

Martial Unity 991

Chapter 991: Success

"Oh?" Rui's eyes lit up in interest as the outcome of the experiment was better than he had expected.
"This... might work!"

Using all three techniques simultaneously yielded a result that hadn't occurred when he used them individually.

When observing the Thundering Valley, he felt some strange vague strange sensation that preceded a lightning strike. He wasn't sure what it was, but it did not exist when he used all three techniques individually.

('Each technique was insufficient individually,') Rui mused. ('But together, they could help close the gap that they themselves are unable to.')

Tempestuous Feel could help him identify the flux of particles in the atmosphere, but it wasn't able singlehandedly able to identify the streamer.

Seismic Mapping could help him identify the seismic radiation throughout the Thundering Valley, but he couldn't identify the seismic radiation caused by the stream of positively charged particles flowing up to the clouds.

Riemannian Echo could help him identify mass and energy, but he wasn't able to distinguish the energy and mass of the positively charged stream of particles as opposed to all the energy in the atmosphere.

Each sense was unable to lead him to where he wanted to go, they could only get him part of the way there.

('But together...') Rui's eyes narrowed. ('Together, they can allow me to see more than I would have been able to by myself.')

With Riemannian Echo, he would be detecting high-energy phenomena, with Seismic Mapping he would be able to distinguish those phenomena that produced seismic radiation, with Tempestuous Feel he would be able to distinguish drifts of particles in the air.

Any phenomena that registered in all three senses in these manners was either a lightning bolt or the positively charged stream of particles from the air.

('And I can use my eyes to distinguish between those two,') Rui realized as he applied all three of his senses to try and see if he could distinguish the positively charged upward stream.

Unfortunately for him, he realized it was difficult distinguishing it from the ocean of information that bombarded his senses. He was able to distinguish hazes and sensations, but it wasn't concrete enough.

('Still, this is worth pursuing!') He realized, smiling. His proficiency could be improved with practice, so he wasn't too concerned. ('Eventually, I'll be able to handle being able to sense the destination of lightning all by myself.')

In the grand scheme of things, this wasn't groundbreaking, but it meant that he had an out against lightning. He wasn't sure how many Martial Artists were out there that used lightning-based techniques, but he would be able to detect the trajectory of any lightning if he ever ran into it in the future.

As small as it was, it was a step down his Martial Path of being able to adapt and evolve to anything.

"You look like you figured something out," Kane remarked.

"I have," Rui nodded. "I think I found a way to be able to handle the lightning better than before."

"Oh?" Kane raised an eyebrow. "Well, so did I."

"What have you come up with?" Rui asked, intrigued.

"Secret," Kane shook his head with a smirk. "Let's have a contest, whoever's solution is able to deal with the lightning the best wins."

Rui snorted, amused. "Interesting, I'll take you up on that."

He didn't mind a little fun and healthy competition. It was all fun and games, and a little rivalry would stimulate their growth by pushing them.

Besides, Rui was curious whether Kane would be able to outdo him in this regard. In general, he would be inclined to say that Kane wouldn't be able to. He had surpassed Kane for quite a few years now.

However, this wasn't just any challenge, this was an area that was closely related to Kane's forte, his Martial Path. Rui did not for one second believe that it would be easy to outdo a Martial Artist in their specialty, especially one as talented as Kane.

Although he often came off as ordinary compared to some of the things that Rui was capable of in some circumstances, the truth of the matter was that Kane's rate of growth put an overwhelming majority of Martial Squires to shame. The amount of progress he made considering his youth in the Squire Realm was quite astounding. So much so that he didn't fall too much behind Rui in his growth rate considering how much time Rui had spent in the Squire Realm.

The rest of his friends most likely would not ever be able to catch up to the two of them, besides from perhaps Nel.

"I'm going to need some training though," Rui added. "What I have in mind is not something that I can apply in combat straightforwardly."

"Same here," Kane replied. "I'm gonna need tons of training actually. So you might actually beat me to it."

The two of them returned back to the inn as they bantered back and forth. They both had a lot of things to think about and consider about their first experience in the Thundering Valley.

Just the fact that they saw fantastic and exotic sights and even creatures alone gave them a lot of food for thought.

Rui noticed that Kane was particularly in a thoughtful mood as he spent the rest of their day absorbed in a stupor.

('He must have come up with a truly interesting idea,') Rui mused. He was glad that Kane was getting into the groove of developing his Martial Art. All of the previous places that they had visited weren't exactly conducive to the growth of his Martial Art. He just didn't have many opportunities where his Martial Path was directly challenged in regard to its strongest suit.

Rui wondered if that was a factor that influences the rate of growth of a Martial Artist, being exposed to challenges that challenged their Martial Path sounded like an excellent way to confront the shortcomings and flaws in the most important field to any Martial Artist, after all.

Chapter 992: Affinity

If that was the case, it would explain things. Rui was an all-rounder, furthermore, his Martial Art was adaptive evolution. It was centered around the concept of overcoming by changing to overcome.

Thus, any hurdle, obstacle, or impedance could serve to stimulate his Martial Art. He would strive to overcome those problems by growing specifically to be able to handle them.

This was what he had done his entire time as a Martial Artist. The most recent and greatest example of it is the Shionel Dungeon. He had set the goal of being the first clear the Shionel Dungeon, an almost insurmountable task that only the most powerful Martial Artists in the Squire Realm were capable of even considering taking on.

The sheer number of Martial Squires that competed in the Shionel Dungeon back when he had yet to enter the Shionel Confederation was incredibly large. It was an abysmal herculean task to surpass all of them and clear the dungeon before all of them.

Yet, setting this task for himself allowed him to surpass his limits to an extraordinary degree as he went above and beyond to fulfill this daunting objective. He ended up creating two grade-ten techniques in order to overcome them; Riemannian Echo and Void Forestep.

