

Martial Unity 1161

Chapter 1161: Answer

"Take care man," Kane clasped his hand in a partial hug. "Don't get lost."

"Will do," Rui smirked. "Figure out your path forward."

"I will," Kane nodded. "Good luck."

Just like that, the two of them split ways. Kane was number one on the list of two people that Rui would be seeing off.

"You have collected all the documentation you need, correct?" Senior Sarak asked.

Rui nodded.

He was referring to information surrounding Senior Xanarn's condition. Rui had memorized all the information surrounding her condition, but he also had a copy of the information in case he needed it to have a third party verify that whatever solution he was considering on acquiring was actually able to treat and cure Senior Xanarn.

"Good, before you leave, I have something for you," Senior Sarak noted as he reached for a drawer in his desk, pulling out a well-crafted badge with the symbol of the Floating Sect engraved on top of it.

"This..." Rui murmured as he studied it.

"It makes you an official ambassador of the Floating Sect," Senior Sarak smiled. "It means that you may wield the name of the Floating Sect to fulfill the objective centering Senior Xanarn."

Rui raised an eyebrow.

That was a considerable amount of trust. Senior Sarak was giving Rui a lot of power that could be misused to bring harm to the sect. For example, if Rui ran around making powerful enemies in the name of the Floating Sect while wearing that badge, the Floating Sect would suffer greatly as it would end up gaining more enemies for absolutely no fault of its own.

This kind of power was normally given to highly qualified and trusted diplomats.

Rui hadn't ever disclosed to anyone that he had undergone diplomatic training and had been deemed a qualified foreign service officer by the standards of the Kandrian Martial Union, so Senior Sarak did not have much of a foundation to place such trust in Rui.

However, Rui wasn't a fool. Although it seemed as though this gesture was one that indicated deep trust, it was actually the other way around.

It was to get Rui to trust the sect with this gesture.

He could tell that Senior Sarak was keen on making Rui join the sect on a more permanent and committed basis. However, the Floating Sect by its nature was loose. It was scarily meritocratic and the cost of not being as competitive as external competition that sought a spot in the sect was death.

It meant that it was hard to get guardians to truly consider the sect their home. Home was not a place that watched its residents die at the hands of outsiders.

That was no home, that was a battlefield.

It was that trait that hampered emotional investment.

And for the most part, it was fine for the sect and functioned just perfectly. It was a highly effective way to maintain quality standards and was one of the reasons that the Floating Sect was unshakable in the war when it came to Squire-level conflict.

However, there also were talents who shined so bright that they were worth anchoring to the sect no matter what.

Tokugawa Ieyasu was one such guardian who was worth investing in the island. Rui was most certainly another of similar value. Rui was sure that Kane too fell in this category.

He had made sure Kane understood this and was entirely cognizant of the manners in which they would try to integrate him into the sect.

He wasn't sure how well Kane would be able to handle such things without Rui's presence, but he had already decided to distance himself from Kane for some time and let him handle his own problems by himself.

Regardless, trying to get Rui to have greater faith in the Floating Sect for expressing so much trust in him when they handed him the keys to their political capital. By giving him that power, he was sort of conditioning him to get used to it and normalize possessing and using that power, making him less inclined to leave the sect in fear of losing that normalized power.

He didn't necessarily fault Senior Sarak for employing such means to try and get Rui to become attached to the sect. At the end of the day, the man was a leader of a powerful force and had to look out for its interests, including but not limited to securing incredible talents.

It was simply unfortunate for him that even this degree of manipulation was too crude and elementary to work on the likes of Rui.

"I appreciate the aid and trust that you are showing me by giving me this power," Rui replied with a smile. "I will make sure to use it to help Senior Xanarn."

The man nodded. "I look forward to that. Good luck."

That was the last person on the list that he was supposed to see off.

Yet it appeared that there was one person who wanted to see him off before he left.

"I believe this is the first time we've actually spoken, guardian Ieyasu," Rui offered the strongest Martial Squire of the Floating Sect a nod.

The man had interrupted Rui just before he was about to leave the island.

"What do you want from me?" Rui asked impatiently.

The man stared at Rui silently for a few seconds.

Rui had to admit that his passive aura possessed a depth that he found hard to understand. It was no wonder that he had momentarily mistook him for a Martial Senior the first time they stood in each other's presence.

"Uhh..." Rui tilted his head at the silent man. "How can I hel-"

"You... are the answer," He spoke softly.

Rui's eyes widened as he unleashed a maelstrom of pressure.

Ieyasu's eyes narrowed. "You are the answer. You are the final piece of the puzzle. You are the final step I must take to reach a higher Realm of power."

Chapter 1162: Challenge

The Floating Sect grew alarmed for a moment as two auras that did not seem to fit in the Squire Realm boomed atop the island.

The temperature seemed to chill a few degrees.

The air between them grew taut, wrung by the pressure that the two of them exerted.

Rui's eyes sharpened. "You speak much."

"I have much to say," Ieyasu stared into Rui's eyes with his dark eyes. "All these years... All that patience... It seems my prayers have been answered. A Martial Art with a depth that eludes even my eyes."

His passive tone grew more intense. "Don't you see? You are the key."

Rui stared at him with a sharp expression, silent.

Suddenly, the air changed.

The pressure disappeared.

"Grow stronger," He turned around. "The stronger you are, the greater the final step you will be. Your Martial Art will serve as the gateway to my Martial Heart. Your death will baptize my journey into a higher Realm."

He glanced back at Rui. "I, guardian Ieyasu, challenge you to a duel upon your return."

"I accept," Rui snorted.

The man simply walked away at those words.

Rui simply stared at his retreating figure with a sharp stare.

He did not refuse this.

He did not aim to prevent it.

In fact...

"Hmph," the edge of his lip curled up in a brief mild smirk.

He looked forward to it.

