

## **Martial Unity 1201**

Chapter 1201: Target

The Virodhabhasa Martial Festival was impending, and it could be sensed.

The Seonmun Church town was a highly religiously-inclined location in the first place, but that vibe was magnified significantly, and only grew more by the day as the Martial Festival rolled around.

The town had begun the major preparations for the Virodhabhasa Martial Festival, and the festive atmosphere that had spread across the town was so palpable that one could smell it even if one closed their eyes. It was an incredible morale boost for the entirety of the town.

It was as though the town's infrastructure as a whole was adjusting and making way for the massive festival that was coming soon.

Unlike most festivals around the continent, the greatest attraction was not the regular kind of festivities that occurred in normal festivals. Decorations, and various artforms like paintings, dance, music, and food were present, but they were not the central focus.

No.

A Martial Festival was centered around Martial Art.

Various platforms and arenas had been built across the entirety of the town for the sole purpose Of Martial Art demonstrations. While Martial Art was purposed for conflict, it was possible to utilize it as a unique art form without too much difficulty. The church town became increasingly busier and denser by the passing day as the town greeted an immense influx of tourists from outside of the region.

The region was hard to penetrate due to the topography, but it was easy enough to surmount for people with the means and wealth.

Given that this festival was only held once every two years, it was novel enough for the upper class of society to expend some wealth to go out of their way to partake in this festival. The Virodhabhasa Faith

while large and powerful deliberately maintained an open and welcoming stance to outsiders, which made it an alluring place for vacations and things of that sort.

"Everybody sure is going all out," Rui remarked from atop an elevated terrace.

"It is an occasion that does not come frequently, after all," Master Deivon replied with a smile. "It is an important week for us, so we go all out."

"The Martial Contest will be held during the second half of the festival, correct?" Rui asked.

"Indeed," The man nodded. "I hope you have familiarized yourself with all the rules and norms of the contest. Make sure you are aware of everything that needs to be known."

"I have done just that,"

Rui did indeed look into the format contest recently. He had been quite curious about how the contest would be conducted, and exactly how the winners would be decided.

After all, the Martial Contest needed to filter through hundreds of thousands of Martial Squires throughout the entire continent!

That was an absurdly large number. Just how in the world did they plan to extract a winner out of this immense population?

Well, actually, the manner in which they did was quite reasonable, all things considered. The most convenient part was that they got to filter out the top one percent of the entire population through the preliminary contest of each town.

This was where things became rough as far as Rui was concerned. The Martial Contest was confined to the Martial festival, which meant that it could not take too much time to complete. Nor could it be too tedious since there was an element of entertainment as much as it was meant to be a pure meritocratic procedure. The event was funded by a portion of the pay-per-view spectator revenue that the event would earn.

They could not have a standard elimination tournament since that would take far too long with the sheer number of Martial Squires participating in the preliminary contest of each town.

Thus cruder and less accurate means had to be employed in the interest of time.

Rui actually physically heaved a heavy sigh when he recalled the means of electing the town representative of the town.

A royal rumble featuring all of the participating Martial Squires. This was something that he did not choose, but could not avoid.

It was such an incredibly crude way of choosing a victor that Rui highly doubted that the accuracy of the results exceeded thirty percent. The sheer number of variables that skew victory away from the actual strongest Martial Squire was too high. It was pure entertainment and could hardly be considered a genuinely rigorous evaluation of the Martial Artists in question.

On the other hand, it was the quickest way to extract a winner out of all the participating Martial Squires of each town, and also the cheapest way, not to mention the most thrilling and exciting format to watch.

This way, many other interests overtook the interest of accuracy.

However, that wasn't the worst part about it.

"You probably don't know but..." Master Deivon began.

"I know," Rui sighed. "I have a high profile in this town even with an alias and a mask. I will be a target."

Martial Squires weren't stupid. The ability to evaluate threats was a basic instinct, intuition, and thought process that every Martial Squire possessed. Rui had already gained a reputation for his formidability when he accomplished things that Martial Squires weren't supposed to be able to accomplish, such as destroying training infrastructure that was supposed to be impervious to Martial Squires. Or managing to gain access to Senior-level training facilities due to Squire-level facilities being insufficient.

Master Deivon has done his very best to quell rumors, but alas, the nature of the system in place made that basically impossible. His status as a Martial Master wasn't able to help, it wasn't as though he could destroy information with a Master-level technique.

"It's not going to be easy," The Master remarked. "This format is already unfair to the strong since it gives the weak the opportunity to fight back with numbers by targetting the strong. But it's going to be especially unfair to you. The ambitious Martial Squires who wish to at least become the town representative will not sit back and fight you fairly."

"I am prepared," Rui narrowed his eyes, replying calmly.

#### Chapter 1202: Potion

Rui did not need the Martial Master to inform him of the challenges that he alone would face due to the high profile that he had accrued. He knew that many ambitious Martial Squires who sought to gain the favor of the powerful religion as well as earn the interest of powerful spectators would use unfair means to try and negate Rui as a threat.

Of course, he knew that these weren't truly unfair within the confines of the rules, which is why he was sure about what was to come. It was one of the reasons that Master Deivon had personally traveled on foot to return to the Seonmun town at incredibly high speeds, crossing in hours what Rui would take weeks, to try and contain the information, but it was simply too impractical.

Furthermore, even if he did get there in time, his authority over the Seonmun Church town was not that of an absolute dictator or anything of the sort, containing the information was simply too difficult.

"I have managed to contain the information within the town," Master Deivon remarked. "That means while you will be a target within the preliminary contest of this town, that will not be the case in the main contest."

"Thank you, Master," Rui replied with a hint of relief. "In that case, it may very well be the case that the preliminary contest will be a greater challenge for me to emerge the victor in than the main contest will be."

"No, you're sorely mistaken, I'm afraid," Master Deivon shook his head. "While a majority of towns will not be too much of a threat to someone of your caliber. I can say with complete confidence that the main contest will be of a greater challenge."