Would he have created these techniques had he not subjected himself to the overwhelming difficulties of being the first to clear the Shionel Dungeon?

('Almost certainly not,') Rui shook his head. ('Those techniques were created as a result of trying to overcome specific challenges that came only because I subjected myself to the original challenge in the first place.')

The only reason that he ended up creating a technique centered around spatial sensing was because of the sensory jamming effects of the Shionel Dungeon.

The only reason he ended up creating the Void Forestep technique was to be able to handle taking on the Root in the final battle. Had it not been for that one cause, perhaps the Forestep technique would have never been created, or perhaps he would have created the Forestep technique a decade later.

('It's not just the training decisions that one makes that will shape the way and rate at which one's Martial Art progresses,') Rui realized. ('The challenged one is subjected to in their circumstances also affect the development trajectory of one's Martial Path.')

His eyes widened as he came across another realization. ('That's also probably another reason the Martial Union organized Martial missions in such a sophisticated and rigorous manner.')

Organizing missions by their field; whether they were offensive, defensive, or any other kind helped not only because it allowed missions to be completed by specialists who were especially qualified for the job, but also allowed them to face challenges that were relevant to their specialties, allowing for the conducive circumstances for growth.

With Rui, things were different from an offensive or defensive Martial Art. He was an all-rounder, which means he wasn't strictly limited to a particular kind of challenge for it to be effective. That theoretically meant that he could find opportunities for stimulation easier than other Martial Artists.

However, did that mean all-rounders were superior?

('No...') Rui shook his head.

The degree of stimulation depended on many personal factors, but one of them was the affinity between the challenge and the Martial Art and the Martial Artist. All-rounders could take on all kinds of challenges, but they didn't have a great affinity with any one particular type.

Specialists on the other hand had great affinity with the challenges relevant to their field and could derive great stimulation and opportunity for growth.

In that regard, he suspected that he was going to see something special from Kane this time. The training in the Thundering Valley was right up his alley, it was built for him, even. Following that logic, Kane ought to be able to develop much greater stimulation and opportunities for growth from these circumstances than Rui did.

Rui certainly intended to make the most of this situation, however, that did not mean he could do it to the same degree as Kane. Granted, Rui also possessed an advantage at being disproportionately able to develop techniques and add individuality to his Martial Art with greater ease and effectiveness than any Martial Squire he had ever seen in his entire life, so he wasn't sure if Kane would necessarily be able to exceed him.

It all depended on what he had in mind. Rui knew that Kane didn't have much experience with developing new techniques. In fact, this was most likely his very first time creating a technique fully from scratch.

Rui wondered if making it a competition and keeping it a secret was a good idea after all. He could perhaps use some help from Rui in making whatever concept and idea he had in mind real, without necessarily losing any individuality. Rui was good at realizing extremely ambitious concepts, if he limited his help to that, it could prove to be of great use to him, all while Kane retained pretty much all of the individuality he would gain from adding the new technique to his Martial Art.

('Eh, if it doesn't work out, I can always help him after,') He shrugged individually. Rui didn't need any reminding that, no matter how young he looked and felt physical, he was still incomparably older than

Kane. There was a sense of patience and composure that came with age and experience in him that Kane lacked.

In some regards, he could not treat Kane as an equal, he was still effectively a child from Rui's perspective. Thus he decided to ultimately go about developing his own technique without being overbearing or intrusive.

If Kane wanted help, he could just ask, he definitely knew that Rui would help him if he did that. Thus it was best to let him initiate that.

The best outcome was that it would end up being a smashing success and he would truly surprise Rui with the results of all of his training.

Chapter 993: Results

Rui left Kane to his own devices as he began spending his days mastering his new sense. He was initially having a little bit of difficulty with the new sensory technique that he had come up with. The reason was simple.

Sensory techniques required the most amount of training resources compared to other techniques in his experience. This had been true for every single sensory technique he had ever mastered in his entire life starting with the first one with Seismic Mapping all the way to his latest one. All of them he had mastered using the special sense sealing esoteric technology of the Martial Union.

Did that mean that it was impossible to create a new sensory technique without it? Of course not.

But it most certainly showed Rui how effective some of the training that Rui had undergone with the Martial Union's resources could be.

Thankfully, the new sensory technique that he was creating borrowed from existing techniques, otherwise it would have been truly difficult for him to accomplish what he had in mind with the technique.

What he needed to use, each, Seismic Mapping, Tempestuous Feel, and Riemannian Echo partially only, while ignoring the rest of the senses.

It was like using only a part of one's vision, hearing, and smell, all while ignoring the rest of those senses when one didn't even know which parts they were.

Sensory data input did not come fully organized, needed to sort through all that data and fight what he wanted.

That was the issue that he was facing, it was an entirely mental problem.

He spent his days meditating before the Thundering Valley.

His training methodology was quite simple. He would apply his three senses to sense a small section of the Thundering Valley, while also storing all the sensory data that he got into his Mind Palace and organizing it.

Every time a lightning bolt struck the section of the valley that he was sensing, he would immediately go scour through his memory and look for signs of the upward stream of positive charges from the location where the lightning bolt struck, looking for any patterns that could be used to identify whether there were the preceding events of a lightning bolt strike.

One of the most annoying parts he found was focusing only on the relevant information and nothing else in such an environment. Although he had a sharp amount of control over his thoughts, it wasn't easy being hyper-efficient in the way that his consciousness focused on important information.

This was separate from more tertiary processes such as using the Mind Palace for storage and processing. He was really starting to see why the Martial Union had extravagant training resources for literally every sensory technique.

As the days passed, Rui and Kane trained separately. Rui never saw Kane when he himself was training, and he respected Kane's choice enough to not use Riemannian Echo to try and find him and spy on him.