Imitative Evolution versus Adaptive Evolution.

Which one would prevail?

They shared many parallels, yet their cores were decisively in conflict.

This was not just a conflict between Martial Artists or Martial Art.

At its core, this was a battle between ideologies.

The loser would lose more than just the fight.

Rui had a feeling that the loser would lose something far more important than that.

He had dedicated his heart and soul to adaptive evolution. So much so that his Martial Path was a manifestation of his drive towards adaptive evolution.

What would it do to his psychology if he realized that the very essence of his Martial Art as an attempt to fulfill Project Water was fundamentally flawed?

('That would break me...') He narrowed his eyes.

He believed that Bruce Lee's philosophy, the philosophy that formed the foundations of Project Water and the Flowing Void Style was the way to the ultimate Martial Art. That core belief had not only been the basis of his Martial Path and Art but also who he was as a being.

Losing that fight would invalidate that. It would invalidate who Rui Quarrier was.

Would he be able to pursue his Martial Path after that?

"..."

He knew the answer to that question, even if he did not want to admit it.

He suspected that the exact same thing was true for Ieyasu.

That was why his challenge was so solemn. Even though he didn't have anything to materially gain such as a better chamber, this fight was probably more important to him than any other he had ever had.

If they lost, they may very well cripple their Martial Path.

If they won... Then the very opposite may very well happen.

The sheer existential validation they would get in their Martial Path would deepen it by leaps and bounds perhaps.

Neither of them knew.

It appeared that Ieyasu was confident that fighting Rui could activate his Martial Heart. Meaning that he believed that Rui could challenge his Martial desire, the desire that drove him down his Martial Path. Rui had already concluded that only circumstances where one's prime desire for pursuing one's Martial Art was challenged, could the Martial Heart be triggered provided the other conditions were accomplished.

In that case, he was actually similar to Rui.

Rui wanted to create a supreme Martial Art that could adapt to everything

A Martial Art that truly threatened to fundamentally negate that premise such as imitative evolution, could potentially drive him to lengths that he had never been pushed to before. Part of the reason for this was because he had never run into a Martial Path that conceptually challenged his own.

He had run into powerful and talented Martial Artists, but none of them had a Martial Art that contradicted the premise of his own.

Kane's Dancing Wind Style was certainly not something that attacked the premise of his Martial Art since evasive maneuvering was something that could be adapted to, conceptually. The same was true for the Martial Art of his friends.

But imitative evolution denied the premise of his Martial Path. After all, it was premised on the axiom that all Martial Art could be imitated, and all Martial Art could be improved. How could one adapt to a superior version of one's self?

Then again, how could one imitate what was evolved to defeat imitation?

One of these was true, and superior to the other.

Neither of them was willing to concede that spot.

('Well, I'd lose the fight as I am now,') Rui shook his head.

They both knew that.

This wasn't because his Martial Path was weaker, this was simply because he, the Martial Artist, was weaker. He hadn't developed his Martial Art as much as Ieyasu had.

That was understandable to both of them.

Rui was far younger than him.

That was why Ieyasu had told him to grow stronger. It was why he challenged Rui to a duel after he returned.

He wanted Rui to not return until he was truly confident that he could defeat Ieyasu.

Rui had obliged. He would not return until he finished the first iteration of Project Metabody.

They had exchanged few words, yet a mutual understanding had formed between them. They had much to gain from the defeat of the other, and much to lose from the victory of the other.

Neither of them could back down, backing down was the same as admitting that they weren't confident in the core premise of their Martial Path. They both instinctively felt that if they admitted that, the Upper Realms would forever be out of their reach.

Chapter 1163: Unknown

Rui realized that he didn't know a thing about Ieyasu, about who he was and where he came from.

That was normal, of course. They were merely part of the same impersonal organization. They had been included in the same operation against the Martial Seniors of the Kaddar Region.

But they had never actually even interacted prior to this moment.

('Whatever,') Rui shook his head. ('It doesn't matter for now. I just need to focus on what I'm setting out for.')

Soon enough, he stepped off the island, sky-walking away.

Instantly, the weight on his body plummeted, as the air thinned.

He heaved a sigh of relief as he treaded through the air comfortably.

All this time in the Floating Sect had truly increased his physical prowess, everything felt incomparably lighter than before. The passive training that came with simply living in the Floating Sect was something that could not be dismissed, and he could definitely feel the effects of it on his body.

The constitution of his body was fundamentally stronger. He was probably already very close to achieving the threshold needed to be able to survive the activation of the Martial Heart. This was much quicker than the rest of his peers, and the reason for that was because having turned into a Martial Squire at an extremely young age had meant that his Martial Body was still undergoing growth to reach the prime of its physical life, and had undergone a lot of growth during puberty.

Having obtained it earlier, it underwent growth quicker than those who became Martial Seniors.

The average age for breaking into the Squire Realm was around the age of twenty-five, and Rui had done so at the age of seventeen. Five years of growth in the Squire Realm meant that his body progressed towards meeting the threshold of the Martial Heart earlier than those that became Martial Squires after their bodies had fully matured into adulthood.

Still, that did not mean that he was on the very cusp of becoming a Martial Senior even if his body was close to reaching the necessary threshold.

After all, many guardians of the Floating Sect had spent many years in the Floating Sect having strengthened their bodies to meet the threshold.

Yet almost none of them were considered to be genuine a candidate for the Senior Realm. The reason for that was simply because the body was the most basic necessity, yet also the least challenging part of the sheer difficulty of breaking into the Senior Realm.

The sub-par individuality, the lack of a powerful enough drive, and the lack of circumstances that could serve as the trigger for the Martial Heart were the biggest reasons that the one thousand guardians of the Floating Sect were still Squires and not Seniors.

He recalled what Senior Xanarn had told him about the sect.

The sect could help them fulfill the body condition with ease, but could not otherwise improve their ability to break through.