Rui raised an eyebrow before a grin crept on his face. "That sounds reassuring. I cannot wait to test my Martial Art against the pinnacle of the Squire Realm."

Rui deliberately avoided revealing the name of his Martial Art. He would be stupid to do so, he had long revealed the name of his Martial Art as Rui Quarrier in the Martial Contest of the Martial Union. It would instantly reveal his identity, and Master Deivon would immediately get immense leverage over Rui once he figured out his identity as the Voider.

Although Master Deivon had been sincere in their partnership thus far, Rui did not think the man was a friend. He was an ambitious Martial Master who still chased for power even at his age and Realm, which automatically made him someone Rui was very wary about.

"By the way, it is time for the final dose of the Core Bloom potion," Master Deivon informed him. "It will behoove you to take it as soon as possible so that you can adjust to the minute difference that it will make before the contest arrives."

This was the potion that Rui had received in their exchange. A potion that would elevate his Martial Body above the threshold of being able to withstand his Martial Heart.

"I look forward to it," Rui replied. "I have to say, I didn't expect that the potions would not increase my ability to withstand damage."

Although Rui had treated his body slowly over the span of a year so that he didn't need to waste any time for acclimatization, he had noted that this potion did not allow him to withstand more damage although it was supposed to allow him to withstand his Martial Heart.

The Martial Master shook his head. "That's not how it works. Damage inflicted by attacks generally works on a very macro-level with respect to cells and tissue. The damage that the Martial Heart will do to your body will occur on a sub-cellular level, the metabolic processes that occur within the cell are delicate and that is what the potion reinforces. They operate on entirely different realms of scale. That is

why your body is unable to withstand attacks better despite the potion. However, once you consume the final potion you will be eligible to activate your Martial Heart and break through to the Senior Realm."

An intrigued smile arose on his face. "Who knows, perhaps you will activate your Martial Heart during the contest."

"That would be ideal, but..."

He was not too sure about that. The reason he was entering this contest was to heal Senior Xanarn perfectly. But that was not his drive as a Martial Artist, he did not think he could activate his Martial Heart for her sake.

"It's just an unlikely possibility" Master Deivon. "It would make you the youngest Martial Senior alive, so saying it is unlikely is an understatement. It would take truly remarkable circumstances for the current record for the youngest Martial Senior to be broken."

What Master Deivon did not mention was the fact that the circumstances which Rui represented himself were more than just a little extraordinary. Rui was the second Martial Squire that he had ever met, after the previous reigning champion of the Martial Contest, that could break the current established record.

However, it was just a possibility. Whether it would actually unfold and occur was a possibility that remained to be seen.

"Have you decided how you're going to deal with the challenges that you will face in the preliminary contest?" Master Deivon.

"Don't worry, I have some things that can make it easier for me to deal with," Rui spoke with a hint of confidence.

It was clear that he did not intend to divulge what those means were. In general, he had been quite secretive and possessive of his capabilities. Master Deivon's confidence in him came from the techniques that he submitted, as well as the feats that he had accomplished. Without those two, he

wouldn't have been nearly as confident that Rui was not only a Virodhabhasa seed, but also would perform well in the Martial Contest that would soon be commenced.

He did look forward to it more than he ever had.

### Chapter 1203: Eyes

The Martial Festival commenced in its full glory the very second dawn broke on the first day of the week-long festival. The energy of the town skyrocketed compared to the average day as the citizens went all out in participating and enjoying a festival that occurred only once every two years.

Rui, on the other hand, was actually quite jobless.

He had finished his training, and there was absolutely no improvement to be made in the span of three days. He spent the day taking in the festival, enjoying a rare occasion as much as he could.

He even visited the colosseum that would host the preliminary contest.

"Woah," Rui did a double take when he realized how large it was. "That's... generous in its size."

It was big enough to comfortably accommodate all the participating Martial Squires of the town in a single match. Ordinarily, it would be too big for any human to possibly view in its entirety while also being able to follow the battles of all Martial Squires. It was basically impossible for ordinary humans to follow Squire-level combat in the first place, these conditions just made it even more impossible than it already was.

However, Rui knew that certain measures would be taken to ensure that the audience would be able to keep up with the combat. Rui had heard that each ticket also came with a potion that could allow the cognition of ordinary humans to reach a level that would allow them to follow what was happening.

Rui had been shocked when he learned of that. However, it wasn't the existence of such potions that shocked him. He knew that potion users existed, and could keep up with Martial Artists in combat. Thus

potions that could allow humans to process Martial Artist combat were hardly a shock, it was actually a step below.

What was shocking was that the Virodhabhasa Faith was willing to produce so many potions of such a kind all for the frivolous purpose of allowing an audience to be able to keep up with the spectacle.

What was just as astounding was the fact that there were god only knew how many people who were willing to pay an absurd amount of money for a single ticket that included the price of the potions, all so that they could have the experience of watching Martial Squires fight.

('Rich people...') He snorted.

He was among the richest for a brief period of time before he purchased a decade's worth of services from squads of Martial Seniors ensuring that no Senior-level threat could hurt his family and the services from Guildmaster Bradt, but even then he wouldn't spend money in such a vain manner.

('I bet this is how it will be for the Senior-level contest too,') He snorted.

He couldn't even imagine the price of a single ticket. The number of people who would pay for such tickets was also probably substantially lower. However the price one a Senior-level ticket was probably a hundred times higher than that of a Squire-level ticket, thus the profits were not low either.

Yet the potions weren't the only things that drew his attention and interest.

It turned out that the execution of the contest was enough to keep him entertained until the fourth day of the Martial Festival when it was finally time for the preliminary contest.

By the time the fourth day arrived, the excitement of the town had reached what would probably be the very peak of the entire festival. After all, once the preliminary contest was completed, the contest would escalate far beyond the confines of the town, and head to the colosseum in the central headquarters of the Virodhabhasa Faith.

Thus it was only today that the three contests would make the town livelier than ever.



