

Martial Unity 1321

Chapter 1321: Debate

He spent more time with her than he had anticipated. By the time he had left her place, his hair and clothes were in a mess.

He sighed with a mild smirk on his face as he left her personal quarters.

He had one more person to speak with before it was time to leave.

He activated a breathing technique while activating his Martial Heart.

BADUMP!

The breadth and depth of his senses spiked as his mind came to behold the entire island. He immediately spotted Ieyasu, who was actually quite some distance away from the island in the sky.

He activated Gale Force Breathing as he took a single step forward.

WHOOSH!!!

Instantly, the world around him shifted as Xanarn's personal quarters disappeared into the distance in an instant.

He had reached the edge of the island with a single step.

The second step brought him right to Ieyasu.

He turned back, looking at the island that he had already left well behind in the distance. In just a matter of seconds, he had traveled dozens of kilometers.

'Incredible...' He couldn't help but marvel at the power of the Martial Heart before deactivating and turning towards Ieyasu.

The two of them simply stared at each other for a few seconds.

They didn't entirely know how to regard each other. They weren't friends, but they weren't exactly enemies either. They simply recognized that they were useful tools to each other that could facilitate their breakthrough to a higher Realm.

The assumption was that one of them would die in the process, and that was a risk both of them were willing to endure.

The possibility that not only would both of them survive but also would break through to the Senior Realm was essentially non-existent.

Yet it happened.

"...I have some important matters to speak to you about." Rui began. "You know my identity. I have no doubt that you have managed to glean some other information about me, to what extent, I don't know. However, here's what I do know..."

The air curdled as a profoundly faint bloodlust arose from Rui. "...Should you use that information maliciously... I will kill you. It won't be a fair fight. It won't even be a fight. It won't be an honorable death. One day you'll be sipping tea only to find yourself coughing blood uncontrollably. One day, you'll be taking a shit only to find a blade sticking out of your chest."

His eyes narrowed. "Do not give me a reason to make you my enemy. It will not end well for either of us, but especially not you."

The man stared deep into Rui's eyes, his own reflecting the void that loomed deep within Rui's eyes.

"You seem to be under a grave misconception." He remarked, never removing his fixed stare from Rui. "You... do not matter. The only reason your existence had meaning and value to me is because you served as a means to an end. Now that those ends have been acquired, you have already left my cognition."

"Who you are... Where you came from... None of that matters to me." He declared. "Within a few months, I will have forgotten what you look like. Within a year, your name will have escaped me. I have more important things to dedicate my mind to. Nothing is worthy of my malice, not even you. Take your irksome paranoia and get out of here before I change my mind and finish what I promised I would do to you."

Rui simply stared at him with a pointed look, as if he was trying to convey something.

"...What are you doing?" Ieyasu frowned mildly.

"Well, you can read my mind right?" Rui tilted his head. "So you should know what I am thinking."

"I do not have that technique activated at all times, it is quite burdensome and I don't care for people's thoughts outside of combat," Ieyasu stated.

"Interesting..." Rui's eyes grew clouded with interest.

"Don't make me repeat myself." Ieyasu's eyes narrowed. "You have already delayed my training enough."

Rui glanced back at him with a cautious expression. "You swear you won't divulge my personal information?"

"I don't swear lightly." He replied coldly. "I don't care whether you believe me or not."

Rui simply stared at him in silence for a few moments. "...Well, I guess I'll have to take you at your word for now. Especially since I can't kill you."

"Of course, you can't." Ieyasu snorted.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Exactly what it sounds like. You cannot kill me, I am superior."

"Our battle was a tie." Rui protested.

"My Martial Heart is stronger," Ieyasu stated.

"My Martial Art is stronger." Rui retorted. "Besides, I'm younger, I have greater potential and quicker growth than you, so I will surpass you."

"Only because you had me to help you grow stronger. My Martial Art has that effect on people who can survive it."

"You had me to help you grow stronger. My Martial Art does the same thing too. So I still end up having more potential and growth than you."

"You had me at the age of twenty-four when you reached the peak of the Squire Realm." Ieyasu narrowed his eyes. "I had nobody when I reached the peak of the Squire Realm at the same age six years ago. I had to spend five years searching for someone who was cut from the same cloth as me, and then I had to wait an additional year for you to mature and reach my level."

Rui paused.

That was actually a good point. Rui did indeed luck out meeting Ieyasu at the right time.

"Imagine how long it would have taken to break through to the Senior Realm if you did not have me." Ieyasu narrowed his eyes. "You would have had to wait for years on end for a suitable candidate, you would have easily reached my age without having found an opportunity to break through. You broke through earlier than me because you were luckier than me. Nothing more."

Rui snorted, yet he remained silent, wordlessly conceding that point.