The more time he spent in the sect, the more true her words rang. The sect, as an environment, was too detached from the drives of the Martial Artists who traveled far and wide to train in the sect.

That was one of the reasons that he had made the decision to leave. He did not want to become psychologically entrenched in the Floating Sect.

There was a vast world out there that he could indulge in while he searched for a solution for both Project Metabody and Senior Xanarn's condition.

He made sure to avoid the Kaddar Region like the plague, sky-walking far above sea level and the clouds, using Mind Mask to minimize his presence to make sure that he did not even earn their attention.

Just because the war was over, it did not mean that the Kaddar Region's hatred for the Floating Sect was gone, if anything, it was far worse than it had ever been.

The Kingdom of Graheria in particular would do everything in their power to take him down if they learned how much they had suffered because of Rui.

Not only had Rui infiltrated one of their military bases and gotten valuable intelligence on their superweapon, but he had also killed one of their Martial Seniors.

That's why he went well out of his way to ensure that he was well above even the clouds until he had put some distance between them and the Kaddar Region.

Ajanta Island could still be seen in the distance due to how big it was, and even it was a small dot in the sky.

STEP

Rui returned to land for the first time in nearly a year.

"Huff..." He sighed. ('Time to get going.')

He actually had multiple possible destinations in mind.

Back when he was looking for destinations that could allow Kane and him to be able to gain the resources needed to master their lightning techniques, he had narrowed down on three locations that could give them access to the resources they needed in exchange for Martial services without any long-term commitments.

They had only visited one out of the three of them; Crexeet Town.

Rui had seriously considered going to Crexeet Town to look for what he needed. He had already built up a positive reputation there, and he would probably be welcomed back with open arms.

However...

He shook his head. ('They don't have what I'm looking for.')

Crexeet Town was highly competent when it came to Squire-level Martial Art research and development, however, it was increasingly limited when it came to matters that exceeded the Squire Realm.

He was not confident that they would have what he was looking for when it came to his Metabody technique due to how powerful the technique was.

He knew for a fact that they would not have the means to deal with a Senior-level poison, especially when the Floating Sect's medical department had already pronounced her condition to likely be permanent.

In that case, he had no choice but to turn to the other two possibilities.

Chapter 1164: Powerful

Of the two of them, a branch of the Virodhabhasa Faith was the one that Rui had set out to approach, mostly because it was the closest of the two destinations, or rather the least further away. However, it meant going even further west of the Floating Sect, he would have to travel a considerable amount of distance even at the speeds at which Martial Squires traveled.

However, he was confident that there was a good chance that he would find the things that he was looking for there. He recalled what he had learned about the Virodhabhasa Faith from the bare basic information that he had purchased from Chairman Deacon.

All he knew was that it was a faith centered around a Martial Artist known as the Virodhabhasa. As far as Rui knew, there were no Martial Artists who went by that name or that moniker. He had searched for Martial Sages and Martial Transcendents with that name, and he couldn't find any.

Chairman Deacon had assured him that no Martial Artist in existence was recognized as the Virodhabhasa by the Virodhabhasa Faith.

Regardless, the fact that it was a faith centered around Martial Art meant that it was a great avenue for Martial Artists to gain access to resources that they would not be able to obtain otherwise.

Furthermore, the religion was wide and powerful, one of the four major religions that had spread across the entire continent. So he was sure that the religious organization would have what he needed, even if he was visiting one Martial church that was closest to him. That combined with the fact that the religion worshipped Martial Art in general, he was sure that he would simply be able to negotiate a deal that allowed him to get what he needed.

This was especially the case when he had been entrusted with the official backing of the Floating Sect. It made it much easier for him to be taken seriously by the church branch of the faith that he was going to.

It was located in the Seonmun region, a rather remote and small purpose.

Nothing special, but enough for his intents and purposes.

From the research that Rui had done, it was a place that gathered Martial Artists, especially Martial Squires, which was Chairman Deacon had shared with him in the first place. It was a Martial church that was meant for Martial Artists to receive the grace of the church, different from ordinary churches that catered to the average person.

Based on the information that Rui had gotten from Chairman Deacon, the church mobilized the power of Martial Artists across the entirety of the continent and employed that power for the betterment of the church.

It made most of its earnings through donations from diehard religious zealots from all classes of society that believed in the so-called Virodhabhasa, it also engaged in a modest amount of Martial Art brokership services similar to the Martial Union, connecting Martial Artists to consumers of Martial Art services.

All in all, it didn't strike Rui as anything particularly special aside from how widespread it appeared to be.

Rui didn't really see religion in the Kandrian Empire, which was a little unusual in hindsight. Monarchies usually enforced their power with religion, with concepts like the Divine right of kings, which stated that monarchs received their right to rule through God and could not be held accountable to humans.

Yet the Kandrian Empire was surprisingly secular.

Not that he was complaining, he disliked religion, but he did find it strange.

Regardless, the outside world did not follow suit.

And so Rui would be interacting with religion for the very first time in his second life.

He was not excited.

He was actually wary.

Not just because he disliked religion as a concept, but also because he knew how dangerous religion could be.

Especially powerful religions.

They were not to be messed with. Rui was not conceited enough to believe that his power as a Martial Squire was relevant against enormously far-reaching and powerful organizations. This was no different from thinking his power as a Martial Squire was enough to take on the merchants of the Shionel Confederation.

There was a reason that he had hidden his identity while he acted as the Voider in the Shionel Confederation.

Because he was far too weak to be able to stand up to them on the merit of his own power.

It was why he had run away from the Shionel Confederation in the first place.

He was extremely determined to not let such a thing happen here. He intended to come to know everything that he needed to know in order to make sure that he never did anything that resembled making an enemy of the powerful religion.