Rui still had quite some time before it was his turn, so he decided to purchase a ticket for the Apprentice-level preliminary contest.

This was in stark contrast to how he would handle such events in the past. In the past, he probably would have spent the whole day trying to enter his absolute best state through meditation. But he had reached a stage in his Martial Path where he no longer needed to go to such lengths to enter his peak mental state.

The more time he spent as an active Martial Artist, the easier it became to enter the zone where his mind entirely focused on the task at hand. He found that it was actually easier to let it arise naturally rather than trying to brute-force it.

Rather than stressing himself out, he decided to relax and watch the kids of the lower Realm duke it out in an identical fashion as the Squires and Seniors would. It was also the only ticket that he could afford at the moment.

It helped him relax and not needlessly force him to consume extra mental and physical energy. It also helped that he had made sure that he was as close to his peak as possible by carefully measuring his diet and sleep.

It wasn't long before it was time.

The participating contestants were supposed to report to the contest committee three hours prior to the kick-off of the contest. Thus Rui had the pleasure of facing his fellow contestants before the match even began.

"Contestant #342; Squire Falken."

STEP

He paused once he entered the giant hall hosting hundreds of Martial Squires, heaving a sigh.

('Give me a break guys...')

Each and every Martial Squire was staring at him. He could practically see the wariness, as well as the predatory hostility within their eyes. It didn't take a genius to figure out that they were not thinking nice things.

Rui couldn't help but curse the organizers who forced all of them into one room. This was just an attempt to bait drama. Although there were two Martial Seniors to ensure that a conflict did not prematurely erupt in the hall, it was clear that anything else was fine.

#### Chapter 1204: Deceive

Rui sighed visibly as he took his place among his fellow contestants. They did not cease observing him. It was actually embarrassing to be the object of scrutiny of an entire crowd that he was forced to be with.

However, this wasn't entirely inconvenient. It meant that he could already begin executing one of the strategies that he had come up with to handle the fact that he was going to become a target due to how high-profile he had become.

The reason he was a target was because he was perceived as the greatest threat.

That was something he could alleviate to a certain degree. Among Martial Artists, strength could be perceived, sensed, and intuited. Although the substantive rumors surrounding Rui were not things that could be dismissed, most Martial Artists were most confident in their own senses.

That was something he could work with. By utilizing a Mind Mask, he could reduce the amount of threat he conveyed to his fellow peers.

Because of his enhanced mind, his Mind Mask was powerful enough to completely suppress any sense of danger and threat he evoked, turning him into a normal person, or even less than a normal person despite not having a strong affinity for stealth.

However, he knew that in these circumstances he could not go that far. His fellow contestants were not stupid, they knew that he was a Martial Squire, if they could not at least sense a Squire-level aura, they would be even more afraid and determined to take him out because it meant that he could effortlessly conceal his power despite it being immense. That would only make them more concerned.

Instead, he did not reduce it all the way down, or even most of the way down. Trying to make himself a grade-one or grade-two Martial Artist was too much of a bluff. They would definitely be suspicious as no contestant participating at the moment was low-grade. They were all high-grade Martial Squires, many of whom had arrived at Church town for the sole reason of partaking in the contest.

Death was not forbidden in the contest, thus low-grade Martial Squire would have to be suicidal to consider participating in the contest.

That was why he decided to lower his perceived grade from as incredibly high as it was to grade eight. The power he was at more than three years ago.

Grade eight was as low as he could without the bluff being too suspicious. It was high enough for the participating Martial Squires to put more faith in their senses and intuition than in some rumors.

After all, rumors could be falsified and grossly exaggerated. The severe exaggeration of the power level of a grade-eight Martial Squire wasn't even the most egregious example of why crazy rumors could not be trusted.

Rui heaved a sigh of relief when he saw that his plan was partially effective.

Many of the stronger Martial Squires immediately dismissed him as a threat when they realized that their senses didn't even perceive him as a genuine threat.

Yet there was a good chunk of Squires who remained wary, albeit to a lesser extent. That was fine by Rui, he would take everything he could get.

He knew that this underestimation was temporary. Eventually, the contestants would realize that he was even more of a threat than the rumors indicated the longer the battle prolonged. The Mind Mask technique would not be of much avail once they actually saw him fight.

Rui had many thoughts on how he ought to fight in this contest. The most dangerous parts of the contest were actually the earliest phases of the conflict. This was when the greatest number of Martial Squires would fall by far. The colosseum was large enough to give the Martial Squires enough space to fight at whatever range they wanted, but that was it. It was still congested enough for there to be enough chaos for many Martial Squires to fall like bowling pins.

In fact, the ones that would survive the earliest phase were the ones that could handle the chaos the best.

('Kane would thrive in this contest. He would have a very serious chance of winning if he participated in my place.') Rui mused.

The Void Step technique was simply too overpowered, generally speaking. He would simply need to zip around and stab people in the back, literally.

Rui could not do that, so he decided to take another route. Surviving the chaos was his greatest priority. Unfortunately, there was too much chaos, such circumstances were where the difficulty of executing the VOID algorithm was the greatest. There was simply too much data for him to be able to process and create predictive models for. It was one of the aspects of the VOID algorithm that needed to be improved. The VOID algorithm was created for one-on-one hand-to-hand combat, after all.

Although Rui had used it against multiple Martial Artists in the past during the Serevian War, that was limited to single-digit numbers. This was on an entirely different level of difficulty.

Therefore, his greatest priority was to last despite being targeted until the situation became less chaotic.

('Looks like I'll have to rely on the Metabody System earlier than I expected.') Rui mused. ('I can forget about offense in the earliest phase of the contest. My focus is lasting, so I'll have to choose between the remaining Metabody techniques.')

He considered Void Forestep, before dismissing it. It relied on the VOID algorithm too much out of all the Metabody techniques.

That left Nemean Blossom, Weaving Blood, and Hungry Pain plus Final Breathing.