However, he couldn't help but grow curious. He managed to notice that every time Kane came back from training, there was an unmistakable sign that he had been hit by lightning, even if he did do a decent job covering it up.

He found it fascinating exactly what kind of training would require getting hit by lightning so often.

Though he wasn't sure if that was a necessity for the training or just a consequence of failures.

He wasn't sure if it was the latter, considering Kane's demeanor was confident without a doubt.

Rui couldn't imagine what kind of technique would require being hit by lightning, as strange as it sounded.

He recalled the fact that Kane had already thought of the idea for his technique after their first experience training in the Thundering Valley. That led him to believe that something about their first training session in the Thundering Valley led him to come up with whatever idea he was working on.

He momentarily considered whether his own techniques had inspired the technique before putting the thought of the way.

('That's arrogant. I should focus on my own training rather than ponder his,') Rui firmly pushed away any thoughts surrounding them as he dove back into his training.

Days turned into weeks, turning into months. The two of them grew into a rigorous disciplined schedule. They woke at around the same time, eating together before heading out to train in the Thundering Valley to train.

It wasn't long before Rui made a breakthrough in his technique.

('I've found it!') He grew excited as he finally caught all the patterns that allowed him to identify the preceding events of a lightning bolt.

He closed his eyes as he employed Seismic Mapping, Riemannian Echo, and Tempestuous Feel to the Thundering Valley before him.

An immensely gigantic flux of information entered his mind, yet he resolutely threw away exactly what he didn't need. Instead, his mind swiftly focused on what he had come to realize was the relevant and necessary information.

SPARK

('There!')

BOOM!

A millisecond later, a lightning bolt struck that exact location. He had come to peer through the veil of chaos that was the trajectory of a lightning bolt.

No matter what crazy path a lightning bolt ended up taking, its destination was fixed due to the streamer's origin point being fixed.

This was the perfect way to estimate a lightning bolt without requiring abysmally powerful sensory techniques. He was quite excited by this result. He could now run around the Thundering Valley without care!

"Well, that's not true," He reignited his enthusiasm in. "A lightning bolt's trajectory can still vary wildly and I can get by a lightning bolt that strays a lot if I'm not careful. Also, the inner regions of the Thundering Valley are definitely a no-no."

The lightning in the inner regions was extremely dense from what little he had barely managed to glean using Riemannian Echo in combat. At that point, it was no longer speed training but defense or endurance training.

Chapter 994: Done

Rui was ready to give his technique a new name.

('Though is it really a new technique if it's just a result of using three techniques simultaneously?') Rui wondered.

That was an interesting question. Rui did not think that it mattered in the grand scheme. Regardless of whether he considered it to be a separate technique or not, it was something that expanded his Martial Art that also individuality.

There was no point in speculating too much.

('Still, it feels nice commemorating it as a technique,') Rui shrugged. ('Even if it can barely be considered one.')

Rui knew that he wasn't missing much either way. Instead, he shifted his attention back to the Thundering Valley.

It was time for a test. He wanted to see how much more knowing the destination of the lightning would help him avoid them.

('There's a good chance I can use Forestep to a much higher degree, if not the entire way,') He grew enthusiastic at the thought.

He quickly got up, stretching as he warmed his body up. All that time spent meditating made him feel as though his body had gotten a little stiff. Not even Martial bodies were exempt from the requirement of activity to maintain their peak form.

He stretched every muscle in his body to the limit, groaning in comfort as he felt the blood flow to the various muscle groups increasing.

"Alright," He hopped lightly on his feet as he activated the Forestep breathing technique.

"FUUU!" He exhaled deeply, immediately feeling his body grow lighter as a surge of power began flowing into his muscles.

It was time, he activated his new technique, focusing on specific parts of the three constituting the new sensory technique. Immediately as he walked in, he could identify the patterns that corresponded with the presence of streaks of charged particles reaching up from the ground.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

He spun through the air as he gracefully avoided them. He didn't even feel the need to stress his mind by forcing his reflexes to keep up with his movements. The current system that he was working with, to a certain extent, mimicked what he had done against the Root. The difference was that he had straightforwardly used the VOID algorithm against the Root and built a thorough predictive model for it over the span of half a year.

BOOM!

('Actually, there isn't too much of a difference, now that I think about it in hindsight,') Rui thought to himself as he casually dodged a lightning bolt.

In the end, he was still predicting the lightning by analyzing patterns of preceding events. That was essentially how the predictive model of the VOID algorithm worked. He gathered data, noticed patterns, used those patterns to predict his opponent's moves, and then used the best move to counter them.

('The difference is that this is a natural phenomenon as opposed to a person,') Rui mused. ('The biases and patterns that normal people have are part of their individuality. However, the patterns in natural phenomena in nature are... nothing short of the laws of physics.')

This realization put Rui in a strange mood, even as he dodged lightning bolts with greater ease than ever before.

"Does that mean my mind... My Flowing Void Style... My VOID algorithm can help me understand the nature of not just my opponent's fighting styles, or strengths and weaknesses, but also the nature of reality itself?"

STEP

His eyes widened as he paused in his path. Just the fact that that possibility seemed like it might be real was absolutely insane!

After all, the VOID algorithm was originally something that he had created for hand-to-hand combat. That was all. Nothing more.

('But... that doesn't mean the same is true in Gaia, right?') Rui wondered to himself before his eyes widened with an idea. ('Maybe it's the case tha-!')

Just as he felt he had come on the cusp of something important, a deep and sharp sense of pain overtook his entire body.

BOOM!

"Rgh!!" He gritted his teeth, grimacing as he handled the mind-numbing pain coursing through his nerves. A big lightning bolt struck his entire body, he had failed to notice this one creeping up on him. "Damn it!"