In fact, the first thing that he needed to was get to the bottom of the religion and make sure he understood what the religion was all about. Most religions had a holy book that contained the scriptures and doctrines of the religion, as well as the stories surrounding it.

He intended to memorize all of it.

He intended to memorize so well, that not even the most esteemed religious leaders of the religion would be his match.

The worst thing that he wanted was to do something that was completely fine and innocuous in a general context but was an incredibly rude and offensive gesture to the Virodhabhasa religion and gets persecuted for that!

This made them more annoying than dealing with merchants. Merchants like Chairman Deacon and Guildmaster Bradt were far easier for Rui to predict because their interests and their ability to fulfill those interests were both something that Rui could deeply predict.

However, the same was not true for religious folks. He had absolutely no idea how they would act in any given situation, it was much harder to predict what the more delusional and irrational members of a religion would do in any given situation.

Chapter 1165: Familiarize

That was why he didn't even mind signing up for a crash course on the Virodhabhasa faith. After all, he had no idea what the framework of the religion was. He intended to make sure he knew all of it inside out and backwards front.

This was all to ensure that he did not say or do anything that could remotely become the basis for being blacklisted by the Virodhabhasa Faith.

The Martial church was a large town that drew in martial Squires from all over the continent that were interested in gaining more power, being blacklisted.

Rui spent the next two weeks traveling. The distance to the Seonchun Region was quite large, and for one, Rui wasn't too much in a hurry to cross it at full speed.

He had come to appreciate the moments when he enjoyed the diversity and beauty of the world. There was just something that hit differently about a world with very little pollution.

The breeze and the wind hit differently, entirely.

Rui found himself indulging in these moments from time to time when he truly felt that he had come across something that was truly worth appreciating.

It made his journey that much more pleasant.

Yet felt as though the last two years had all been gone in a blur under all the stress that he was experiencing.

Growing stronger for the sake of his family, while important, was actually a drive that made him a lot stronger in exchange for poor mental health due to all the stress that came with it.

It put an immense amount of pressure on Rui to make sure that they wouldn't get hurt due to him being incompetent.

Yet when he traveled in such a manner, he was a lot more relaxed and able to take in positive experiences better than when he was confined to a single location.

Sometimes he had to remind himself that the smaller things across his journey could be important to him, perhaps even the most important to me for him barring his Martial Art, and family.

Even as he traveled, he made a realization. ('I have been traveling regularly for quite some time now... I've grown comfortable with this manner of living.')

That was a strange feeling.

He had spent most of his life rooted in the Kandrian Empire, and he had been comfortable with that for most of his life.

However, in hindsight, that was because he hadn't realized that the world was filled with so many wonders.

Of course, in hindsight, he should have. When things like Martial Art and esoteric resources should have tipped him off that the world was probably filled with supernatural phenomena and was worth traveling to experience.

Furthermore, now that he had spent quite some time actually living in such a fashion. It had become what was normal to him.

And it had.

Frankly, he could not imagine being crammed into a single place for an extensive period of time anymore.

He had begun to truly enjoy the very process of traveling.

Yet, all journeys needed to come to an end.

After two weeks of traveling, he had finally arrived at his destination.

The Seonmun Region as a region was quite bare and empty by itself. It appeared that the region was largely empty barring one solitary town in the middle of what appeared to be otherwise barren and uninhabited.

The town itself was decently large relative to the intelligence that he had gotten from guildmaster Bradt. Furthermore, what surprised Rui was that the town was remarkably well constructed and engineered, in contrast to what he had been made to expect.

('Did the old man lie to me?') Rui narrowed eyes.

Then again, nearly two years had passed since he got the intelligence from guildmaster Bradt, it was unreasonable to expect such outdated intelligence to remain to still be accurate after all this time.

"Still..." Rui frowned. "This..."

It was quite incredible to watch as he bore witness to the fine and splendid town that was entirely dedicated to one religion.

Now, it was time to actually get there.

The Seonmun Region was a valley with very narrow cliffs. In a way, they acted as a way to filter out all the Martial Apprentices or even normal humans who tried getting in somehow. Only Martial Squires and above were qualified to gain what they wanted from this particular Martial Church.

And he could imagine why Martial Churches did not cater to Martial Artists of too many Realms, it became progressively harder, and it just was an unwise application of resources.

After all, there were regions that were too barren or poor enough that it did not make sense to house a Senior-level Martial Church, for example. In these cases, the Virodhabhasa Church was a place that had Martial Artists that corresponded to the state of Martial Art in various places.

Eventually, Rui reached the church town on foot.

At the official entrance to the town, Rui ran into two strong Martial Squires guarding the entrance into the town.

"Purpose of entry?" One of them asked him, growing wary.

"...Trade," Rui replied simply.

"...Come this way... You will be processed." The man replied, ushering Rui into a building adjacent to the gate into the town.

Thankfully, the process was not too rigorous or demanding. It did not demand any paperwork or identity verification. It truly acted as an open church to any and all that sought to enter it.

Once he did enter it, it was something else entirely.

It was as though he had stepped into a whole new world entirely.

The first that he noticed was that the sheer quality of infrastructure was quite impressive for a religious organization.

This only made him more nervous though.

Any religion with that much wealth and power was something that he was not inclined to let his guard down around, especially now that he had entered it willingly and was subjecting himself to it willingly.

Regardless, the first order of things was to familiarize himself with his new circumstances.

Chapter 1166: Transcendent

Soon enough, he was led into a building and into a wide hall with a counter of staff members who immediately supplied him with forms and statements to sign.

Thankfully, it was nothing that proved to be too difficult. Most places on the Panama Continent had light immigration protocols, and the Seonmun branch of the Virodhabhasa Church was no different.

Once Rui entered the town, he took the opportunity to gather as much information as he could.

The first step was, of course, simply observation.