He could see cases being made for all three techniques. Which probably meant that he would employ all three techniques to a partial degree. The question was figuring out to what weightage he would give to each technique. Activating them to equal degrees was probably sub-optimal. He needed to figure out which one was most important, and how he could make the best use of the new-found resources that he had.

Chapter 1205: Analysis

Of those three techniques, Rui needed to make sure he used them to the most optimal degree. Fortunately, there were ways through which the most optimal distribution could be analyzed.

('It all comes down to which is the most energy-conservative way to ensure that I last through the initial chaotic phase,') Rui narrowed his eyes as his mind furiously processed through all the available combinations and permutations.

The most energy-conservative Metabody technique was Hungry Pain plus Final Breathing. However, this technique would not guarantee him getting past the initial phase where he would be targeted by a good number of Martial Artists. Given that it decreased his output with the intent of preserving stamina, he could be sure that this technique alone would not get him through.

Nemean Blossom was definitely something that would ensure that he would get past the initial phase. The technique made him so tough by sacrificing power, speed, and stamina, that it could easily allow him to withstand anything they threw at him. The Earthen Fortress Bloom technique that this technique was based on was tough alone, and had been enhanced by the Hungry Pain technique that enhanced the thickening of the cell wall of cells had already proven itself when he tested it. It was an absolute guarantee that he would make it through.

('But it's not the most energy conservative way of getting through,') Rui knew that.

Each Metabody technique truly drained him, they sacrificed everything for the sake of amplifying one parameter, and once he was done, he would be weakened. So even if he got past the initial chaotic phase, he could very well end up in trouble in the later phases due to being drained from maintaining the Nemean Blossom technique which would be draining away at the biochemical and nutritional resources of the body and Hungry Pain. It had a definitive time limit from the moment it was used.

('In that case... Weaving Blood is definitely more alluring.')

Weaving Blood did not have a time limit the same way that the other techniques did. The reason for this was that Weaving Blood did not constantly consume energy and biochemical resources every second the way Nemean Blossom or Void Forestep did. Instead, Weaving Blood's energy consumption was entirely dependent on damage.

If there was no damage done, then Weaving Blood would not consume any energy. Stamina would be preserved in this case.

If there was tons of damage done, then Weaving Blood would consume tons of energy. Stamina would not be preserved in this case.

In fact, unlike the other techniques, it was possible to deplete and finish Weaving Blood in just a matter of seconds as long as the damage was high enough. This was not the case for Nemean Blossom.

('This means that if I use Weaving Blood, as long as I stay sharp and keep my reflexes up, I can get past the initial chaos phase with zero energy consumption as long as I don't take any damage.') Rui's eyes lit up. This was an alluring outcome. Weaving Blood was the only technique that could allow him to get away with no extra energy consumption despite using the Metabody System.

('However... it also means that if I do happen to get hit in the head and suffer blunt force trauma... It's game over.')

Rui sighed.

Weaving Blood could not heal blunt force trauma, it also could not heal being knocked out. These were not conventional wounds to cells and tissue that could be healed with cellular division.

Of course, if he didn't get hit hard in the head, then there would be no problem. But the issue was that if he did, it would cost him his life.

('In which case, it will be better to have a bit of Nemean Blossom to ensure that this doesn't happen. Sure, my energy consumption will increase a bit, but it's best to make sure that even if I get caught off-guard, I don't lose anything.')

Rui mused.

Nemean Blossom made his flesh so tough and resistive to impacts that he would not get knocked out by pretty much anything any of the Martial Squires within the room he was in had to offer.

('So, twenty-percent Nemean Blossom, eighty-percent Weaving Blood.') Rui decided.

Now that he had made that decision, he was mostly done with all the considerations that he had about the contest.

He did, nonetheless, take his time to scan all of his opponents. Part of the reason that they were all put in the same place before the contest officially began was to put their ability to gather information on their opponents to the test. As well as their strategic and tactical intelligence in the test.

Rui smiled a bit.

He didn't get full of himself, but he was absolutely certain that he was the best at this out of all his competitors by far. It was unfortunate that they weren't really moving or doing anything physically rigorous because he would have been able to build elementary predictive models on them.

However, even if he could not do that, he could conduct basic threat analysis on all of them, while also building profiles on them containing as much information about their Martial Bodies and Art.

While all the Martial Squires were engaging in basic analysis, Rui was the only one who turned it into a system that operated within the confines of his massive Mind Palace.

Of the several hundred Martial Squires, he could detect only three grade-ten Martial Squires. These three were the three greatest perceived threats, only because Rui was able to conceal his threat level well enough. There was no doubt that these three were also going to be heavily targeted and would be focusing on making sure they didn't go down while being attacked by many Martial Squires.

It was ironic because the strongest Martial Squires including himself and those three would be on the defensive while the most aggressive ones would be the ones immediately below them, hoping to surpass them with numbers to claim the spot of representative for themselves.

## Chapter 1206: Commencement

The colosseum that had long been specifically constructed for the sake of the Martial Contest was now teeming with people. Spirits were high as the citizens of the Seonmun town gathered to see an exciting spectacle that they had the opportunity to witness only once every two years.

Rui learned that despite worshipping Martial Artists, the members of this religion did not see anything wrong with tossing hundreds of them inside a relatively congested area where they could not get away from each other and watching them brawl it out. There was no doubt that many of the contestants were going to die, it was inevitable, yet there did not seem to be any concern in that regard from the spectators.

It appeared that while the members of the faith decisively placed Martial Artists above normal people such that it was unacceptable for the latter to transgress against the former, there were no problems as long as it happened between Martial Artists.

The tensions in the hall kept escalating as the event had already begun.

"Welcoome brothers and sisters!! To the seventy-second preliminary Martial Contest of the Seonmun Church town...!"

"We welcome you today to an exciting battle featuring the finest warriors of the Squire Realm that this town has gathered...!"

"Only one will prevail! Only one warrior will remain standing, being bestowed with the title of the strongest! The title of the Seonmun Champion!"

The crowd cheered in a frenzy, growing increasingly excited by the second. The pair of dynamic commentators simply stoked the fires that had already been burning, hoping to get everybody even more hyped.

