

Martial Unity 1311

Chapter 1311: Outcome

At some point in the fight, the spectators had come to resent the two monsters that had fiercely clashed in the fight.

It couldn't be helped.

Try as they might, they were unable to look away.

Try as they might, they were unable to take their eyes off what ensued.

Try as they might, they could not bring themselves to be anything more than invisible spectators.

It was a prison.

'Free us...!'

It seemed their prayers had been heeded.

Squire Falken had begun gaining an edge even as Squire Ieyasu unleashed the might of a thousand Martial Art.

One by one, he overcame all of them.

Each time he did, he had gained a small edge on Ieyasu.

Each time he did, he had come one step closer to winning the fight.

And soon enough, the decisive moment arrived.

Not a single person had moved.

Not a single person had so much as twitched.

They couldn't so much as blink or breathe.

In just the flash of a moment, Rui surged forward with a mighty attack.

It was to be the end.

And yet...

WHOOSH!

Every single Martial Squire quivered in bone-chilling terror and shock at the miracle that unfolded in the colosseum.

Little did they know it was not the first one.

A titanic Senior-level attack surged forward towards Rui.

"Die."

What ensued happened so quickly that they were unable to bear witness to it.

One moment, his strike surged forward.

And the next?

A ground-shattering collision ensued, and the world shook as a mighty blast erupted from the epicenter.

For just the briefest moment, The guardians managed to behold the cause of the explosion before it erupted.

What they saw shook them deeper than any shockwave could.

Where there were two Martial Squires, there were now two Martial Seniors.

BOOM!!!!!!

The ensuing shockwave would have killed most of them if not for Senior Xanarn and Senior Leonil.

Yet, none of them cared.

Even as the island shook, the guardians sky-walked into the air to bear witness to the battle between two newborn Martial Seniors that now took place in the distant skies.

And yet, just moments later, the weather changed.

The collision between two-tier five Transverse Resonance resulted in an even greater explosion.

The three Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect were put to the test yet again.

They flashed out of the island, their Martial Hearts burning at full power. Instantly, they had come up with a course of action.

Senior Leonil and Senior Xanarn activated their breathing techniques manipulating wind and sound respectively as they converged the section of the shockwave moving towards the island towards Senior Sarak.

Senior Sarak activated his defensive technique, preparing to withstand the weight of the incoming shockwave.

BOOM!!!

He gritted his teeth, narrowing his eyes. 'This is not the power of ordinary newborn Martial Seniors!'

Yet, he was much more experienced than any of them, or his own peers. He cleanly absorbed the power, before dispersing it in a more harmless manner.

And just when he thought he was done, a similar explosion ensued.

BOOM!!!!!!!

Rui and Ieyasu stood before each other, launching their most powerful tier five Transverse Resonance attacks.

Over and over.

Neither side had been able to gain an edge.

And yet, neither of them was able to conceal the smiles that had emerged on their faces.

The power of the Senior Realm was intoxicating. Not even the aloof detached Ieyasu was able to contain the pure mirth that he felt after obtaining the power he had been dreaming of for six years.

Yet, something had to give.

And something did.

BOOM!!!!!!!

A crucial threshold had been crossed. The brain could only handle so much blunt force trauma.

The world went dark as their consciousness dimmed.

Two lone figures plummeted from the skies.

CLASP

Senior Sarak appeared catching the two of them with a sigh of relief.

He could hardly believe that he was holding the two youngest Martial Seniors in history.

Ieyasu shattered the record by a whopping five years at the age of thirty.

For a matter of microseconds, he truly was the youngest Martial Senior in history. An incredible feat that would spread his name across the entire Martial World, and beyond.

And yet, Rui had immediately shattered his record by a margin of six years and was now the undisputed youngest Martial Senior at the absurd age of twenty-four.

In less than a millisecond, the world record had been shattered twice.

Senior Sarak was certain that such a thing had never happened before. He, and everybody else at Floating Sect, had the honor of witnessing the two most talented Martial Seniors in existence.

As a Martial Senior, he had mixed feelings. He had been considered talented when he broke through to the Senior Realm, even if he was nowhere near the record of Sage Serei, the youngest Martial Sage in existence, yet compared to the two Martial Seniors he was holding, he felt like an antiquated relic.

Each generation of Martial Artists surpassed the previous one, the world of Martial Art constantly evolved.

Better techniques. Greater insights and understanding. Better training and growth resources. Greater heritage and guidance.

Even still, there was no doubt that Rui and Ieyasu were at the very pinnacle of what the young generation of Martial Artists had to offer.

Senior Leonil and Xanarn appeared before him, deactivating their Martial Hearts.

"The guardians are fine," Senior Xanarn informed him. "They're shook, but they're fine. Many of them wanted to start training vigorously immediately. It seems that the fight truly highlighted their mediocrity. Their titles and statuses as guardians within the Floating Sect are meaningless before the pinnacle of power that they witnessed in this fight."

"That is good," Senior Sarak remarked, nodding. "I predict we will see a surge in the growth of the guardians."

"The island is fine. But I swear it was this close to breaking apart." Senior Leonil grumbled. "It is best to get some reinforcing work done to its foundation nonetheless though. Better safe than sorry."

Chapter 1312: Technique Principles

"Have the staff contact the PrimaInfra corporation," Senior Sarak replied calmly, never taking his eyes off Rui and Ieyasu. "They were the ones that helped set up the island for continued habilitation in the first place. Have the staff contact the Bradt Distribution Services as well, only they can transport the massive amounts of supplies needed to do any civil maintenance."

The two of them nodded at those words before their eyes fell on the two unconscious Martial Seniors.

"Incredible, aren't they?" The man murmured, as he turned, taking the two of them back to the island
"It's a shame that they're going to leave."

"You don't know that." Senior Xanarn murmured.

"Don't I?" Senior Sarak raised an eyebrow. "I know you promised Falken that you would devote yourself to him to repay your debt. But hoping that he would remain here is a pipe dream."

He glanced back at the two of them. "They're destined for so much more than being the guardians of an island. This island will only stifle their potential."

She opened her eyes. "Even so, I am prepared."

Silence brooded between them.

It was not a pleasant topic for the other two Martial Seniors, but alas, what could they do?

It was true that she was indebted to him. It was also true that they couldn't force her to stay.