The architecture of the town reminded him of Vatican City. Every avenue of art, engineering, and architecture was given a religious tone. He saw various sculptures and artwork decorate the streets and the buildings of the town. It was in sharp contrast to any other place that Rui had ever visited before.

Although this town did serve to attract Martial Artists towards the Virodhabhasa Faith, it did have a fair bit of normal residents. Yet they were anything but normal. They all wore ethnic attire that bore religious inclinations, and it seemed as though everything in the town revolved around religion.

Furthermore, he could tell by the body language and demeanor of all the people that this wasn't just an occupation, this was a way of life for them. They ardently devoted their entire day to the religion.

Rui felt uncomfortable.

The town was truly beautiful, but the heavy religious inclinations of the people of the town crept him out. It was one thing to believe in a God, it was another thing to center your entire life around such a belief.

Of course, it wasn't as though Rui expected too much more from a church town dedicated to faith. Still, he disliked religion and he hated cults.

Furthermore, it wasn't as though the entire town was like that.

For instance, the second that Rui stepped into the town, he sensed countless Martial Artists.

In fact, it was not an exaggeration to say that half of the population was comprised of Martial Artists.

He senses countless Martial Apprentices, many Martial Squires, and even some Martial Seniors!

Furthermore, when he sized the few of them he could immediately see, he could tell that they were not necessarily as religiously inclined as the ordinary townsfolk.

('They're visitors, just like me.') Rui mused.

According to the information that he purchased from Guildmaster Bradt, the town was a Senior-level town that possessed a great many resources that he could access.

What surprised him was the fact that such a heavily religious town was also highly sophisticated Martial Arts and technological sectors centered around Martial Art, potentially able to provide him with the information that he sought.

This was something that ran contrary to what he knew of societies with heavy religious inclinations. Usually, such societies were technologically behind more secular states. As far as Rui knew, cultural liberalism was the hallmark of a religious society taking its first step towards becoming a technologically sophisticated society.

Yet it appeared because of the heavy focus on Martial Art, and all fields that were useful to Martial Art, the Virodhabhasa Faith had managed to maintain religious dogma while also becoming a more sophisticated religion that did not fall behind on the times.

('Interesting...') Rui mused as he came across a large bustling religious shopping complex. ('Fancy.')

It appeared that being religious did not stop them from making the best use of those who visited the town.

He stepped in, taking a good look around.

A majority of the commodities sold were trinkets, products, or idols that were meant for personal consumption devotion or religious rituals.

"Welcome, young man," An elder woman smiled, greeting him with a gentle beckon. "Do you have an interest in joining the Virodhabhasa Faith?"

Her entire body was armed with religious attire. Rui had no illusions that this woman was probably the most religiously indoctrinated person that he had ever met in his entire life!

Yet, she exuded warmth and grace that was sincere.

"I was just interested in learning about it," Rui explained.

"Then you have come to the right place," She smiled even more. She plucked a book from a table in the store.

It was a dark leather-bound book with a symbol that he had seen everywhere in the town.

"I'm guessing this..." Rui muttered.

"This is the Virodhaveda," She explained with a deeply reverential tone and demeanor. "This is the holy book of our religion, one that was promulgated by our progenitor the Astral Sovereign."

Rui's eyes widened as he recognized that name.

The Astral Sovereign was a Martial Transcendent, and one of the most ancient Martial Artists alive. It is said that the man had been alive for nearly half millenium, since the Age of Martial Art had begun.

That was the reason that Rui had been taken aback.

He had no idea that the Virodhabhasa Faith had been started by a Martial Transcendent of all people.

He narrowed his eyes in confusion.

That didn't make any sense. Why would a Martial Transcendent of all people start a religion?

As far as Rui was aware, the birth of religion was rooted in ignorance, fear, and hope. These three human traits were the core reason that religions came into existence.

Why would a Martial Transcendent, a being who was so far detached from the human condition, begin a religion?

It didn't make sense.

Rui's first suspicion was that this was made up.

After all, being supported by a Martial Transcendent would make their religion insanely popular. So perhaps the true religious leaders of the religion had collectively fabricated a lie that the Martial Transcendent had given birth to their religion, just to gain his implicit endorsement.

Spreading the lie that their religion was created by a Martial Transcendent would also make their religion more pliable to Martial Artists like himself. After all, as a religion centered around Martial Art, their biggest target audience was Martial Artists like himself. Especially younger ones of lower Realms like himself.

Chapter 1167: Revelation

Of course, regardless of whether that was true, regardless of what the conspiracy behind the religion was, the woman standing before Rui was certainly not a nefarious conspirator. She was probably a native who had been born and brought up in the Seonmun Church town and had been indoctrinated into the Virodhavhasa Faith their entire lives.

She probably believed that she was doing something that was truly good.

"This holy book, the Virodhaveda, was written by a Martial Transcendent?" Rui asked, trying to hide the skepticism in his voice in order to avoid pissing anybody off.

"Indeed," She smiled, regarding the book that she had passed on to Rui with a reverential expression. "If is said that two hundred and fifty years ago, when the Astral Sovereign reached the Transcendent Realm, he received a prophesy from the very world itself."

Rui narrowed his eyes.

"He received Divine Revelation that warned him of a cataclysm that would consume the very foundation of the world," Her voice quivered. "One that would erase all life across all dimensions of this beautiful world. One that no ordinary force could possibly halt."

Rui furrowed his eyebrows as he watched the elderly woman grow emotional, choking up as her eyes teared up.

This woman was beyond help, she was so heavily indoctrinated that her religion had taken a deep hold of her and her emotions.

"As the Martial Transcendent despaired, the Divine Revelation revealed that not everything was lost," Her plummeting emotions suddenly took a turn for the better as she began smiling again. "The Divine Revelation spoke of a savior. One unlike any other the world had ever seen."

Rui's eyebrow rose as the woman expressed pure blissful devotion.