Rui could only sigh in response. Yet his attention pricked when his senses caught all the seated spectators being served a potion that they all quickly consumed. He could feel their minds and cognition speeding even from this distance.



"Now that you have all been given the means to enjoy the spectacle that is to follow, let us begin without any further ado!"

It was then that a man entered the hall that all the Martial Squires were in.

"Warrior," He addressed them. "I am the contestant manager. I am here to inform you that it is time. Follow me, and good luck."

They all made their way through the paths that he had them go through before pouring through the entrances into the colosseum battle arena.

Instantly, they were greeted by the bellowing cheers of the spectators.

Every Martial Squire could not help but be amazed at the sheer number of people that had gathered to witness them fight. They could not help but feel ambivalent about it.

On one hand, it was an honor that so many people were willing to bear high expenses to watch them fight. On the other, it was also a little insulting that the contest to decide the strongest had been turned into an entertainment show where they were essentially clowns of the circus.

Regardless, none of them let it dwell on their minds for more than a bit of time.

It was what it was, and there were more important things to focus on.

The crowd became more subdued as waves of pressure washed over them.

The Martial Squires were focusing.

The sheer amount of pressure that they collectively exerted was immense. Many of the spectators grew nervous even though they weren't involved.

The Martial Squires were on edge.

Sharp.

Alert.

Willfully pushing their minds and bodies to the limit.

It wasn't long before they formed an equidistant perimeter along the edge of the colosseum.

"And without any further ado. BEGIN!!!"

Rui immediately activated the three techniques Metabody technique to a partial degree in rapid succession.

His skin grew several shades darker as his cells began thickening their walls, they also stockpiled compounds and nutrients needed to immediately divide and form new cells to heal any wounds that his body would incur.

Yet by the time he did that, all hell had already broken loose.

What happened when you grouped up several hundred powerful Martial Squires and told them only one could prevail?

If anybody didn't know before, they sure did now.

RUMBLE!!!

A maelstrom of chaos the likes of which the spectators had never beheld before overtook the entirety of the colosseum as nothing short of a war erupted.

All of the cheers and screams ceased.

Not a single one of them dared to raise their voice as even their enhanced minds struggled to keep up with the carnage that promulgated.

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOOOOOM!!!

Waves of attacks, waves of maneuvers, waves of actions and reactions all flashed across the colosseum just milliseconds after the match had commenced!

Just as Rui had predicted, the three grade-ten Martial Squires had become the greatest targets. He also predicted the barrage of attacks that many Martial Squires launched his way. It appeared that while the grade-eight Mind Mask had reduced him from becoming everybody's target, there were still some people who thought he was too much of a threat.

"Tsk."

Rui sprinted at top speed, avoiding powerful blasts that barely missed him!

He pushed his reflexes and senses to the limit, heightening his alertness to the very zenith. Primordial Instinct was his greatest friend through the initial phase of chaos.

He activated Outer Convergence and Gale Force Breathing as well as Phantom Step, dashing away at incredible speeds while weaving through warring Martial Squires.

The battle had long escalated into the air, encompassing the entirety of the three dimensions within the colosseum. Rui zig-zagged through the air, and the ground, avoiding attacks that crashed into other Martial Squires taking them out.

He felt relieved as he witnessed the three grade-ten Martial Squires struggling under volleys of attacks launched by the grade-eight and grade-nine Martial Squires that worked together to take them down. Although those three were the strongest, that did not mean that they were capable of handling so many attackers that were just a grade or two below them. Rui could have easily suffered their fate had he not concealed his power.

#### Chapter 1207: Late

The spectators watched with slackened jaws as Martial Squires collapsed one after the other. The earliest phase of the match was so chaotic that Martial Squires attacked those they didn't mean to attack and got hit by attacks that weren't meant to hit them.

It was just that things changed so quickly that by the time an attack was launched and began traveling, in close-range or long-range, the things in its path had already changed. Many Martial Squires were inadvertently taken down by attacks meant for someone else.

It was too much to follow!

Thankfully, with each falling Martial Squire, things became easier to follow. Being knocked out, killed, or incapacitated were grounds for elimination, and those Martial Squires were swiftly extracted through esoteric means without interrupting the battle.

It wasn't too long before a lot of the riff-raff were filtered out. These were Martial Squires who, while they weren't weak, simply stood no chance at claiming victory against all odds.

It wasn't too long before only the grade-eight, nine, and ten Martial Squires, and Rui remained.

Rui had spent this brief and initial phase of the preliminary contest on the run for the most part. He kept his energy consumption low enough for the most part. While some attacks did hit him, especially large wide-scale attacks that covered a lot of area, his partial Nemean Blossom handled them perfectly for the most part.

"Get him!"

"Tsk! He's too slippery!"

"Surround him!"

"RARGH!" One grade-nine Martial Squire appeared in front of him, managing to cut him off while throwing his most powerful attack at him.

CLASP!

His eyes widened as he felt his power disappearing the second that Rui caught his fist, as though it was being drained away into a void. Not even a powerful grade-nine Martial Art technique was enough to overcome the combination of Flux Earther and a partial Nemean Blossom.

BZZZT!!!

At the same time, Rui activated Thundercoil, sending a buzzing and paralytic sensation through his body.

For just a brief moment, he couldn't move.

And that was enough.

BAM! POW!

A swift kick to the jaw rocked the man's head, driving him dizzy before a final blow to the solar plexus armed with Outer Convergence and Reverberating Lance hammered the final nail in the coffin.

THUD

The man crumpled to the ground, unconscious.

This paused his pursuers, as they froze.

Wasn't he just a grade-eight Martial Artist? How did he take down a grade-nine Martial Artist so quickly?

Suddenly, a profoundly deep sense of peril emerged in their hearts.

Something was wrong.

A grin cracked onto Rui's face. "Time's up. Should have been quicker. Now it's too late."

His skin lightened, returning back to normal. He felt less solid compared to before.