He immediately retreated back outside the valley, groaning in pain. "Note to self, store all epiphanies in the Mind Palace when in urgent situations before getting lost in a stupor."

He had even forgotten the train of thought that he was on prior. It was as though the coursing lightning had burned the very thought from his brain when it flowed through his body.

"Ah well, I got a general idea. If it's important, it'll come again," He shrugged in resignation.

He wasn't content with the results of the test, so he immediately jumped back in, this time more focused on his gains than anything else. Rui knew that his previous failure was not an accurate representation of his capabilities, he had just gotten a bit too distracted.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

His sharp and well-timed Forestep movements allowed him to evade lightning bolt after bolt. Because he knew the destination of lightning bolts momentarily ahead of time, he need only pay attention to the ground, which was the opposite of what he was doing before where he directed his senses upwards since that was where the lightning bolt was coming from.

There were times when he stopped at a standstill because he was surrounded by lightning, which was quite unnerving but something he managed to do because he had faith in his judgment.

He spent his time running a lap around the exterior of the Thundering Valley. Compared to before when he was stressing Primordial Instinct to the limit, he was moving smoothly and with ease.

His thoughts were interrupted as he spotted a figure in the distance.

"Look who finally decided to come out of his cave," Kane laughed.

"My training was just about done, so it was time to put it to the test," Rui shrugged.

"What a coincidence, so is mine," Kane grinned excitedly.

Chapter 995: Struck

Rui noticed that he was incredibly confident and relaxed despite their environment. That probably meant that he had achieved some success. Furthermore, that also probably meant that he was quite eager to put himself to the test against Rui.

Rui hadn't failed to notice that he was barefooted.

That was strange.

Rui had told him that without the rubber that they were wearing, they were prone to getting struck by lightning.

Before he could even ask Kane what he was doing, or what he had in mind in regards to their little friendly competition, Kane had already made up his mind.

"Whoever makes a lap around the valley first wins!" Kane grinned as he shot away, getting a bit of a headstart.

"That's cheating," Rui grumbled lightheartedly as immediately pursued Kane swiftly.

Rather than trying to overtake him, he made sure to maintain a constant distance behind him. This was difficult in and of itself, given how fast and speedy Kane was.

However, he was more interested in observing the technique that Kane had come up with rather than trying to win the little competition they had going.

What he came to see blew his mind.

He noticed that Kane was about to run into an upward stream, meaning that there was a lightning bolt going to strike soon. He didn't bother warning him since he had amply proven he was capable of dodging them even if he couldn't sense and predict them like Rui.

Yet, against all his expectations, when a lightning bolt did emerge from the heavens, streaking down in a flash of light, he deliberately did not evade it!

He simply stopped on the spot as he planted himself in its path!

"Y-!"

BOOM!

Not a single one touched Kane!

He spun through the air like a hurricane, with movements that defied his previous limits!

"Oh," Rui subconsciously murmured, feeling inadequate by what he witnessed.

This was a rare emotion for him. The only Martial Artists who could make him feel were those from a high Realm.

Yet Kane had done just that. Watching him dodge lightning like it wasn't even a challenge made him feel like everything he had accomplished in the field of maneuvering was sub-par.

For a moment, he felt an old nostalgic sensation back to the days when he hadn't even become a Martial Apprentice, back when he was still in the early stage of the Apprentice Realm. He used to truly be awed by Kane's capabilities.

For the first time in years, he felt that sensation once more.

He felt that sensation as he watched Kane working wonders!

His movement speed and his reaction speed had elevated to levels that were on par with what Rui had accomplished against the Root!

"No..." Rui's eyes widened with shock. "He has surpassed me!"

"FUUUUUUU...!" Rui watched Kane exhaling exaggeratedly, creating air currents with the sheer force of his breath.

It was only then.

It was only then that he was beginning to understand what was happening.

"He's using Godspeed in combat... Similar to my Forestep technique," Rui murmured as he watched Kane grow faster. "But... how?!"

The reason that Rui could use the Godspeed technique in the form of the Void Forestep technique was because of the VOID algorithm's ability to compensate for his severely lacking reflexes. Without that, if he dared to use the Forestep technique in combat, he would not be able to react in time to the speed of combat occurring, and would easily die to his opponent. Or he would launch himself flying due to not being able to execute certain movements in time due to his brain being able to keep up in combat.

However, Kane did not have the VOID algorithm. Even if he had the VOID algorithm, it would not help him in this case for the same reasons that it wasn't useful to Rui in this situation. He wasn't able to create predictive models on lightning due to being unable to acquire the quantum data needed to create a predictive model of lightning.

So how on Earth were his reflexes keeping up with his greatly enhanced speed?

Rui recalled the strange sight that he had witnessed prior.

('He purposely let himself get hit by the lightning,') Rui recalled. ('Bare-footed too, for some reason.')

He knew that Kane was no fool. He was actually decently sharp given his age and temperament, there is no way he would do something that foolish for no reason. Rui also had not forgotten the strange changes to his appearance after the lightning bolt had hit him.

('Could it be...?') Rui's eyes widened as an absurdly fantastical theory entered his mind. It was so detached from reality, even the esoteric reality that Rui was familiar with, that it made no sense to Rui. He didn't even dare utter it out loud due to how embarrassing it was that he was even considering it.

Chapter 996: Winner

It didn't take Rui long to regain his composure. Regardless of what the magic that Kane was performing at the moment was, Rui quickly grew sober after witnessing it a few times.

On top of that, he was following Kane. That meant he had to successfully deal with the same tribulations that Kane was dealing with, otherwise, he would get struck by the lightning himself!

Rui's eyes narrowed as he steeled his focus, honing his concentration and he gathered every bit of his awareness and brainpower to the hurdles at hand.

He dashed to the left as he avoided the eight streamers that immediately formed into a lightning bolt. The density of the lightning bolts per unit area of land had increased substantially, so much so that even Kane no longer went deeper but had long since curved his trajectory sideways.