"Let's leave those matters for later."

They swiftly returned to the island, promptly having the two Martial Seniors diagnosed in the medical department.

"They have merely suffered a concussion, they will wake up soon."

And wake up, he did.

Rui groaned as he opened his eyes.

He had a splitting headache. Yet not even that could prevent a smile from emerging on his face as he took a long deep breath in.

'I am a Martial Senior.' It was actually embarrassing that he couldn't stop smiling about it.

But how could it be helped? After everything that he had gone through, breaking through to Martial Senior was everything that his soul and sanity needed.

It was soothing.

He hadn't lost his desire for power, certainly not, but it did not eat away at him the way it did when he returned to the island the day yesterday. He was no longer weak, or at least, he was exponentially stronger than he was before. Just that knowledge alone was like a deep massage to the mind.

He felt as though his rationality had returned. He would be lying if he had said that he was in the most rational state of mind in the past few weeks.

He was not a computer, though he had come to become a lot closer to one than anyone could possibly imagine. The depths of the inner workings of his mind were beyond anybody's fathoming.

'Ah... That's not entirely true.' Rui narrowed his eyes as he thought about the man he had just fought.

Tokugawa Ieyasu. He was perhaps the only man who understood the depth of Rui's mind.

Rui didn't entirely understand how the man's mind-reading technique worked, but there was no doubt that it was the most powerful mental and sensory technique that Rui had ever seen. It was definitely more potent than the All-Seeing Eye, and Riemannian Echo, two grade-ten techniques, as far as its potency went. Easily one of the most impressive techniques that Rui had ever seen.

'He's reading brain waves caused by neural activity.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

Brain activity was nothing more than an enormous set of electrical impulses flying from neuron to neuron inside the brain. Traveling charges generated electromagnetic fields, according to Maxwell's Theory of Electromagnetism. These two facts together meant that the brain generated an extraordinarily weak electromagnetic field that was uniquely affected by thoughts, emotions, and other neural processes.

It was not impossible to gain insight into those neural processes through the electromagnetic field generated by those neural processes. In fact, it was easier than one might think.

Back on Earth, this technology had already made rather impressive progress by the time he was an old man in the twenty-first century. There were already many research teams that had developed prototypes of various products that employed mind-reading technology in them.

Of course, they were far from sophisticated or refined, but they were very much possible.

As far as he was aware, such technology did not exist on the Panama Continent, however, with all the things that Martial Art had accomplished, a mind-reading technique was not absolutely impossible. It would be extremely difficult, but not impossible.

He couldn't imagine how much difficulty Ieyasu had gone through to create that technique.

In fact, Rui had a feeling that was probably the only technique that had Ieyasu's individuality in it. It was probably the only technique that was his. Every other technique that Ieyasu had thrown against Rui was someone else's.

It meant that one technique alone was enough to singlehandedly give his Martial Art all the individuality needed to extract the Martial Heart and become a Martial Senior. The only thing on par with that level of individuality Rui had was the VOID algorithm, and that was something that took two lives to realize.

'What absurd talent. He has raw talent on par with Fiona, and a Martial Path pretty much on par with mine.' Rui shook his head.

Fiona, as a Martial Apprentice, had the raw talent needed to master every field she came across. Ieyasu most likely had similar talent. It was necessary. How else could he replicate all kinds of Martial Art techniques of all fields on the spot and execute them better than their original wielders?

He had a deep foundation in all of those fields. At the age of thirty.

'At my age actually, if I take into account the fact that he was already at the pinnacle six years ago when he became the number one ranked guardian of the Floating Sect.' Rui sighed in admiration.

He was glad that they met. Who else could have possibly broken each other through?

He was glad that they both managed to live. Although he had resolved to mercilessly butcher with all his power in order to make sure he didn't sabotage his chances of breaking through by holding back, he didn't enjoy killing.

Chapter 1313: Intelligence

Furthermore, there was no point in trying to kill each other now.

The battle was over. The core reasons for their bloodlust; the desire to break through, had also gone.

If anything, Rui valued him. He was probably the one man who would never be anything less than extremely difficult for Rui to defeat, no matter how many times they fought.

Rui's Martial Art was such that once he fought someone, they would never be able to defeat him ever again under ordinary circumstances. This happened with Kane, who lost to him even on a battlefield where he essentially had limitless stamina for a powerful grade-ten technique fueled by the environment around them. Not even such overwhelming situational advantages could allow Kane to defeat Rui.

The VOID algorithm when adapted was too powerful, and it never forgot.

Yet, against Ieyasu, this was not strictly true especially since the man did not have any patterns. A feat that Rui still did not entirely understand, though he did get the core reason for why it was necessary.

'A mirror that bears its own image can never truly reflect any other.'

It meant that Ieyasu needed to abandon who he was, in a sense, to pursue his Martial Path.

Yet a Martial Path was a reflection of who one was. It was a confusing paradox with only one solution.

It meant that his very psychology must have been extremely warped around others for such a Martial Path to manifest from it. Rui could not even begin to imagine what he had been through to develop such a Martial Path.

Regardless, it was a very valuable training resource. Just sparring against him would probably allow Rui to make improvements and grow stronger. A strange thought entered his mind when Rui remembered that Ieyasu also had connections to the Virodhahasa Faith as a fellow Virodha Champion.

He scratched his head, shrugging. It didn't matter if that truly was the case. In fact, it would actually be beneficial if that truly was the case. He could present Ieyasu to Master Uma and get her off his back.

His mood immediately plummeted as he thought about Master Uma.

'I'm definitely going to make her pay. But the time for that day has not yet arrived.' His eyes narrowed.

A newborn Martial Senior had no business considering fighting and beating a Martial Master.

'One step at a time.'

Master Uma would need to get in the queue for matters that he needed to attend to. Chairman Deacon was at the front of that line, having pre-booked it ahead of her.

Rui had reached a stage where he needed to seriously consider exactly and precisely how he was going to get rid of Chairman Deacon. When he first left the Shionel Confederation, he never paid any serious mind to make a decision when it came to how he was going to resolve this threat.

At the time, he was a high-grade Martial Squire at most, furthermore, he had a full decade ahead of him. He had simply focused on becoming a Martial Senior since that was the bare minimum strength he needed to be at before he could actually think about tackling this looming problem.