Yet for some reason, they only felt greater pressure when they beheld his figure walking towards them.

Rui put away the defense. Now that the most chaotic parts had passed, and only continued passing, he no longer had to play defense.

Before they could even gather their wits, Rui had already lashed out, racing against them.

"HYAH!" An aggressive offensive Martial Squire bellowed, launching a powerful kick to Rui's head as he approached him.

WHOOSH!

The man's eyes widened as his attack crashed into an empty image.

A feint.

BOOM!!!

He coughed blood as Rui's most powerful attack crashed into his ribs. The full might of Flowing Canon, Outer Convergence, Reverberating Lance, as well as the momentum accrued by Gale Force Breathing crashed into the man's abdomen in the brief window that his guard was down due to the feint.

Yet, much to his credit, he only fell to a knee, trying his best not to lose. Unfortunately for him, it was far from enough.

POW!

A swift kick to the skull knocked him out, putting him out of commission.

Yet he couldn't even revel in any sense of victory as he was immediately attacked from four directions.

It appeared that his targeters had realized that he could not be taken down one-on-one after watching him dust two high-grade Martial Squires with little effort.

Yet, they simply did not comprehend. They did not comprehend the depth of the power that Rui was hiding; the depth of the VOID.

WHOOSH

A simple step here.

A shift in weight there.

A palm over there.

Rui made the simplest of adjustments, and all of their attacks failed. Half of them were dodged, and some of them were blocked.

None of them reached him.

Yet he was not content.

His eyes flashed over to the closest Martial Squire, a maneuvering-oriented expert, sending chills down his spine.

Rui threw a swift kick in his direction, a short and crisp blow with little power. And yet, the man effortlessly dodged the attack with his high speed.

Or so he thought.

BAM!!

The kick resolutely landed on his face, breaking his nose. Yet the shock he felt surpassed the pain.

('I dodged, but... his attack swerved in this direction even before I began dodging!') Even though he was quicker, Rui moved earlier, just early enough to compensate for the lower speed, just late enough that his opponent could not change the decision that his body was already executing.

How could he do that? It was impossible!

Unless...

('Unless he knew ahead of time,') The man's eyes widened.

"You shouldn't get distracted."

A chill crawled up his spine.



BAM!!!

Rui launched an attack from his blindspot into his vitals.

CRACK CRACK CRACK!

"Cough!" The man vomited blood even before the attack launched him flying, barely retaining his consciousness.

Yet he already knew that his wounds were too severe.

He turned back to Rui in alarm and fear, yet Rui had already dismissed his existence. "You should withdraw before it's too late."

Three Martial Squires down. Three seconds in real time.

It dawned on his targeters.

No, not just them.

It dawned on everybody in the colosseum.

Maybe, just maybe... the rumors surrounding Squire Falken were not fiction.

Still...

"Like I said," Rui narrowed his eyes coldly. "Too late."

A wave of peril washed over everybody. A sense of pressure that didn't seem to quite fit in the Squire Realm drew everybody's attention.

He removed his Mind Mask entirely.

It was no longer necessary.

Chapter 1208: Turnaround

They were arrogant words at face value, yet one could tell Rui was not merely grandstanding.

He meant every word.

That was why many could not help but believe him.

Perhaps it really was too late. Perhaps they should have taken him down sooner, and no longer had any chance of doing so.

Almost as if to prove a point, Rui moved, rushing forward toward them.

His eyes were fixed on the Martial Squire closest to him. He lashed forward, launching his most powerful attack!

A powerful Flowing Canon flew in the direction of his closest competitor. Ordinarily, an attack from so far away would be easier to dodge.

Yet Rui knew he wouldn't dodge.

The man he was targeting was a powerful defensive Martial Artist with a body that was slanted toward passive defense.

"Come!" The man firmly planted his feet into the ground, while adopting a defensive stance.

He was confident that at the very least, he would be able to handle Rui's raw power, if nothing else.

It wasn't that his confidence was misplaced. His analysis was actually quite reasonable. When one considered Rui's weight compared to his, as well as the fact that his Martial Body did not seem slanted for offense, and neither did his Martial Art, then the conclusion was quite reasonable.

Yet unfortunately for him, Rui did not fit into standard models of Martial Artists.

He was a deviant. And the man would find that out the hard way.

TAP TAP TAP!

Where he expected a powerful strike that he had braced his abdomen for were mild finger pokes.

Yet it was only when he couldn't move anymore for a brief moment that he felt a deep flash of dread.

SPLAT!

Rui struck at his eyes with his fingers at the very moment that he was unable to move. He had baited the man into adopting a passive defensive stance meant to withstand a powerful blow, and switched up at the last moment, opting to instead for a choice that could not be defended against with conventional passive defense and paralyzing him for a moment as a result.

After that, it was simply a matter of choosing which vital to attack. He went for the eyes because they were the easiest.

Four Martial Artists. Four seconds.

The others gritted their teeth with grim expressions when they witnessed how quickly Rui took down their one and only defensive powerhouse.

That was more than just a little discouraging. They hoped that a defensive Martial Artist would be able to hold out for longer. Ideally, if he had been able to stall him by weathering all of his attacks, then this would have been easier for them. They would be able to gang up on him with the defensive Martial Squire throwing himself in front of Rui to use himself as a shield to take all of his attacks.

Unfortunately, that turned out not to be the case. Rui had long predicted that the man would be able to withstand his attacks in base form, aside from perhaps Transverse Resonance tier five. Rather than wasting energy on taking him down the hard way, he simply made full use of patterns that the elementary predictive models had been created from.

Someone who was prone to tanking offense passively probably still relied on some amount of active defense to cover vital spots. Rui simply got rid of that active defense for a moment through Lightning Tap.

While the others couldn't help but be shocked at how quickly a defensive Martial Squire fell, Rui was rather nonchalant.

This wasn't the first time, and it most certainly wouldn't be the last.

He rushed forward.

"Cocky bastard!" Three Martial Squires rushed forward, launching three attacks.

