likely unable to get their hands on such technology.

"Yes sir," The man finally replied after a while, from Rui's perspective. "As far as I'm aware, only higher-grade Martial Squires tend to have accouter models with such a feature."

"I see," Rui nodded. "I'll apply for the commission anyway."

"Understood sir."

Rui swiftly breezed through the paperwork before heading down to the utility department, taking a good look around. It resembled a posh and lush version of the market districts in the town of Hajin. There were various shops of different tech manufacturing companies that set up highly monitored outlets within the Martial Union for purchasing utilities, products, gear, and equipment relevant to Martial Art and missions.

"Could I purchase some accouters with a video call feature?" Rui asked at the store if he had purchased his current accouter.

"Of course, sir," The saleswoman nodded with a courteous smile. "Are there any other parameters you would like to select by?"

"Affordability, portability, and user-friendliness, I suppose," Rui replied. "I don't want to buy extravagant options, and I want an accouter that won't get in my way in missions while also one that is simple to use as far as its core functions go."

She presented several options.

"I recommend the FRN-W31." She told him, presenting him with a product. "It, more or less, ticks all the boxes you're looking for..."

Rui nodded after a brief explanation. "Alright, I'll take this one."

"That will be forty-thousand Martial credits, sir,"

Rui almost double took at her words. "I thought you said it was affordable."

She gave him a sheepish, apologetic smile. "I'm afraid that this is quite affordable as far as rates of accouters with video call functions go."

Rui couldn't be bothered to scour the entire department to test that claim. He wouldn't have even dared to consider purchasing one in the past, but his recent windfall made it practicable to purchase.

Once he purchased it, he immediately logged into his account, only to find a message in his inbox.

[Squire Falken, I am Feruir Cerni, the individual who commissioned the mission that you applied for. Please accept the video call that I have initiated with you so I can converse with you regarding the mission.]

('I probably shouldn't hold this conversation in an area filled with people.') Rui realized.

It wasn't long before he was sky-high in the air, mingling with the clouds, using them as a cover. He used Tempestuous Feel to make sure that there were no Martial Artists sky-walking within a kilometer of him.

Once he accepted the invitation for a video call from the client, it wasn't long before a choppy image of a man appeared on the screen. Rui cringed inwardly, the quality was quite low. It appeared that the technology wasn't refined enough for more affordable accounters with this feature to have a more refined feed.

"Squire Falken?" The man spoke, his voice nearly drowning in a sea of white noise. "I am Feruir Cerni. It is a pleasure to speak with you, are you alone?"

Rui felt like he was using a walkie-talkie.

"I am, rest assured." He assured the man. "You can speak freely."

"That is good to hear," The man nodded. "Let me begin by thanking you for accepting the commission. I have gone through your profile, and your skill set is more than satisfactory for what I have in mind. While your experience since becoming a Martial Squire is a bit lacking, your success rate is quite impressive. As long as you are able and willing to abide by certain conditions, I am more than willing to accept your application for our commission. These conditions are laid out in the contract, of course."