('He wanted to go deeper so that he could travel a shorter circle and complete a lap around the valley quicker than if he stayed on the outer ring that would require traveling longer distances,') Rui mused. ('Sheesh, he sure is competitive.')

It wasn't too strange. This was his field, his Martial Path. It made sense that he would hold back no punches when competing in a manner that centered around it, so Rui wasn't worried.

In fact, Rui tried imagining how competitive he might get if he entered a competition centered around adapting and evolving.

('It wouldn't even be funny,') Rui knew himself well enough to know that he was not going to take such a competition lightly. He would push himself to the absolute limit if that was what it took to validate the competitiveness and effectiveness of his Flowing Void Style compared to the rest who walked similar Martial Paths.

Seeing Kane go all out accomplishing such dazzling results strangely motivated Rui more than he had expected. He thought he was above such juvenile games even if there was merit in friendly competitions.

('Apparently not,') He smiled as he exhaled deeply.

Instantly, his body felt lighter. He decided that if he had any chance of winning, he couldn't hold back!

Instantly, a second surge of power enveloped his body as his body became even lighter.

He felt as light as air, yet as swift as the wind!

The full power of the Forestep technique was unleashed as he decided to take a little bit of a risk. He hadn't yet tried using the full extent of Forestep with the new sensory technique that he had just created. That was why he was a little unsure, but he was willing to take a risk if that was what it took to keep up with Kane.

WHOOSH!

He shot forward at an incredible speed as his momentum tore through the atmosphere.

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM!

He casually avoided five lightning bolts before they had even arrived!

The Thundering Valley had turned from evading lightning bolts to evading obstacles, with those obstacles being the positive streams that were destined to become lightning bolts. It made life much easier as he was able to do a great job at maintaining top speed as he zipped through the land.

"Finally going all out are you?" Kane laughed as he saw that Rui was no longer being left behind in the dust. "But that's not going to be enough to catch up with me!"

He was right, unfortunately.

Rui knew this as well, it was just a matter of common sense.

The Godspeed technique was superior to Rui's Forestep. Furthermore, Kane's Martial Body was most suited to maneuvering, speed, and agility. There was no way that Rui could match his movement speed.

Thus, if Rui was going to catch up, it would be through the reaction speed department, but unfortunately, Kane had him beat in that aspect as well.

Still, he intended to do his very best. At the very least, he could not embarrass himself by falling behind to the point that Kane's figure had entirely left his field of vision.

He persevered, pushing himself to the limit...

But not even that was enough.

"I win!"

Kane leaped into the air, pumping his fist into the air.

"Damn," Rui murmured with a resigned smile, appearing just some seconds later. "Your win. Even if you did cheat."

"Hehe," Kane grinned.

Neither of them really cared. Kane had proven himself to be so much superior that even if he gave Rui a headstart, he would have still won.

He had only been behind by a few seconds, which may not seem like much to ordinary humans, but it was the world to Martial Squires. From their perspective, Kane may as well have reached ten minutes earlier!

The two of them retreated from the Thundering Valley so they could finally speak with each other without having to dodge the lightning that was constantly pecking away at the valley.

"Explain," Rui simply uttered one word, but it conveyed everything he wanted to say to Kane.

Kane smirked mischievously. "Oh man, you look like you'd strangle the information out of me if that was what it took to understand the technique."

Rui didn't even deny the allegation.

"Well, I was always impressed with the way you applied the Godspeed technique," Kane began. "It actually suited my Martial Art just as much as it did yours, even if there were differences in the nuances of your application versus how I wanted to apply it. However, I was never able to apply the Godspeed technique as anything other than a one-time linear attack with pre-determined movements. I was quite miffed inwardly you know... That was until we got hit by the lightning bolt of that raiju. That was when things changed."

Rui recalled that incident. It had happened several months ago.

"Although it did hurt, it also felt... strangely energizing," Kane told him. "I felt as though my nerves were being turned to up to eleven. The rest of my body hurt, sure, but my nerves felt more alive than ever. So I began experimenting..."

Chapter 997: Instinct

"At first, I just wanted to feel that sensation again, so I began allowing myself to be hit by lightning. Ah, don't give me that look, I took proper precautions and even had potions nearby," He placated Rui who furrowed his eyebrows when he heard of what Kane had been doing. "I soon discovered that my senses and nerves grew kinda super jumpy at everything. Like, I would overreact to simple stuff like thunder."

He paused for a moment, before continuing. "The jumpiness disappeared after some time, but the more I did this, the longer it lasted. So for the first month, I just subjected my body to lightning and... just did that and nothing but that."

Rui's expression had already morphed considerably, conveying what he thought about all of this.

"Okay, but hear me out Rui," Kane gestured with his hands before him. "By the time the second month came, the pain was minimal. I found that when I did it bare-footed, it didn't hurt at all!"

Rui's eyes widened.

That shouldn't be possible!

The human body was not a good conductor of lightning. That was the main reason why people got hurt; their flesh burned when lightning struck them. Electrical currents passed through mediums by replacing the electrons of the atoms or molecules in that medium, and making those electrons part of the current instead. Thus the electrons that entered a medium were not the same electrons that exited.

Mediums with high resistance towards electricity like rubber tended to get heated when a current passed through them.

The human body was one such medium. It was an insulator towards the current and did not conduct it well. That was why when electricity passed through the human body, it tended to heat up the human body significantly, causing it to burn due to this reason.

However, the fact that Kane was able to reach a state where he wasn't feeling pain with the electricity that passed through his body could only mean one thing to Rui.

('His body is able to conduct electricity extremely well!') Rui realized with a shock. ('But how?!')