WHOOSH

Not a single attack touched so much as a hair on his body. One moment he was in front of them, within the range of their attacks.

The next moment, he disappeared. They couldn't even sense him.

No... That wasn't quite right.

('Shit! He's behind us!')

Yet by the time they turned around, the last thing they saw was Rui's mouth opening as he exhaled.

BOOM!!!

A titanicly powerful sound attack crashed into all three of them, launching them away. This was the most apt way to use the attack, to use it to take down as many Martial Squires at a time as possible.

Getting past them was simple for Rui. He had simply employed Phantom Step at exactly the right moment to slip into their blind spots. Phantom Step worked the best when it was used to show one what they wanted to see when they wanted to see. Yet using that to crouch into their blind spot into the last moment required deep foresight of their positions.

It was something that could only be accomplished with a deep amount of insight into their fighting styles.

It was not something that just about anybody could do.

Seven Martial Squires. Seven seconds.

Although a greater amount of time had passed from Rui's perspective, only seven seconds had passed since he began fighting back.

And in that time, seven Martial Squires had already fallen.

Rui turned around with a bland expression, eying those who remained.

Yet those that remained wanted nothing more to do with him.

"Shit, he's coming!"

"Get away!"

"I forfeit!"

The spectators, who had been silent and shocked since the turnaround had occurred, began laughing at them and cheering for Rui. Unlike the Martial Squires, the spectators did not know who he was. The names of each Martial Squire were not tediously announced before the contest began, thus their identities were known.

Rui was just another Martial Squire who appeared to be targeted for some reason. He did not make much of an impression prior, compared to the grade-ten Martial Squires that had been valiantly fighting back since the start of the contest.

That changed in the past seven seconds, as Rui almost became a different person in their eyes, taking down Martial Squires as though they were ordinary civilians was a shocking yet entertaining sight to see.

Chapter 1209: Opponents

"Woah, who is that guy?"

"Whoever he is, I hope he wins. I'm rooting for him."

"Man, to think that even monsters like him are participating. Even the preliminary contests go hard!"

"If he wins, I'm going to purchase a ticket to the main contest in Li."

The crowd only grew more excited when Rui unveiled a portion of his true power. Yet, in reality, he was a little bored.

Ordinary Martial Squires were not able to excite him anymore. This had already begun being true even before he began Project Metabody.

But now that he had completed it? He couldn't even pretend they were entertaining anymore.

When he looked into the eyes of those who sought to eliminate him with numbers, he knew he wouldn't lose despite the numeric disadvantage.

Those who returned his gaze also knew that.

And he knew that they knew.

And they knew that he knew that they knew.

That was why they retreated.

Rui couldn't even be bothered to chase them.

What he proceeded to do drew gasps from the various spectators. His actions were stunning to those who witnessed him.

In the middle of an ensuing rumble, Rui had the audacity to sit down on the ground.

It was a statement.

A declaration that this contest was not worth his full effort.

Or that was how the spectators interpreted it.

In reality, Rui couldn't be bothered with such frivolous forms of show-off. His actions were more innocent than people were willing to believe. His attention had already turned in directions that actually held his interest. The three grade-ten Martial Squires.

A smile crept on his face.

"Strong."

This was undeniable.

Rui carefully watched and analyzed all of their Martial Art as he continued building predictive models on all of them. He began the moment the fight began, dedicating a portion of his attention to those he knew were the greatest threats in this competition, and now, he could dedicate all his attention to them in a full-fledged manner.

The one that drew his attention the most was the one with a Martial Art that he had never seen before. It was a shocking fighting style that he didn't even think was possible. She sashayed around the arena, those that crossed her path were left frozen on the spot. The ground she treaded upon hardened as frost began covering it. The air around her chilled. Rui couldn't help but widen his eyes in shock as he watched tiny snowflakes form in the air around her.

She had a Martial Art that was centered around freezing!

It was an absurd tale at first, one he would have found hard to believe had he heard it through second-hand sources.

Yet now that he was seeing it occur in real-time right before his eyes, he could not deny that it not only existed but was incredibly powerful.

('Her lethality is off the charts!') Rui watched in rapt attention as everything she touched or even came near froze. ('She doesn't generate ice, she lowers the temperature of her body as well as her environment and the targets of her strange cold techniques. How does he do it?')



Although it very clearly appeared to everybody as though she generated a thin layer of ice on top of her targets to freeze them from the outside in, only two people realized what was actually happening.

One of them was Rui.

('She's freezing them from the inside out!') An amazed smile appeared on his face. ('She's freezing the water inside the Martial Body, causing them to freeze on the spot and die.')

It was an instant death with no hopes of recovery. Furthermore, this form of offense bypassed all passive and active defense.

Tough flesh, tough skin, tough bones. None of it mattered. None of these things could possibly prevent the rapid lowering in temperature that she caused within their body. Furthermore, the healing factor that a lot of these Martial Artists had was also largely ineffective against cold. The damage was done across the entire body on a molecular level. Seventy percent of the human body was simply water. That reality made her attacks absurdly lethal.

('Damn...') Rui tutted, yet he couldn't hide the excitement on his face. ('Nemean Blossom and Weaving Blood are either entirely useless or simply not worth it against her.')

He had already concluded that the only way to combat her was to keep her well out of range. If she got within five meters of him, it was probably game over. She had no compunctions of freezing his brain over, killing him on the spot.

Unlike the other two, she actually appeared to be in her twenties, albeit well on the latter side. She had reached the conventional peak of the Squire Realm through the sheer potency of his Martial Path. She had more in common with Rui and Kane than the other two older men who were her peers.

Of course, the other two were, by no means, weak.

Rui glanced at the next most interesting among the three grade-ten Martial Squires.

One man stood stationary at one spot, with his legs firmly planted on the ground. His attackers moved in, rushing in with attacks from all directions, yet he was unperturbed. Any attack that entered within arm's length of him, however, immediately regretted that decision as they were twisted into oblivion. Skin stretched and spun, bones crumbled into gravel, and muscle tore as fibers resisted the force as much as possible.