She did not entertain, for even a second, that she might have been wrong.

No.

"This savior was an otherworldly being. A being who obtained power from another world. A being born in another world, a being that came from another world."

Rui's eyes widened in shock!

Ordinarily, he would have been more than happy to dismiss her words as religious delusion. It was all too easy, after all. Many religions made supernatural empirical claims of all kinds. Most of them were wacky and obviously false, but that was the way that things worked.

Yet, Rui wasn't able to dismiss this claim.

Not at all.

How could he possibly scoff at the notion of a being emerging from another world when he himself was a being from another world?

As a resident of Earth, and then a resident of Gaia, he knew full well that there were other worlds out there either in this universe or another, and he knew that under some circumstances it was possible for their consciousness to travel over from one world into this one.

To this day, he did not have even the slightest shred of understanding or insight into how his reincarnation had occurred. The only thing he knew was that it had indeed occurred.

That was why he couldn't dismiss her words lightly.

The atmosphere grew heavy as the delusional indoctrinated woman spouted what a reincarnated man knew was not entirely nonsense.

"This savior was said to be a Martial Artist. Yet no ordinary Martial Artist. A Martial Artist said to possess unprecedented power. Power, unlike anything that the world has ever seen."

She paused, taking a moment to bring her hands together in prayer as she muttered a few chants under her breath, before turning back to Rui.

"Do you know what Virodhabhasa means, young man?" She asked with a gentle tone."

"...I'm afraid not."

"The word Virodhabhasa is a word from the native dialect of the region that the Astral Sovereign is from," She explained with a loving tone. "It means 'antithesis'. The Virodhabhasa is a being with a Martial Art that is said to be the antithesis of all forces in the universe! It is the harbinger of destruction to all Martial Art, monsters, and weapons in the world! A Martial Art said to be the anti-existence to everything that dares to oppose it!"

It was once again Rui's turn to become shocked.

The claims she made, to any rational being, were ones that could easily be dismissed as the nonsense of religious fervor.

Yet, once more, Rui could not dismiss her words.

Because the Martial Art of the Virodobhasa was what he hoped to achieve with Project Water. If he made fun of that Martial Art as something that was impossible, would he not be insulting Project Water and his idol Bruce Lee?

That was he could not muster up even a hint of rejection, if only to not invalidate his own Martial Path.

Just then, for a brief moment, a strange thought entered his mind.

He quickly shook his head. ('Not everything is about you.')

He didn't want to grow arrogant with such thoughts. His attention quickly returned to the woman before him.

"Our Lord and Saviour, the Virodhavhasa is the only being that can protect us from the cataclysmic destruction of the world!" She insisted, taking a moment to pray as she muttered a few more chants.

She turned back to Rui. "This Virodhaveda that you hold in your hand contains the translated Divine Revelation that the Astral Sovereign received from the world. Why don't you give it a read with an open mind?"

"...I'll be open to that," Rui replied. "Thank you for indulging me."

"Not at all, young man. Thank you for gracing me with your attention." She bowed. "All Martial Artists are sacred. It is thanks to all of you that are civilization stands strong."

This was where the fanaticism for Martial Artists came from. Rui was not aware of the extent to which this went, nor the nuances behind it and its relation to the Virodhabhasa.

However, he had gotten what he needed to get. He quickly paid her the sum in gold before heading deeper into the town.

The architecture was just as beautiful as it had been before, but it had taken a different undertone to Rui.

Chapter 1168: Speculation

The various paintings, sculptures, and other artwork that he saw decorating the town made more sense.

There was a central faceless Martial Artist within all of these works, a Martial Artist that was often pictured in a divine light.

That was the so-called Virodhabhasa, the deity central to the Virodhabhasa Faith. For some reason, the claim that the religion was founded by a Martial Transcendent no longer sounded too absurd for some reason.

He couldn't help but feel weird about all of this. He had traits that the Virodhabhasa Faith would be very interested in hearing about.

What would happen if they learned that he was a being from another world?

What would happen if they truly understood the depths of his Martial Art, and his ambitions for his Martial Art?

He shuddered.

That would not end well.

They would either lock him up for a religious inquisition, or they would begin worshipping him.

Or, they would declare him an enemy of the faith for trying to usurp the position of the Virodhabhasa faith.

There were a multitude of possibilities, but Rui wasn't sure which one would occur. He found it hard to predict religious fervor, after all.

Regardless of which of those outcomes happened, he would be in a world of trouble as they were all terrible outcomes that he would rather not occur.

That was the reason he was wary of this religion now.

Frankly, this was worse than what would happen if he revealed that his Martial Art could exponentially increase the rate of breakthroughs. The Virodhabhasa Faith was far more radical and irrational than the Martial Union.

It was also undoubtedly more powerful. He truly was a mere speck before such a powerful religious organization, and that was the reason that he began feeling increasingly wary of the circumstances that he was in at the moment.

He began increasingly regarding his surroundings with greater caution and wariness. Of course, this was a bit paranoid, as it was impossible for the Virodhabhasa Faith to ever find out that he was a reincarnated being from another world unless he himself divulged it.

There was no way that he was ever going to do anything that stupid.

As long as he acted as any other Martial Squire did, he would be fine, there was no reason for any problems to occur.

For now, he needed a place to stay. He quickly booked a simple room in an inn that he would be residing in for the time being.

"Huff..." He sighed, tired, glancing at the Virodhaveda that he had just purchased.

The holy book wasn't too thick, but it was still far too large for it to be a single prophecy.

('That prophesy must have taken a long time if it was truly conveyed all of this,') He picked up the book, opening the first page.

The first page contained a statement that was allegedly from the Astral Sovereign himself.