Although Martial Squires were certainly an evolved species of humanity, they still shared many similarities with the homo sapien species. In fact, they were more the same than they were different.

That was why Rui couldn't believe what he was hearing. It meant that Kane's Martial body had evolved in a way that allowed it to be able to handle a flow of electricity far better than the ordinary human, or even his own Martial body.

"And then the next few months were spent focusing on controlling my jumpy nerves," Kane casually continued like he hadn't just dropped a bomb on Rui. "I had a feeling that my nerves had somehow

managed to retain a portion of the lightning bolt that passed through me. I also instinctually felt that if I could just somehow control the effects it had on my nerves and reflexes, it might turn into something amazing. I had a feeling that mastering this lightning energy was definitely the way to go forward!"

Rui was so surprised by this line of logic that he couldn't help but do a double-take, jerking his head back as he furrowed his eyebrows with incredulity.

Was this how normal Martial Artists developed techniques?

('If that's the case, then I can definitely understand why normal Martial Artists take forever to create a technique!') Rui couldn't believe it.

The thought process that Kane had revealed was so devoid of any logic or rationality that it actually hurt to listen to someone like Rui.

Rui applied the scientific method when he went about developing new techniques. He usually went about it two ways. He either had an objective for a technique or a concept of a technique in mind.

An example of the former was the Riemannian Echo technique, which he created to fulfill the objective of being able to sense the internal layout of the Shionel Dungeon. For these kinds of techniques, he took a scientific approach to thoroughly researching the possible means by which he could achieve the objective he wanted, starting with what was the likeliest.

In the second case, he systematically established the core problems and hurdles he would need to overcome and researched the best way to actualize the technique by exploring different principles and mechanisms that he could incorporate into the technique, after creating a list of all possible broad solutions.

He had never ever created a technique by relying on instinct and feelings!

Instead, he applied his lifetime of experience with research and development to the creation of techniques.

However, he knew that Martial Artists most certainly did not possess that, thus what else could they do? Most Martial Artists were sparingly literate. Being educated on the basics that were expected of every person in society was the limit, they had no concept of the scientific method!

That was why they relied on their gut and intuition that they had developed as Martial Artists.

Rui stopped listening to Kane's vague and unspecific rambling as he got drawn into his own little stupor. He suddenly needed a lot to consider. He did not consider his way of doing things to be bad because they were different from the norm.

If anything, given the sheer success that he had achieved, he was probably training the superior way.

However, he still couldn't help but consider it. Would he have truly come up with this strange and fantastical technique that Kane had come up with had he been in his spot?

('Probably not...') Rui shook his head.

The very notion of getting hit by lightning so that he could somehow absorb a bit of its power and use that to stimulate his nervous system and heighten his reflexes to be able to use the Godspeed technique was absurd to him.

He would have never even considered it in the first place. He was sure that he would have come up with another solution, and he did, with his new ability to sense the destination of lightning. But it was an inferior solution to that of Kane's.

That made him think.

Could he be missing out because he only listened to his rationality than his instinct?

Chapter 998: Duel

"Hey!" Kane jerked him out of his stupor. "Are you listening?"

"Ah, sorry," Rui sighed. "I got distracted by something. Go on."

"Pay attention," Kane huffed. "Anyways, like I was saying. It was only after that I regained full control of my body and my reactions that I actually began testing it out against lightning. It was amazing! It was as though my body couldn't keep up with my nerves! It was after that that I got the brilliant idea of mixing it with the Godspeed technique! I just had a feeling that it would work, you see."

Rui listened carefully as he went on to describe his application of fusing the Godspeed technique with his new lightning technique. He realized that there was actually quite a bit of difference between what they were doing.

Rui utilized the predictions of the VOID algorithm to prepare movements ahead of time. He also moved within the time period that existed after his opponent had already decided to move before his movements began. In other words, he began his counter-movements at the earliest moment that it was too late for his opponent to move.

Objectively speaking, the top movement speed of the Root was higher than his fastest Forestep, but because of this mechanism, he was able to greatly overcompensate for that speed gap.

He used Forestep on pure reflex and muscle memory. This was similar to what Hever did with his Meteoric Throw technique. He had burned all those movements into his very blood, practicing to do them without any insight from his consciousness and thought whatsoever. He had reached an incredible point doing just that. His sheer mastery of what was a straightforward simple grade-six technique turned into a grade-nine technique.

Rui had not reached that level. But, in six months, he had put him through excruciatingly tiring training as he dedicated his instinct to the technique. He refused to have any conscious thoughts, only focusing on his movements and breathing during that time. He was attuning his subconscious mind to the technique, ensuring that they would be able to reach the way he wanted them to.

Kane did not do that. What Kane did was essentially reach a higher level of combat speed by using two different paths. The first was through Godspeed, which solely amplified movement speed. The second was through this strange new lightning technique that amplified his reflexes.

Together, he had essentially reached a different league of combat speed.

The former did not interest Rui that much, he was essentially doing something very similar, and Kane had gotten the idea from him. It was the latter that was truly incredible. Kane's body had managed to retain a portion of the lightning that he had been struck with. Rui was starting to get an inkling of how that worked.

As a combat sports researcher, he was intimately familiar with available and legal treatments and therapies that fighters were allowed to go through. He dug through his enhanced memory as he recalled a physical therapy that was centered around lightning, known as electromuscular stimulation. The therapy showed that the reaction speed of humans could be heightened in humans when they were subjected to mild electrical currents through their muscles and serves.

It appeared that Kane's technique was centered around a similar principle, however far superior in magnitude. However, even then, this technique would not be all that effective had Kane not been this suited to being able to handle electrical currents through his body.

"How did you know you would be able to handle the lightning again?" Rui asked, curious.

"Well, like I said," Kane shrugged. "It was instinct. Also, I am part of the Lightning Sect, so, you know, I felt that had to count for something."