And now, he had arrived. Furthermore, his deadline had been reduced by three years. He had a little under seven years left to fix the problem.

'First, I need to ascertain the difficulty of taking him down.' Rui's mind entered a state of rational consideration, flowing smoothly, uninterrupted by the emotional irrationality that had plagued him in the past few weeks.

In order to overcome a problem, he needed to ascertain its difficulty. This was the very basics of problem-solving.

Yes, it was common sense that killing Chairman Deacon was going to be a monumentally difficult task, but how difficult? What were the various impediments that would prevent him from doing so? Even if he did succeed, he needed to consider where there were there outcomes of killing Chairman Deacon that would be so unfavorable that they would be not worth killing him.

For example, he might unleash an even bigger storm on himself and his family if he killed Chairman Deacon and was identified as the culprit. That was highly undesirable. A more unlikely one was suicidal measures to ensure that any killer of his would die along with him. Considering how vicious the man was to those who transgressed upon him, it was not impossible.

In general, there was too much he didn't know.

'I need intelligence. Detailed high-quality strategic intelligence on the man.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

Funnily enough, he had many sources.

The Martial Union. Guildmaster Bradt. The Virodhabhasa Faith.

Yet each option was problematic.

The Martial Union was ideal if not for the fact that Chairman Deacon undoubtedly was searching for any sign of Rui, and his greatest area of investigation was the Martial Union. Most likely, he had dedicated an enormous amount of investigative capital purely to finding any signs, even the tiniest hint of Rui Quarrier through the Martial Union.

That was why Commissioner Reze did not approach Rui during the first banquet when he was just another contestant.

It was too dangerous to do so at that moment in time.

It was why he had waited for Rui to perform extremely well so that an extremely good justification existed for Commissioner Reze to want to speak to Rui without drawing any suspicion. Everybody wanted to speak to the strongest Virodha Champion that had ever been seen.

'I should have used that opportunity to ask for as much investigative intelligence on Chairman Deacon as possible instead of the basics.' Rui groaned. 'Instead, my mind was fully and solely focused on breaking through and nothing else. You're stupid. Stupid. Actually stupid.'

He chastised himself mentally, shaking his head, and sighing. 'Regardless, I would be stupid to approach the Kandrian Empire in any way, let alone the Martial Union. If I was a powerful stealth-oriented Martial Artist, then it would have been a different case, but Mind Mask is not enough.'

There were too many avenues of information slip-up. Entire surveillance teams across the country trained to identify his body type. Massive spy networks covertly gathered classified intelligence from relevant organizations such as the Kandrian Border Patrol Force, the Kandrian Bureau of Investigation, and even the Martial Union.

It was too risky to be worth it. He needed to consider other options.

Chapter 1314: Conversations

The Virodhabhasa Faith was an absolute no-no for obvious reasons. He would be more than just a fool if he dared to go anywhere near the religion's bases. The religion was spread quite far, but it was quite benign in most places, limited to worshippers who had no real power in the Faith or the Theocracy.

He definitely needed to steer very clear of any of the church towns.

Guildmaster Bradt undoubtedly had a lot of intelligence on Chairman Deacon, but the latter most likely paid just as much, if not even more attention to him than the Martial Union since they were in the Shionel Confederation where Chairman Deacon's primary power base was.

All three options were untenable for now.

He would need to find another source of intelligence, and then purchase that intelligence from them. This was not going to be easy as any strategic intelligence on Chairman Deacon was undoubtedly valuable, and would not be handed out for free.

Still, this was not nearly as much of a problem as it was before.

'After all, I am a Martial Senior. Heh.' Rui smiled, before feeling embarrassed.

He couldn't help it.

It was almost too surreal.

'But the services of a Martial Senior are not trivial.' Rui mused as his expression straightened. 'It makes my bargaining capital greater.'

Senior-level commissions were quite expensive, orders of magnitude above what he got as a Martial Squire. He still remembered that even the titanic revenue he earned from the Shionel Dungeon through

Esosale Supplies bought him merely ten years of Senior-level protection when that same sum was enough for a millennium of Squire-level protection.

Of course, an organization that had gathered the strategic intelligence on Chairman Deacon that Rui was looking for was certainly not a weak organization that he could easily charm with his status as a Martial Senior.

'Finding the right source and negotiating the right transaction is not something that can be done quickly or easily. So I should keep it as a general agenda in mind for when I leave the Floating Sect.' Rui mused.

He had developed an affection for this little sect perched atop a floating island, but it had served its purpose. It could not make him grow stronger as a Martial Senior, he was sure about that.

Of course, there were things that needed to be settled before he left the island. He needed an initial destination to travel to, to begin making progress on a long-term plan to solve his problem. He could definitely count on the Floating Sect to at least point him in the right direction to help.

'I need to speak to Xanarn about...our future.'

Rui sighed. He felt awkward with those last two words.

Neither of them had committed to each other romantically, though he was attracted to her and enjoyed her company. She had promised to dedicate her life to him to repay her debt.

But that was not the kind of relationship he wanted. Although a Martial Senior like Xanarn would certainly be a useful asset, he didn't like thinking about her in that light.

'Kane...I would love to keep traveling with him with him but...' He sighed.

They were too far apart now. As a Martial Senior, Rui would be making endeavors that would make use of his power as a Martial Senior or challenge him as a Martial Senior.

He would be leading the life of a Martial Senior, and that was not a life that a Martial Squire could be a part of. If he ever went to a training region similar to the Umiana Trench or the Thundering Valley, but for Martial Seniors, the region would be so perilous that Kane wouldn't even be able to enter.

If he ever went on Senior-level operations, Kane would have to be left behind.

Not only would he be nothing more than a burden to a Martial Senior, but he himself would not be able to accomplish anything productive unless they happened to be in a place that offered Squire-level training and growth resources.

These matters were clear to Rui, but he didn't know if he had the heart to tell Kane the truth when he would meet him again. He might just cave and take Kane along if Kane expressed a lot of enthusiasm for coming along with him.

In addition to Kane and Xanarn, he needed to speak to Ieyasu. The man knew Rui's identity, that was something that they needed to speak about.

If Ieyasu expressed even the slightest hint of revealing his identity or using it against Rui in any way then...