I write this with a solemn heart. The revelations I received that day on the day of Reckoning were profoundly moving. Nothing has ever been the same ever since. The Virodhaveda contains all of the insights and knowledge that I gained that day from the very world around us. Open your heart to the wisdom of the world, and pray for the Virodhabhasa, for they are the only beings that can bring us salvation. As children of the world, we must find the Virodhabhasa. That is the Divine mission of the Virodhabhasa Faith.

Rui raised an eyebrow.

If this was actually from a Martial Transcendent and not something the religious leaders of the religion cooked up, then it certainly was quite shocking.

Rui wondered whether a Martial Transcendent would allow their name to be improperly used by a religion that was spread around across the entire world to spread all kinds of religious dogma.

('Probably not,')

If he was a martial Transcendent and he heard about a religion trying to use his name to endorse their nonsense, he would instantly put an end to that bullshit.

The fact that two hundred and fifty years had gone by and Astral Sovereign hadn't taken a single step to deal with this probably meant that they weren't simply making stuff up about his involvement with the religion.

In that case, it would mean that the Martial Transcendent was involved, the question would be to what degree.

Had he truly experienced a divine revelation?

Or was this something that he had fabricated to create a religion that he could lead to gain more power and influence around the world than he already had?

Religions were tremendously powerful in more than one way. They could radicalize people and create a population of brainwashed extremists who would essentially be willing to die for the sake of the religion that they believed in.

This served as a powerful force. Perhaps even a Martial Transcendent found it useful to employ the power of religion to bring even more power to himself.

However, that begged the question of why he didn't create a religion centered around himself. The Virodhabhasa Faith was a religion whose central deity was not the Astral Sovereign. The latter was merely a prophet in this religion that had received divine revelation from the very world itself.

Had he turned himself into the central deity, he would be able to wield power far more directly and in an unrestricted manner.

That led Rui to believe that he probably did not fabricate the religion to gain more power unless he was as stupid as he was creative.

However, even if he didn't do it for power, it did not mean that the religion was not fake. Rui was an atheist scientist. He held extremely high standards of evidence and proof for the extraordinary claims made by religions, and he was not so inclined to take anything for their word.

Yet there were several things that he simply couldn't deny due to the fact that he knew to be true, and strived to make them true himself.

Chapter 1169: Familiarize

Rui gained a more thorough understanding of the Virodhabhasa Faith the more he studied it. The religion was actually a lot simpler than the religions he knew of back on Earth. Those religions were much older and had a far greater expanse of mythologies and religious stories and texts.

Many religions had pantheons that were infested with countless gods each with their own set of mythological stories.

Even religions with a single deity encompassed an ocean of stories, doctrines, and other information relevant to the religion.

The Virodhabhasa Faith was a lot simpler in that regard. Its holy book mostly contained the absurdly lengthy divine revelation that recounted many details that Rui considered to be extra fluff to spice up the myth of the Virodhabhasa Faith. There were chapters filled with metaphorical hyperbole adding more details to embellish the existence of the Virodhabhasa.

Yet even as Rui grew bored reading them, there were some excerpts that drew his attention.

Encompassing Creation and Destruction, the universe bows before their splendor.

With a wave of their hand, Martial Paths may rise above or fall under.

Rui couldn't help but wonder what that alluded to, but he felt strange about this particular small excerpt. The strange parallels that ran between his Martial Path, and what he hoped his Martial Path to be and the Martial Art of the Virodhabhasa.

Of course, that did not mean he was convinced that he had any relation to this religion or the deity of the religion, he just found the parallels to be eerie.

However, he accomplished what he had set out to do, he gained a good understanding of their beliefs, principles, and customs.

They revered Martial Artists as beings blessed by the Virodhabhasa. Beings that came to rise only because the Virodhabhasa created Martial Art, and aided them in the discovery of their Martial Path.

This was a view that probably did not sit well with Martial Artists who weren't indoctrinated into the religion prior to becoming Martial Artists.

After all, every Martial Artist, no matter how humble and modest, took pride in being a Martial Artist. It was difficult to be a Martial Artist, and there was usually nothing that truly stopped one from being a Martial Artist except one's self.

Regardless, he wasn't concerned by that at the moment. He was reassured that it was not likely that he would be ill-treated by the Virodhabhasa Faith. The reverence of the Virodhabhasa Faith meant that it took extreme circumstances with which they could antagonize and persecute Martial Artists.

Still, there were some taboos that not even Martial Artists could get away with.

Defiling or ruining artwork that contained any depiction of Virodhabhasa was strictly criminalized within the town and was considered a sin.

Assaulting a religious leader would be punishable by death, no matter the Realm of the offender Martial Artist.

There were a number of strict laws and lesser strict guidelines that Rui made sure to absorb without any complaint.

As long as he followed suit, he would not be in any trouble.

One thing he was glad about was that the Virodhabhasa Faith was a religion that stringently pursued open-mindedness and acceptance. It was a sin to employ force or unwelcome coercion to force or manipulate someone to join the Virodhabhasa Faith.

This was another thing about the religion that relieved him. He would be very troubled if it came to light that the religion forcefully converted everybody who tried to enter the town. However, that was something that the Virodhabhasa Religion strictly refused.

Rui suspected the reason for this was to ensure the religion did not clash with more secular states or states with their own ethnically dominant religions.

Gaining the reputation of an evil cult was something that wasn't worth employing coercion.

The religion never used the stick to gain more followers, instead, it was extremely proficient in applying the carrot to gain more followers. Especially Martial Artist followers. It applied the massive earnings from brokering commissions and receiving donations from across the continent to create facilities and resources for training, growth, and the development of Martial Artists across a remarkable number of Realms, thereby attracting flocks of Martial Artists their way.

In that regard, Rui couldn't help but admire the religion, because it was so dedicated to its religious cause, that it funneled an overwhelming majority of its profits into the expansion of the faith allowing it to fulfill its religious cause with even greater effectiveness.