Rui stared at him with a frozen expression.

An awkward silence ensued for a few seconds.

"...What?" Kane shrunk under his glare.

"You thought you could handle lightning because you were part of the Lightning Sect?!" Rui rested his head in his hands as he groaned in disbelief.

"Well, I just had a good feeling about it!" Kane grew embarrassed.

Despite how silly his reasoning was, Rui couldn't help but consider an idea that popped into his head.

('What if the evolution processes that he went through involved an electrical current flowing through his body?') Rui wondered.

In that case, only the cells of his body that were prone to being able to conduct electricity would survive, and only those cells would reproduce. If only Kane went through this more than Rui did, if Rui did at all, then it would explain why he could harness the power of lightning in this manner.

That was just an unsubstantiated hypothesis, however, he had no proof that it was true. A piece of evidence against the hypothesis was the fact that he had literally never seen a Martial Squire with a Martial body similar to Kane exhibit a lightning technique similar to that. He had been exposed to countless Martial Squires in his time in the Shionel Confederation, and he had never seen anything quite like that.

Then again, Kane only came up with this technique because of this environment. And unlike the Umiana Trench, this place was not as infested with Martial Artists training. There were few that had heard of the Thundering Valley and had chosen to come to train.

The odds that he would run into someone with the right Martial body who ran into the right circumstances and got the right inspiration to create a comparable technique were quite low.

"Incredible technique," Rui earnestly praised Kane. "Seriously, I never knew such a thing was possible. I am actually very much impressed with this technique and with you for having come up with it."

"Heh, it wasn't much, really," He tried playing it off cool, but Rui could see that he was exerting control over his crooked smile. He turned to Rui with confident eyes. "We both know you're stronger than me. But here... with this technique, I think I might be able to beat you for the first time in a long time. So I challenge you to a duel."

Chapter 999: Genius

Rui raised an eyebrow as an amused smile sprouted on his face. He felt bad, but his first reaction was one where he had a hard time taking Kane seriously. He was so far ahead of him on a general level that the two were no longer operating on the same scale.

Furthermore, Rui grew stronger against opponents the more he knew about them, and he knew Kane really well. The predictive model he had on the guy was incredibly robust and sophisticated. It was better than any predictive model he had ever created in his life.

What that meant was that Kane did not stand a chance against him ordinarily. Rui was confident that he would be able to fight three, or even five Kanes under normal circumstances.

However, he quickly realized that his confidence wasn't entirely unwarranted. The new technique that Kane had developed allowed him to develop multiple techniques that allowed him to fight people much stronger than himself.

('No, it made him much stronger, period,') Rui corrected himself.

Kane had achieved what Rui couldn't, and had truly attained another level of speed. Even Rui could not blatantly dismiss his confidence against him.

When Rui considered some of the best feats that he was proud of recently, he found that Kane wouldn't necessarily lag too behind in regards to some of them.

In fact, he would surpass Rui in some of them. For example, he would probably do a far better job avoiding the roots that Rui faced when he fought against the Root.

That realization jolted Rui, but it made perfect logical sense. Kane was an evasive maneuverer, Rui could not surpass his pound-for-pound proficiency at evading attacks. Kane's movement speed was considerably higher than Rui considering he now had the reflexes to freely apply Godspeed the way Rui applied it. Except he had mastered it to a much higher degree.

On top of that, Kane didn't need to burn the Godspeed technique into muscle memory since, unlike Rui, his reflexes could now keep up with the Godspeed technique thanks to this strange new lightning technique.

When all these factors were combined, even with the prediction model, Rui wasn't sure if he would be able to dominate Kane like he once would be able to do so.

It was hard for Rui to get used to this shift, but he was reminded of a certain fact.

('This is why he is touted as a prodigious genius,') Rui mused.

Rui was not talented in the same way. His 'talent' was inheriting his previous life's memories from Earth, and being blessed with the opportunity to allow his mind to undergo a second round of growth in his new brain, improving all his mental parameters to significantly greater than they were in his previous life.

Kane, however, was a true genius. His talent and affinity for Martial Art allowed him to discover his Martial Path at the tender age of eleven, about six-to-seven years earlier than the average.

That was no different from a first-grade student being promoted to seventh or eighth grade due to their genius-level intellect!

Rui became even more convinced that the reason Kane seemed to have stalled for a while was not being subject to the right circumstances. A theory that he had come up with many months ago. Martial Artists had the greatest opportunities for growth when they were confronted with hurdles and problems that challenged them in their Martial Path.

This was sorely not the case on Vilun Island, where he didn't have much of a role to play, or in the Shionel Confederation where he did have an important role to play with the Void Step technique, but was never really challenged or impeded in that regard. The only time he had been challenged in that regard was on the sixteenth floor when they were confronted with the tree that was unaffected by Void Step, but that was not something he had trained to overcome.

However, the same was not true for the Thundering Valley. It seemed like it was just the perfect place to truly bring out the untapped potential within Kane, and based on the results, it had done just that!

Rui silently resolved to make sure to take them to places and subject them to challenges that would stimulate not only himself but also Kane. So that they could both grow side-by-side. It would make his job more complicated as the process of choosing places would become increasingly complicated, but he was willing to suffer this minor detriment to the benefit of his friend.

"What do you think?" Kane smirked mischievously. "Scared you'll lose?"

"I'll take you on," Rui laughed humorously. "But a duel, and not a spar. That's interesting."

"Spars are just light-hearted and restricted combat training," He shrugged. "But a duel has an outcome, a winner and a loser."

Kane sighed as he turned towards the Thundering Valley with a wistful expression. "It's a shame, but I need lightning for this technique, so I don't think I will be able to use this technique away from here ever again. So before we leave, I do want to see how strong I am compared to you."