'I'll kill him. I have no choice.' Rui narrowed his eyes.

This was a different bloodlust from the one he had in their fight. One was for the sake of power, the other was to protect his core interests and his family from a threat that had malicious intent. There was going to be no duel in this case. Rui had no qualms about killing him with a powerful poison if those were the measures he needed to take.

"Ah, you're finally awake, Senior Falken." A nurse greeted him, entering his medical room before bowing deeply. "How do you feel?"

"I had a splitting headache but... now it's gone." Rui murmured, noticing that he felt clear-headed quite rapidly.

"That's expected. You did sleep for three days, after all, the brain needs a brief moment to acclimatize to being awake again." She replied as if it was nothing out of the ordinary.

"Three days?!" Rui frowned. "I know I wasn't injured that badly."

"Do not fret, sir," She replied with a smile. "It is an expected outcome in the medicine industry after the breakthrough to the Senior Realm. It is said that the body needs an additional amount of time to acclimatize to the power of the Senior Realm."

"... 'It is said...?'" Rui asked.

"Well, the power of the Senior Realm is quite confidential, and the medical industry is not entirely exempt. I do not personally know the cause, but we have made sure to follow the rigorous protocols for such cases to the T." She replied.

"I see..." It appeared that the forces that ruled the Martial World made sure to maintain tight grip on the secrets of Martial Art.

Chapter 1315: Key

It wasn't long before Rui was discharged after a health check-up. He found that special clothes.

"Hah..." Rui chuckled as he recognized the Senior-level attire that the three, now five, Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect wore. They were made out of fabric from esoteric fauna that could survive the extensive rigors of Senior-level combat.

"It suits you." Senior Sarak's voice remarked as the man approached Rui. The two of them sized each other up momentarily for the first time since Rui broke through.

'Strange, I don't feel like I'd lose.'

"Congratulations on being the youngest Martial Senior in history. Your fight was a spectacle unlike anything I have ever seen in my entire life." Senior Sarak smiled. "You're going places. That, I know for sure."

"I'd hope so," Rui replied with a brief smirk. "I can't remain here for too much longer."

"I am aware." Senior Sarak remarked. "Walk with me, there are some things that you should know now that you have ascended to the Senior Realm."

The two of them strolled across the Floating Sect leisurely. They would run into a guardian every now and then who would bow with profuse admiration. Rui could feel the difference in his status now that he had become a Martial Senior.

He had top-level authority within the sect as a member of the Floating Sect, only the three Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect could overrule his word now, due to higher seniority.

It wasn't long before they arrived at the highest peak on the island atop a large hill.

"Well?" Rui asked. "What is it that you wanted to tell me?"

"Have you tried activating your Martial Heart since you became a Martial Senior?" Senior Sarak asked calmly.

"...No, there's no point in knocking out the medical staff with the mental pressure, not to mention the risk of a power that I don't know how well I can control," Rui replied.

"Prudent, still, you can't hurt anyone here. Give it a shot." Senior Sarak coaxed it.

"Ok..." He didn't know where the good Senior was going with this, but he obliged.

He closed his eyes, dedicating his senses deep inside his body.

Deeper than he had ever gone.

It was as though barriers had been erased.

It was as though the fog had disappeared.

He came across a mighty ocean.

An ocean of pure power. Power that greatly dwarfed anything he had possessed as a Martial Squire.

It was right there in front of him.

He could reach out at any moment.

And he did, fully expecting to be able to harness it effortlessly.

That was why he was horrified when he wasn't able to.

A final barrier of some sort was preventing him!

It didn't respond no matter how much effort he put into it.

"What?!" Rui exclaimed with a terrified voice. "Why can't I activate it?!"

"Calm down," Senior Sarak stated with a composed voice. "The Martial Heart is a hidden well of power within the Martial Body. You have gained access to it through the Martial Path, treading down that Path to your Heart by developing your Martial Art to maximize the potential of the Martial Body. In other words, the Martial Path is the bridge that gets you to the locations of the Heart, while the Martial Art is the key that opens the door to it."

Rui immediately understood what Senior Sarak was conveying without needing any further explanations.

He activated a breathing technique that was a part of his Martial Art, before reaching out to his Martial Heart again.

BADUMP!

A Senior-level aura radiated through the Floating Sect caressing every sentient lifeform.

It demanded acknowledgment.

It demanded attention.

It demanded respect.

His heart roared into action as his heart rate spiked. Blood itself seemed to begin boiling, shining brightly as it coursed through the Body. Glowing red lines streaked throughout the entirety of his Body from his heart.

His mind grew sharper as well. Time itself seemed to slow down to a crawl. Everything was frozen before him.

His ascended senses granted him an otherworldly awareness. Both its reach and its depth soared to uncharted territory.

He felt all-knowing.

Everything was within his awareness.

Everything on the island, living or non-living, was subject to his mind. Nothing could hide from him. He could peer into the depths of the world with greater ease. Surfaces that used to appear smooth now appeared incredibly rough and bumpy. Things that used to appear stationary were actually quivering and shifting ever so slightly.

A whole new world opened up to him.

It was intoxicating.

"See? It works just fine. The Martial Heart can only be activated through the Martial Art. Always remember that. You should bake that into your memory so that you don't delay the activation of the Martial Heart at crucial moments." Senior Sarak advised. "This is something that all Senior absolutely must know. It is better to learn it from me than to learn it the hard way."

Rui deactivated his Martial Heart, nodding with a look of appreciation. "Thank you for informing me. The psychological shock of not being able to access my Martial Heart would lead to momentary openings that would undoubtedly get me killed."

"Mmmm," Senior Sarak nodded. "Another thing and this is something you already know for the most part, but it is to make sure that you temper your attitude as a Martial Senior. I understand just how confident and powerful you must be feeling with the power of the Senior Realm. It is precisely because of that that I need to warn you..."

He paused for a moment, turning to look Rui in the eye.

"Do not grow arrogant. The power of the Senior Realm is different from the power of the Squire Realm, it is not a permanent passive fixture of your Body that will never fade. It is something that runs out, and once it runs out, it truly brings you closer to your limit. It is because of this that Martial Seniors are not invulnerable. Never forget that."

Rui nodded with a solemn expression.