Only to fail.

The end result was almost comical. Hands were twisted into sharp spiral noodles with the sheer amount of force the man generated.

('A Martial Art centered around torque eh?') Rui gazed with interest. The man's primary offense was torque, he used torque to inflict damage in a manner that was entirely different from normal collision-based offense that an overwhelming majority of Martial Artists used to some degree. It was closer to the locks and holds of certain grappling principles, but the man had elevated them to an entirely different level.

He was like a more lethal version of Hever.

His body was gigantic and his muscles were loaded. He looked like he could give Hypertrophic Surge a run for its money on raw power, but unlike with Hypertrophic Surge, he didn't have any strict time limits. He used a principle similar to Outer Convergence to draw power in from across the entirety of his body to his hands, allowing him to twist his opponent's arms with great ease.

('That's not enough to explain this absurd twisting effect.') Rui narrowed his eyes as he analyzed the man's Martial Art deeper. ('He also likely has hyper flexibility in his arms from the shoulder down. That's the only way he can possibly twist his opponent's arms to such a degree.')

It was a truly incredible solution.

Chapter 1210: Finale

If Kane had been here, he would have been able to see through the technique with his incredible kinetic vision. Rui however, like everybody else, was having trouble even seeing what was happening.

('Definitely a formidable opponent. It seems all three of them are quite fancy.')

Rui turned to the final grade-ten Martial Squire. One glance at him and Rui could tell that he was employing incredibly powerful breathing techniques. It was as though the very atmosphere shook when he breathed. He rapidly shifted across the battlefield in an extremely strange manner.

It took Rui a minute to figure out what was happening. ('He's controlling his movements through the atmosphere via his breathing techniques!')

Rui couldn't help but furrow his eyebrow as he noted that the speed and power he exhibited did not match the weight and size of the Martial Body. It appeared that he had strengthened his breathing to such a degree, that he could use to manipulate his entire body like a puppet, where the strings were the air around him.

He flashed around the battlefield at a blurringly high speed, Martial Artists fell left and right as he struck them with swift and incredibly powerful blows that they were simply unable to defend against. His offense was incredibly diverse as he employed a variety of principles against his opponents. Blunt force, piercing, grappling, vital targeting, and even wind and sound-based attacks.

Unlike the other two, his Martial Art was not hyper-limited to a singular field.

('I definitely need to form a substantial predictive model on him,') Rui narrowed his eyes as he analyzed all his movements.

The other Martial Artists no longer even mattered to Rui, they may as well have already been disqualified while Rui was merely watching demonstrations from each of his opponents.

And he was impressed with what he saw.

Each of them faced an even greater amount of numerical disadvantages as several squads of Martial Squires led by grade-nine Martial Squires, comprised of grade-eight Martial Squires leaped on each of the grade-ten Martial Squires. Yet despite these oppressive circumstances, not a single one of them fell.

They withstood. They resisted. They pushed back.

And in the end, they prevailed.

At the end of it all, there were only four Martial Squires left.

The three of them and Rui.

The three of them regarded each other with respect and acknowledgment. This was the outcome they hoped for. While each of them pursued their Martial Paths for different reasons the stemmed from entirely different pasts, one thing they each had in common was that none of them wanted to see the truly strong overcome by an army of pathetic weaklings.

This was the outcome they had hoped for, and the outcome that they had predicted. That they would crush any and all schemes that the weaklings cooked and would face each other in the end to decide which one of them would become the Seonmun Champion.

There was just one variable that they had not expected.

Rui.

It was complicated. Each of them had heard of the monster that apparently was too strong for the Squire-level training facilities. As Martial Artists who each used those same facilities and had no problems, that was not something that could be ignored, if true.

If true, that was.

When they actually saw Rui, they realized that those rumors were insubstantive. A Martial Squire who was a few notches below them could not possibly accomplish such things. They had immediately dismissed him as a threat. They were each other's only competitors.

Then, Rui stopped holding back. The power he displayed drew their attention even while they were under immense pressure. It was clear that they had failed to evaluate him properly, or he had the ability to hide his strength. This wasn't an unheard of ability, many Martial Artists developed a similar ability, and it was most commonly seen in covert fields. They just hadn't expected to see it from Rui since he was clearly not someone in that field.

Regardless, it didn't matter.

The fact of the matter was, he was among the final four, and he had earned his way there. Not even they could deny that.

However, Rui wasn't entirely pleased with the circumstances. The three of them had sustained a few injuries, having faced much greater oppression from the competitors. Rui, on the other hand, was unharmed.

He got up, walking towards all of them.

"Squire Falken," One of them regarded him. "I had heard tha-!"

**BOOM!**

Rui launched a powerful Mighty Roar Flash Blast, at him. Yet even he couldn't help but crack a smile when the man dispelled the attack with ease.

"Impatient, aren't you?" The older man tutted.

Yet that attack had already served a green light of sorts. The spectators held their breath as the four strongest Martial Squires abruptly lashed out into combat, with the four of them battling against each other.

It was supposed to all four of them against the other three.

Yet, much to their shock, this wasn't the case.

Much to their shock, one of them managed to gain an edge against all the other three.

Rui grinned as he went all-out, partially activating Hypertrophic Surge and Void Forestep at fifty percent intensity each.

His power and speed skyrocketed.

The three of them froze as they felt chills crawling up their skin. Their expression grew more severe as Rui exhibited pressure that didn't quite seem to belong within the Squire Realm. A profoundly deep sense of peril grew within their hearts as they witnessed his body undergoing changes that they didn't understand.

Yet one thing they did understand.

Whatever he was, he needed to be stopped before he trampled all over them.

The three of them ceased their conflict with each other as they each turned to face Rui with grim expressions, surrounding him from all directions.

The spectators grew stunned as the three grade-ten Martial Squires joined forces to fight Rui!

The battle had taken an extreme turn as Rui began experiencing an immense amount of pressure from all directions!