Seeing all this capital being expended ultimately for its religious cause made Rui curious about it. The Virodhabhasa Faith sought to find the Virodhabhasa in order to have him protect them from a calamity in the distant future.

Did they really think they could find one person on this continent?

The Panama Continent was gigantic. It's surface area far exceeded the surface area of the planet of Earth, and correspondingly the population of humanity occupying the continent was also far greater than the population of Earth during his time.

Searching for one individual, that too with such vague and unspecific qualifiers, was far harder than searching for a needle in a haystack.

Still, it appeared that the Virodhabhasa Faith was rather determined to succeed nonetheless.

Regardless, now that he had gained a better understanding of the Virodhabhasa Faith, he could now avoid pissing off the religious folks of the town, and make it out just fine.

He ventured out of his little inn, taking a stroll across the town once more. He had yet to take off his mask in public, and he didn't intend to do so. It was ultimately better that he kept his identity, even his false one, a secret one.

He walked slowly, taking in the town, yet he wasn't aimless.

He was heading to the central church of the Seonmun Church Town. It was the church that connected all seven hundred and eight churches built across the entire town as the center of a gigantic web and was also the headquarters of the entire town.

Chapter 1170: Festival

Rui truly felt the size of the town when he walked across from the outskirts from where his inn was towards the center.

('It's even bigger than the town of Hajin, what the heck?')

It was an extremely wide expanse that made use of the fact that the Seonmun Region was a rather empty region with a lot of space for grabs.

Rui found it curious that the Virodhabhasa Faith decided to open up such an extravagant town in such a remote location. Yet he could understand the rationales for doing so.

For one, building a town like this was easier in more remote regions as opposed to more populated regions.

For example, they would face far more difficulty in trying to accomplish such a thing in the Kaddar Region which was already jam-packed with nations, and also had to deal with a floating island that was in political conflict with the entire region.

Furthermore, there were two ways to interact with outsiders as a religion. Either go to them or get them to come to you.

The Seonmun Church town was probably an attempt at the latter. It was easier to attract Martial Artists with such large concentrations of the Faith's resources, allowing for facilities useful to Martial Artists that could only be found in places like that.

It made it easier to accumulate fame and reputation, which ultimately helped in dragging in nomadic or traveling Martial Artists.

After all, due to a lack of a powerful information network like the internet, word of mouth or more indirect manners information communication was the way in which they could spread information. It meant that the town needed to gather enough of a reputation before it could attract traveling Martial Artists.

That was why such a costly endeavor was needed.

('However, it's probably worth it,')

If the Virodhabhasa Faith wanted to indoctrinate Martial Artists, creating such centers that could attract traveling Martial Artists was the best option.

Nomadic or traveling Martial Artists were a group of Martial Artists that did not have any commitments to any particular organization and were the easiest to rope in.

These Martial Artists comprised warriors who chose to not commit to their native place. This was generally due to a lack of opportunities to exercise their Martial Artist and a lack of avenues for training and growth. Many Martial Artists came from humble backgrounds that were simply too shackling or limited for them.

Leaving their home in search of a greater destiny was not uncommon.

Technically, Rui too came from a humble backgrounds, however, he was born in the Kandrian Empire, a powerhouse Sage-level nation that had a highly meritocratic system that made sure that people with potential were able to realize their potential as long as they had merited it.

It was only after Rui traveled the Panama Continent did he realized how precious the Martial Academies were. He had been blessed with opportunities that many would have killed to have.

But they couldn't, that was why places he had visited thus far were popular.

The Umiana Trench, the Thundering Valley, the Floating Sect, and the Virodhabhasa Faith were all open avenues for growth.

They were effective ways to reel Martial Artists in.

It wasn't long before he reached the central district of the town, and he came across some interesting... things.

A gigantic billboard towered beside the giant main church.

[The Virodhabhasa Martial Festival!]

Rui's eyes widened at those words.

He felt as though those words had unlocked some long-forgotten memories that he hadn't thought about in many years.

('The Martial Festival...') Rui's eyes glazed over as his mind flashed back in time with nostalgia.

The last time he had partaken in the Martial Festival had been around nine years ago back when he was still a wee little Martial Apprentice in the Martial Academy.

He recalled the preliminary tournament held within the Martial Academy, and then the final Martial Contest that had later on been held across the entire nation. It had been one of the peak moments of his time at the Martial Academy.

The amount of stimulation he had gotten from the Martial Contest of the Kandrian Empire was not something that could be underestimated. He would not be the person he was today if not for the rigors that he had undergone back then.

He glanced back at the billboard-like sign that proudly announced the Martial Festival being held by the Virodhabhasa Faith.

He would be lying if he said he was not interested.

As a powerful widespread religion across the continent, any festival held by this particular religion was bound to be tremendously impactful.

He recalled how impactful the Martial Festival of the Kandrian Empire was, he couldn't even imagine the sheer magnitude of the Virodhabhasa Martial Festival.

He was immediately curious about the details of the festival.

Surely, a festival held by the Virodhabhasa Faith was bound to be special.

As for whether he wanted anything to do with it or not... He was torn.

On one hand, his rational side said it was best to stick with the plan and train and look for a solution for Senior Xanarn.

On the other hand, his irrational side, the same irrationality that drove him forward and down his Martial Path begged to differ.

Rui tried weighing the pros and cons of it, but he had too little information.

('I guess I'll have to take a peek if only to learn more,') He convinced himself as he headed down towards a large counter right underneath the billboard with a large number of staff employees.

"How may we help you, sir?" He received deep reverential bows from the two staff members who stood at the counter.

"I wished to learn more about the Martial Festival," Rui replied.

"Why, of course!" She smiled, before grabbing several booklets, and pamphlets, handing them to Rui. "These contain all the details of the Martial Festival. However, I shall be taking this opportunity to go through the broad matters surrounding the Martial Festival, if you are so inclined."