He understood this better than anyone. After all, he himself had been able to kill a Martial Senior once their Martial Heart ran out, and their guard was lowered. Of course, basically, no Martial Squire he was aware of could replicate that feat, since Ieyasu had also become a Martial Senior.

However, the point remained. Bloating his ego and arrogance with the power of the Senior Realm was a good way for a young Martial Senior to get himself killed.

Chapter 1316: Price of Power.

"As long as you keep this in mind, you at least won't die due to newfound arrogance." Senior Sarak concluded, satisfied with Rui's response. "One more thing. For the time period that the Martial Heart is active, your body will age much faster than the normal rate."

Rui's eyes widened with shock. "...What?"

"Did you think that power came without a price just because you earned it?" Senior Sarak raised an eyebrow. "There is no such thing. The price of the Squire Realm was maddening suffering and the risk of death. The price of the Senior Realm is not acute, it is chronic. For every second you spend with the Martial Heart active, your body will have aged many seconds."

"...I wasn't made aware of this beforehand." Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Neither were any of us. Besides, none of us ever expected you to break through at the age of twenty-four." Senior Sarak smiled bitterly. "But knowing you, I'm sure you've already figured out why we withheld this."

Rui simply stared at him silently.

The knowledge of that was probably detrimental to the probability of breaking through. If Martial Squires knowing of this drawback reduced their enthusiasm and desire for this power, then the reduced intensity of their desire would mean a reduced probability of breakthrough.

In that case, the number of Martial Seniors emerging from Martial Squires would visibly plummet across the continent.

This was nothing short of a disaster.

"In fact, and this is also something I should inform you now that you have become a Martial Senior." Senior Sarak stated. "Informing a Martial Squire of this truth is a transgression that is actually punishable by death by the Panamic Martial Federation. So even if I wanted to, I could not inform you ahead of time."

Rui raised an eyebrow at those words. The Panamic Martial Federation was, in some ways, the international version of the Martial Union. It served as a broker between Martial Artists and the international market. However, it only catered to Martial Artists of the Upper Realms.

The international organization was so absurdly powerful that even Martial Seniors were unworthy of it. In many ways, it was said to act as a body that enforced some fundamental rules that were considered taboo to Martial Artists in the Martial World. It also generally acted to protect the greater interests of the entirety of the Martial Artist class across all of human civilization.

He had never ever actually come into contact with an official, or seen a public office of the Panamic Martial Federation in the Kandrian Empire, or anywhere really.

That supported the notion that it operated at echelons that he was still unable to come into contact with himself. Regardless, he did not intend to violate its rules. The revelation of the accelerated aging was unpleasant, but he understood why it was concealed.

It was worth the price. Easily.

Especially when Martial Hearts did not last too long. Especially when Martial Artists had increased lifespans, anywhere from decades to centuries. Furthermore, life-prolonging potions existed on top of that.

Furthermore, if a Martial Senior truly had such a great problem with the price, then all they had to do was not activate the Martial Heart.

It was as simple as that.

Thus, it made sense to conceal this fact from Martial Squires.

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh. "Understood. I appreciate being informed of that."

"Mmm..." He nodded. "The Panamic Martial Federation also expects Martial Seniors to begin to bear responsibility of Martial Artists. You have reached a stage of power where you are able to create impacts that aren't entirely irrelevant. You will be expected to follow certain norms and guidelines."

"Like...?"

"Malicious and targeted bullying of Martial Squires and Apprentices without cause is something that is frowned upon. It is not declared a Martial sin by the Panamic Martial Federation, but it is best you do not earn their disapproval. As a Martial Senior, you are expected to live up to the name and rise up. If you come across a Martial Squire who has reached enough maturity, then you may inform them about the truth of the Senior Realm and the conditions that they need to fulfill." Senior Sarak explained.

Rui raised an eyebrow as a realization dawned on him. "Is that why Senior Xanarn told me about the Senior Realm out of the blue that night?"

"Indeed." Senior Sarak nodded. "She was fulfilling her responsibility and honoring a tradition that we ourselves have benefitted from. Imagine where you would be if we did not inform you of the truth. Do you see? Just this modest effort responsibility can nourish Martial Art significantly. There are too many impoverished Martial Apprentices and Squires who do not have proper guidance and offer wander aimlessly."

Rui nodded. "No problem with this either. I am not ungrateful or selfish. I will be sure to fulfill it when the time comes."

It didn't hurt to strengthen Martial Art. It may have been the age of Martial Art, but states and other human organizations would still love nothing more than to subjugate Martial Artists and turn them into obedient weapons like how they once were. Unless doing so directly affected him negatively, it was

worth offering guidance to some younglings. He already enjoyed the art of guiding young Martial Artists and aspirants, so he had no compunctions about this norm either.

"Well, that's about it." Senior Sarak concluded. "I have passed on what I am obligated to. Be sure to do the same if you come across one like yourself."

Rui nodded. "I did want to inquire about something. I wanted to know if you knew anything about the Master Realm."

"Haha... no." Senior Sarak shook his head with a mirthless laugh. "I have long given up on the Master Realm. My drive isn't strong enough, and I am too content."

Rui simply stared at him.

He sighed. "...was actually one of the first Squire-level guardians of the Floating Sect long ago. Back then a now-deceased Martial Senior used to be the sole Senior-level guardian. I inherited his responsibility and obtained the power needed to protect and oversee the Floating Sect. I do not have any ambition for a higher Realm power. Now that the Kaddar Treaty Organization has been beaten back practically permanently, I look forward to spending the rest of my days overseeing and guiding these more youthful and ambitious Martial Artists."

It was a sentiment that Rui did not understand nor share, but it was one that he respected nonetheless.

Chapter 1317: Wider

"One thing I do know is that the Master Realm is probably very different from anything before." Senior Sarak added.

Rui nodded. Now that he had become a Martial Senior, his suspicions were confirmed. He was certain that the Master Realm did not tap into an even greater resource of physical power within the body.

There was none left, the Martial Heart truly was the absolute pinnacle and limit of physical power. Then it begged the question of exactly what potential the Master Realm tapped into.

He didn't know, but he wasn't too concerned with knowing about it for now. Of course, he was curious about what exactly it was that allowed Master Deivon and Master Uma to portray themselves in such strange forms to him. He wasn't even sure about what was going on. He would be extremely surprised if they actually physically warped their bodies into a blade of wind and a fortress.