It seemed that Kane was under the impression that he could never use the technique again, which surprised Rui, since he was able to think of multiple ways in which Kane could use the technique even away from the Thundering Valley. However, they all involved esoteric material science, which Kane basically knew nothing about as a Martial Artist, thus it made sense when he thought he wouldn't be able to use it without lightning.

However, Rui was willing to bet that there were esoteric substances that could help Kane get what he wanted!

Although he hadn't researched into this particular matter, he was more than willing to dive into the books if it meant allowing Kane to retain this wonderful technique.

In fact, he already knew of one such esoteric substance!

"Don't worry Kane," Rui turned as he stared at the land of the Thundering Valley, and the esoteric that drew lightning from the clouds. "I have a feeling that this won't be the last time you use this technique."

Chapter 1000: Names

"Is that so?" Kane's eyes lit up. "Well, putting that aside. Let's get started, since we've accomplished our goals of creating techniques that can allow us to perform better in the Thundering Valley."

He was right.

"Speaking of which," Rui remarked. "What is the name of your technique again?"

"I actually haven't thought of one," Kane scratched his head. "I can't think of anything good."

"Neither can I,"

"Then let's name each other's techniques," Kane suggested. "You gained the ability to sense lightning or something right? So your technique is Eye of Lightning."

"..."

"Ok, go, your turn," Kane insisted.

Rui rubbed his chin as he tried to come up with a good name. "Let me see..."

A technique that harnessed the power of lightning to boost his reflexes.

"Fulminata," Rui murmured.

It was a Roman name. Referring to the twelfth legion of Rome levied by Julius Caesar. The name literally translated to 'clad in lightning'. Rui felt that it was a suitable name for Kane's technique.

"What the heck is that?" Kane tilted his head.

"What the heck is Eye of Lightning?"

"That's a cool name!"

"Enough," Rui shook his head, sighing. "Let's get back to our peaks. We've already used Forestep and Godspeed, which means we won't be able to use them even if we do battle."

"True," Kane had to agree.

The two of them sat back down before beginning to consume dense nutrition pills. These pills were inedible to normal human beings, only the evolved digestion systems of the Martial Squires could handle the extremely dense nutritional composition.

It gave everything that any Martial Squire could probably require and more. The two of them also consumed some rejuvenating potions.

It wasn't too long before their bodies have reabsorbed the essential bits of mass that they had displaced. Their digestion systems could break down compounds, absorb what they needed and distribute it across the body in the necessary places. That was why they could bounce back to their peak without much hassle.

Rui was relatively certain that this was done on purpose during the Squire evolution breakthrough process. After all, Martial Squires had enormous energy requirements. Their every strike generated more power than humans would consume in an entire month!

That meant that the Martial body needed to break down food to a much greater degree than normal human beings. It absorbed every ounce of chemical energy that could be extracted from anything ingested, and it did it quickly.

Otherwise, Martial Squire would need to wait months between each fight.

Soon enough, however, the two of them were already ready.

"Just to be clear... You don't want to fight in the Thundering Valley, right?" Rui asked with a raised eyebrow.

"Why not?" Kane smirked mischievously. "Afraid you'll get hit by lightning?"

"Uh, yes?" Rui tilted his head.

"Pussy," Kane shrugged.

"Fine," Rui sighed with an amused smile. "Have it your way. Don't think I'm going to go easy on you Kane."

"I wouldn't have it any other way,"

Thus, the two of them agreed to fight in the Thundering Valley. There was also the fact that Kane couldn't use his technique without the lightning, thus it was something Rui voluntarily agreed to.

Soon enough, the two of them stood facing each other from a distance within the Thundering Valley. The valley roared in the background as the two of them faced each other.

The air was tense. The atmosphere ground in the presence of two Martial Squires who had honed their mind. The sheer pressure that they exuded showcased their determination.

Especially Kane's.

He had long been dissatisfied with his power when he compared himself to Rui. He had always felt the exact opposite his entire life. Within the Martial community of the Kandrian Empire, he had always been known as a generational talent. He had been nearly peerless.

Things changed when he met Rui, though even then, he had been ahead of Rui for quite some time. His rate of growth after he became a Martial Artist was unlikely anything Kane had ever seen.

It was awe-inspiring, and it pushed Kane to work harder. He wouldn't admit it out loud, but Rui was, without a doubt, one of the reasons that he was where he was today, both literally and figuratively.

However, he wasn't content trailing behind anymore.

He wasn't content being inconsequentially weak anymore.

He wanted to stand beside his friend, though he didn't mind the prospect of exceeding him, if possible. Rui was not one to stay behind, himself, after all.

He narrowed his eyes as he rid his mind of all superfluous thoughts. A profoundly deep yet faint pressure radiated from him.

This was different from the dominant force of mind that Rui released.

When one looked at Rui, one felt boundless power. One felt as though Rui would be able to overcome any hurdle, defeat any opponent, and endure any tribulation. It was honed, and directed purposeful power, and given time, it was seemingly endless.

Kane, however, exuded an unknown peril. He was as fleeting as a cloud, yet as swift as a hurricane. No one could know what he was capable of, and no one did.

Except Rui.

But that didn't ease his mind.

No.

It was because he knew what Kane was capable of, that he didn't dare take it easy. All it took was one mistake, one imperfection, and Kane would lash out like a serpent, and it would be over in a moment.

That was why he could not afford to hold back. Not here and against Kane.

The two of them took their stances.

Kane adopted his standard stance, his legs were centered and under his body. This allowed him to shift his body weight in any direction he chose to accelerate in. His hands were loosely swaying before him as he lightly hopped and shifted between feet. A simple way of obscuring his advance.

On the other hand, Rui adopted a closed kickboxing stance with equal weight on offense and defense. He did not want to get into a maneuvering contest with Kane, he knew that Kane would win that.