Martial Art was capable of many things, but that sounded too nonsensical. Regardless, even if he didn't know the exact conditions, he knew what he had to do. He was going to stick with developing his Martial Art with individuality, there was no way that he could possibly go wrong with that.

He had already deduced that the nature of the Martial Path was one of a journey of self-maximization. Maximizing the potential of everything that he had to offer by attuning his Martial with him by imbuing it with his individuality.

There was no way he could go wrong in doing that, and it was most likely one of the conditions of breaking through to not just the Master Realm, but perhaps all Realms.

"One more thing." Senior Sarak told Rui. "Given that you're a new Martial Senior, it is best to get the basics out of the way. I would recommend you spend some time sparring with the Martial Heart and get comfortable with it. It is an extension of your power so you do not need to enter a long acclimatization period with it like you did with your Martial Body when you broke through, but it best to psychologically get used to it."

Rui nodded. It was an additional variable that made battle even more complex. he would not accustom himself to always considering it.

"Alright, that's about it," Senior Sarak remarked. "I don't think I missed anything... But you'll be fine even if I did."

Rui smiled wryly at those words. "Is Ieyasu still here?"

"Of course," Senior Sarak replied. "He was up an hour earlier than you. He doesn't have anybody to spar with, so he would be interested in sparring with you as well."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Doesn't he have you guys?"

Senior Sarak laughed mirthlessly. "No, he doesn't. He has already copied our Martial Art very thoroughly years ago. Now that he has developed the Martial Heart, the difference is overwhelming. The same goes for you, though you haven't fought Leonil or myself, so you still have two shots."

Rui knitted his eyebrows. "...But we're newborn Martial Seniors, it doesn't really make sense for us to be able to beat experienced Martial Seniors."

"That logic only applies to the Apprentice and Squire Realms, things work a little differently in the Senior Realm." Senior Sarak replied as a realization dawned on him. "Ah, this was something I forgot to explain to both of you. Thank you for reminding me. But not everybody starts at the same starting line in the Senior Realm. This was true even in the Squire Realm, due to different standards of Martial Bodies, but it is especially true in the Senior Realm."

"...Is it because we retain our Martial Art as is?" Rui realized. "The Squire Realm required everybody to start from scratch, but I was able to use my Squire-level technique seamlessly as a Martial Senior."

"Correct," Senior Sarak replied. "The Martial Art does not need to be rebuilt from the ground-up. Thus, the power level one was at within the Squire Realm has a great impact on what level of power you start at within the Senior Realm. I've known a grade-eight Martial Squire who broke through to the Senior Realm and started out as one of the weakest Seniors that I have ever seen. Then again..."

He glanced at Rui. "I have also come to know Martial Squires were quasi-Seniors. I imagine that they will undoubtedly be well above a baseline entry-level Martial Senior."

Rui was pleased to learn about this. It meant he did not start off as dirt-weak within the Senior Realm, he was already above a proportion of Martial Seniors that had spent quite some time within the Senior Realm.

His mind flashed back across his memories as he revisited all the Martial Seniors he had ever met.

'Senior Geringan and Senior Ceeran are the only two Martial Seniors I know from the Kandrian Empire and...' Rui heaved a sigh. 'They would probably be able to beat me up thoroughly.'

He wasn't entirely sure he could beat the Martial Seniors of Vilun Island, but he was a lot more confident against them than the previous. He had superior techniques and body, but they had an overwhelming amount of experience against him. It would be an interesting contest.

It was a shame he couldn't go back and test himself against them, it would mean exposing himself to the Martial Union office stationed there, which most likely meant exposing himself to Chairman Deacon.

"Remember this, the strength of the Martial Heart is what determines the raw output of any Martial Senior regardless of their Martial Art. This applies even to more esoteric fields such as poison techniques and mental techniques." Senior Sarak stated. "Both Martial Body and Martial Heart are now the variables that determine raw output. This is why the Senior Realm is even wider than the Squire Realm, it simply has much greater variance due to the introduction of a new variable."

This was another insight that was very significant to Rui.

Chapter 1318: Acceptance

Rui appreciated the time that Senior Sarak took to explain all these matters to him. It was definitely quite insightful and did not leave him stumbling in the dark.

"If the strength of Martial Heart is a variable, then does it grow stronger over time?" Rui asked.

"Of course, this happens with or without the activation of the Martial Heart." Senior Sarak explained. "The Martial Heart is an accumulation of hidden power slowly created by the body trickling energy into across the lifetime. That does not suddenly stop once you activate it."

"I see..." Rui murmured. 'That probably explains why my Martial Heart was weaker than Ieyasu's.'

In which case, older Martial Artists were probably significantly stronger than he was. Although he understood the reason behind this rule, it was still an unpleasant realization. He did not want to wait decades to reach that level of power purely because his body's natural growth could not keep up with him.

He wasn't too concerned, however. He suspected that there almost certainly were ways to shorten or even bypass these long wait times just like he had with the esoteric drug treatment that he had gone through in the Seonmun Church Town.

"Alright, I have shared everything I need to share." Senior Sarak eventually said. "I'm sure you have many things to do, so get going."

He did.

"Thank you." Rui bowed to him with respect and gratitude, before leaving.

He immediately activated his Martial Heart.

BADUMP!

His awareness widened and deepened as he scanned the entire island looking for Kane.

"Tsk tsk, you're like a child who got his hands on a new toy." Senior Sarak tutted. "Don't use the Martial Heart so frivolously. It's a precious limited resource that you need to preserve."

Rui smirked at the comparison. He would be lying if he said it wasn't true when it came to things related to Martial Art. He was just looking for excuses to use the Martial Heart. "I'll keep that in mind."

He deactivated it, immediately heading towards Kane's chamber. Kane had already moved into the first chamber of the Floating Sect since Ieyasu was now a Martial Senior and automatically forfeited his claim to it.

It wasn't long before Kane opened the door to his bell, widening his eyes. "You're back!"

"Back, I am," Rui smirked.

"How did it feel to wake up knowing you're a Martial Senior?" Kane smirked as the two of them began wandering aimlessly.

"It was surreal." Rui heaved a sigh. "Almost too much to believe."

"I can imagine. I bet you're itching to activate your Martial Heart and abuse it to the limit, huh?"

"You know me too well," Rui smirked. "But there are more important and urgent things."

He glanced at Kane who had a knowing melancholic smile.

"...I get it. You don't have to worry." Kane shook his head. "I am not a kid who cannot accept reality."

"I haven't even told you what it is."

"Like I said... I'm not a kid."

He may as well have been a kid from Rui's perspective, but he was actually an adult in his mid-twenties. In some ways, he was even more mature than Rui was, especially when it came to Martial Art.

"You probably worried about actually breaking the news to me, so I'll cut you some slack and state I don't have a problem with it." Kane stated clearly. "I understand it's highly impractical for a Martial Squire to accompany a Martial Senior, especially one like yourself who is bound to get wrapped in places and matters that simply are far beyond my power to impact. It's probably the best for both of us."

Rui heaved a sigh. He had come to appreciate Kane even more, he truly was worth someone to be around. "I hate it even more than you do... But it is best for both of us. You're not too far from fulfilling the conditions to the Senior realm. If you spend a few years solely to developing your Martial Heart, I strongly suspect that you will have reached the cusp of it, however..."

"I know," Kane sighed. "Nobody breaks through to the Senior Realm in the Floating Sect, aside from you two monsters. This place is too detached from people's Martial drives."

Rui nodded. "If you want to break through, you most certainly will need to leave and expose yourself to the world."

Kane nodded. "I... think I will return to the Kandrian Empire."

Rui's eyes widened at those words.

"In the first place, we both know Chairman Deacon was truly after you, not me as much," Kane spoke. "I'm sure he hates my guts as well to a lesser degree, but he probably does not want to do anything to me."

They both knew why.

"My father is an aggressive violent offensive Martial Artist who is looking for an excuse to pick fights." Kane sighed. "Nobody will dare to put so much as a scratch on me in the Kandrian Empire. Sage Arrancar, the Raging Devil, is one of the nine Martial Sages of the Kandrian Empire. It is both physical and political suicide to kill his prodigious genius son outside of a fair fight."

Rui nodded. This was the good side of being born in the Arrancar Family. Chairman Deacon was an insect before the might of the Arrancar Family. The Martial Sage of the Shionel Confederation answered to the interest of the national security, he did not answer to Chairman Deacon.

If Chairman Deacon did something stupid like provoking a war with the Martial Union by antagonizing one of its very highest leaders, then the Shionel Confederation would rather watch him get gobbled up than fight a losing war.

Chairman Deacon was known as the hellhound, but he was not stupid. Once Kane entered the Kandrian Empire, his biggest threat was the Arrancar Family, not Chairman Deacon.

"But your family is going to shackle you the moment you get back. Probably by force..." Rui's voice faltered as he realized that that was what Kane was looking for.

One of his greatest driving forces was breaking free from the Arrancar Family, by subjecting himself to them, he was giving himself a chance to break through to the Senior Realm by trying to forcefully overcome any Squire-level apprehended they sent him.

"That is extremely risky. If it doesn't work out, you'll be captured on the spot." Rui narrowed his eyes.

Chapter 1319: Refusal

"If the Senior Realm was that easy to break through to, I wouldn't have to go through this." Kane sighed.

Yet his eyes were filled with determination.

Rui understood his sentiment, though. The breakthrough condition for the Senior Realm was harsh. One needed to be subjected to a challenge that threatened the object of the desire behind one's Martial drive. In Kane's case, that meant his freedom from his family needed to be challenged and threatened.

On top of that, the challenge also needed to exceed what Kane could handle with his existing power. Meaning he needed to be apprehended by multiple powerful Martial Squires or a grade-ten Martial Squire even higher than him, but not too much higher. Just higher enough to push him past his limits and activate the Martial Heart.

It was an exceedingly niche and difficult condition to fulfill. Certainly not something that he could fulfill sitting within the relatively safe environment of the Floating Sect. Of course, he would have to risk his life against challengers who sought the first chamber, but the risk of death was bread and butter for Martial Artists, it was far from enough.

That was why Kane wanted to return to the Kandrian Empire, a dangerous place for him, and risk his freedom. All for the sake of breaking through to the Senior Realm.

"However, that means you have an additional drive for power itself, not just freedom since you're willing to risk freedom for power," Rui noted.

"Yeah..." Kane agreed, refusing to elaborate further.

It was a bit embarrassing for him to admit that he wanted to be strong enough to be able to accompany Rui.

"Besides, I look forward to meeting our friends. Fae..." He sighed.

Rui smirked. "It's a shame I won't be able to see that reunion."

"She's going to be super mad." Kane snorted.

"Don't forget to sell them the lie that I am still in the Kandrian Empire," Rui reminded him. "Definitely don't mention the Floating Sect or any of the things we did after leaving the Kandrian Empire."

The two spent quite some time bantering and chatting some more as they wandered around the Floating Sect, since they would be parting ways once Rui was ready to leave the Floating Sect. Rui even sparred with Kane to test his progress with the knives.

WHOOSH!

"Wow," Rui murmured as he evaded a blindingly swift flurry of slashes. "No wonder you got to the second chamber. Daggers give you a level of lethality that you would have to waste too much time to attain otherwise. That combined with your speed and agility, you're an incredible threat."

"Hehe, this isn't my limit. Watch what happens when I use it in conjugation with Fulminata!"

Rui had to admit that Kane had grown truly formidable. He even suspected that Kane could possibly be able to reach the final eight of the Virodhabhasa Contest. He was probably above Frinjschia but below Meera.

It wasn't long before the two of them wrapped their sparring session.

"We gotta do this more often," Kane remarked.

"It does sound fun," Rui replied. It was true as long as he did not create a new predictive model for Kane's new twin-blade offense and also did not use his Martial Heart.

"Well, you better get going," Kane told Rui out of the blue. "I'm sure you have a lot of important stuff to do and plan knowing you. So don't worry about me."

Rui smiled melancholically. "Same time tomorrow then."

The two of them parted ways. Kane was just the first person on the list of people he needed to talk to.

"...Is now a bad time?" Rui asked when Senior Xanarn opened the door to him.

"Is it ever?" She asked with a strange smile. "Welcome back. Congratulations on breaking through to the Senior Realm."

Rui smiled as she ushered him in. The two of them already knew what they needed to speak about, making the air a little awkward unlike normal.

"...I'm going to be leaving soon," Rui told her straightforwardly.

"I'm aware," She replied with a melancholic smile. "I'm sure you'll be able to accomplish more with another Martial Senior by your side."

"You're not wrong... but I don't want you to come with me," He stated clearly.

She opened her eyes, looking straight at him wordlessly.

"I know that you feel extremely burdened with debt." Rui continued. "But I don't want to see you leave the place that you have dedicated yourself to protect for my sake. I know you love the Floating Sect, it doesn't bring me any joy to tear you away from it."

"I get to decide what I do with my life." Her tone grew a little sterner. "I appreciate your concern, but I live by my principles."

"I don't want to control you," Rui shook his head. "It's the opposite. It is because I don't want to control you that I don't want you to abide by me to repay the debt you feel burdened by."

"You saved my life." She declared.

"Then repay me by actually living it." Rui retorted.

Those words took her aback.

"Because you won't be if you follow me out of principled obligation," Rui stated. "You're invalidating it if you follow me purely because of obligation. The kind of life I will be living is very different from the peace that you have found on this island. This..."

He gestured around them. "...isn't for me. Three years ago I was given a choice to choose between this at the cost of my freedom to pursue my Martial Path and life freely, and I firmly chose the latter. I'm doomed to live a life of perilous chaos, and I'm fine with that. I have powerful enemies, and I do not want to expose you or the Floating Sect to them. I enjoy forging my own path. But it will be torturous for someone who is accustomed to and yearns for peace."

She shook her head. "I refuse. I still must repay my debt."

He narrowed his eyes. He could not allow that to happen.

The idea of Master Uma or Chairman Deacon learning about her importance to him by traveling with him if he ever got exposed was too scary. He already had enough of a headache with Chairman Deacon essentially holding his family hostage, he did not need the Floating Sect to join the list.

Chapter 1320: Solution

Rui stared at her. He knew that she was stubborn enough to refuse to simply let it be. In that case, he wished he had anticipated this and asked Senior Sarak to tell her that the Floating Sect had procured the treatment. That way, everything would be fine.

He enjoyed her company, but he didn't want her along. Although she was probably a bit stronger than him in a general sense due to her many years in the Senior Realm, she too did not have the drive to reach the Master Realm and had not made too much progress since hitting the Senior Realm.

It couldn't be helped, many things could be accomplished since hitting the Senior Realm, and the three Martial Seniors had largely found what they wanted with its power.

Unfortunately for Rui, that meant that she was going to become a liability in the long run. Not only was he not going to stagnate like she did, he was going to maintain his highest efforts to continue pursuing his Martial Path.

Project Water was waiting. Furthermore, even greater power than he already possessed was waiting as well.

She would be left in the dust rather quickly. He especially did not want to involve her in matters where she was likely to be hurt, like in his eventual operations against Chairman Deacon. Thus bringing her along with him was out of the question, he cared too much for her.

Unlike Kane, she did not have an affinity for these kinds of operations indicating that she would excel at them like Kane did with his Void Step.

However, he knew that she wouldn't listen and would follow him no matter what. The only way he could possibly avoid that is by leaving the Floating Sect like a thief when she was asleep without bidding her goodbye or knocking her out if she tried following him.

As painful as it was, he was tempted. The issue was that they led fundamentally different lives, and it made their relationship shaky. What they needed were partners who would not pull them out of their own lifestyles.

He did not want to settle down and live a peaceful monotonous life. She did not want to lead a chaotic and dangerous life like he did, traveling from place to place.

There had to be a way for him to satisfy her principled obligation to repay her debt without dragging her into a life she did not wish to be in, while also not running away from her feelings.

His mind quickly scoured through all the possibilities until it arrived upon one that was quite interesting.

"If... I asked you to protect my family, could do that for me?" Rui asked with a serious expression.

She opened her eyes staring at him. "...This is the first time you have opened up about your personal life."

"I normally can't afford to trust people enough to." Rui narrowed his eyes. "I told you. I have powerful enemies. It will be better for you if you just close your eyes and forget about me."

"I am not a child." She sternly retorted. "I understand and accept the tribulations that come with repaying my debt to someone who leads a life like yours. If it is your family, then I will protect them. I swear that I will do everything in my power to ensure that no harm will befall them."

Rui simply stared at her. "...You will have to leave behind the life that you have cultivated in the Floating Sect for quite some time. Years."

"Then so be it." She declared.

Rui smiled.

At that moment, he couldn't help but think about how exquisite her beauty was.

"I know this isn't any of my business, but why don't you protect your family yourself?" She asked earnestly.

He shook his head. "I only recently became a Martial Senior. And not even a Martial Senior is not enough, not a weak one anyway. I need more power. Furthermore, I need to eliminate the root cause of the threat rather than just protect my family from it. I have taken other strong measures to protect them, but an additional Martial Senior will not hurt."

"I see... Is that why you're traveling around?"

Rui nodded. "Among other reasons."

"In that case, I promise you can entrust your family to me until you return." She smiled. "How do you want me to protect them? You'll need to be more specific so that I don't mess this up."

Rui nodded as he began describing the situation of the orphanage and how she was to go about it.

Initially, he considered having her join the Martial Union as an external member and partake in the Senior-level security detail that the Martial Union had gathered for him. But that was not going to add much of a deterrence since it was too indistinguishable.

He wanted to make a visible change.

He wanted to remind Chairman Deacon that he was not going to let his family be hurt.

He also planned to have her inform his family that not only was he alive, but he was always thinking for them.

And most importantly, he was sorry.

Of course, there were many issues that needed to be cleanly handled. For example, if Chairman Deacon managed to track her background down, he might be able to figure out that Rui was part of the Floating Sect.

His mind coursed through many potential outcomes as he thought of a variety of solutions to avoid negative ones.

"Hey..." Her hand brushed across his cheek. "It will be fine. Your family is blessed to have someone like you to protect them."

He gazed into her eyes with a melancholic expression. "If it weren't for me, they wouldn't need protection in the first place. It would have been better for them if I was not born into their family."

Her expression fell. She leaned forward, bumping her head into his. "I don't think they would feel that way. So why should you? When I tell your family of the lengths that you have gone through to protect them, they will understand."