Chapter 1322: Competitive

It would be disgraceful for him to deny the convenience of his breakthrough. Things could have unfolded much worse if Ieyasu did not exist. Considering that his family very well may have been saved by Ieyasu helping Rui breakthrough so early, Rui decided not to pursue that line of argument.

He was being weirdly childish, in hindsight.

They both were. A debate about who was superior where they tried flexing on the other was uncharacteristic of both.

Rui did not enjoy bragging about his superiority to other Martial Artists. He couldn't but feel like a jerk picking on the weak when he did that. In general, he disliked demeaning others due to their lack of talent compared to his spectacular growth.

But with Ieyasu, something was just a little different. He was on par with Rui, so a competitive spirit that Rui had almost never experienced before welled up.

'...When was the last time I felt that competitive?' Rui couldn't help but wonder.

Not even Meera had made him feel that competitive, he mostly felt pity for her in the latter half of the fight.

The abyssfeeder came close, but it was too non-sentient.

Before that...

'It was when I fought Kane in the Martial Contest preliminaries.' Rui mused, as his mind flashed back to an ancient memory.

Now he found an equal who he did not need to worry about falling behind or hurting his feelings due to clear superiority. They were basically of the same generation and they had many things in common.

"If you have nothing else to say then leave me alone while I train," Ieyasu remarked.

"Now now, don't be so quick to dismiss me," Rui smirked. "You're going to be training to test your limits in the Senior Realm, aren't you? I have yet to do the same thing and what better way is there to go about it than against an equal?"

Rui took a simple stance mid-air, facing Ieyasu.

"You are annoying but..." Ieyasu turned to face him. "...Your suggestion does have merit."

"It's just training too," Rui smirked. "No need to be competitive."

"Indeed," A competitive glint flashed in Ieyasu's eyes as he took his eyes. "No need to be competitive."

It soon became a competition.

BADUMP!

The two of them lashed forward at top speed as their Martial Hearts blazed into action.

The very air around them incinerated with the sheer friction from the speed of their charges.

POW POW POW!!!

A flurry of blows was exchanged as they immediately rushed into action.

The very skies shook in the wake of their onslaught.

Both Ieyasu and Rui immediately activated their most powerful Martial Art techniques. The VOID algorithm blazed into action as Ieyasu activated his Mind Eye technique.

Rui was determined to win this time.

He was confident too. After all, in their previous fight, Ieyasu heavily benefitted from the damage he had inflicted on Rui early on in the fight before Rui adapted to his own mirror image.

That damage would not exist anymore, and it would give him the edge that he didn't have last time.

His mind raced into action as he observed Ieyasu closely. He didn't know which Martial Art he was going to go with, however, he had developed predictive models for all of his copies, including the one of his own.

Yet his eyes narrowed as Ieyasu raced forward with Gale Force Breathing, Outer Convergence, and Thundering Lance coupled with a Flowing Canon. It appeared that Ieyasu had chosen to fight Rui with his own Martial Art for the third time.

"I told you, didn't I?" Rui narrowed his eyes. "You cannot copy the true power of my Martial Art."

"I don't need it." Ieyasu snorted. "The true power of my Martial Art is superior."

"We'll see about that." Rui activated Hypertrophic Surge.

In a symmetric battle, the stronger one won. Last time, he had needed to use Weaving Blood at full power just to undo all the damage he had initially suffered, this time he could channel those resources towards a more offensive means of end.

Rui's predictive model matched Ieyasu's Mind Eye. However, his patterns served him less well because he didn't have the VOID algorithm, he had previously balanced that out with a stronger Martial Heart, making them dead equal.

But with Hypertrophic Surge entering the equation, Rui could finally gain an edge on Ieyasu even in the Senior Realm.

Ieyasu shifted to the left as his right arm twitched ever so slightly.

'Right hook; Ninety-nine-point-eight percent certainty and accuracy.' Rui ducked, launching an uppercut, looking to knock him out.

And yet;

BOOM!!!

He barely managed to block a powerful kick, flinging him away, and glancing at Ieyasu. He was using a kicking Martial Art that he had copied from one of the guardians.

He narrowed his eyes, rushing forward. Rui immediately recalled the predictive model that he had built for the kicking Martial Art.

And yet;

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!

A flurry of elbow and knee blows crashed into Rui, throwing off his predictive model yet again. He rushed forward this time, using the patterns of yet another new Martial Art, throwing Rui's predictive model again.

"I see," Rui narrowed his eyes. "That's clever."

"Did you think I would make the same mistake again?" Ieyasu snorted. "You underestimate me."

None of Ieyasu's copies were effective against Rui. The best was his copy of Rui's Flowing Void style, but even that was no longer enough now that Rui could use Hypertrophic Surge to gain an advantage in what was an equal clash.

Thus he had decided to use all his copied Martial Art in rapid succession, chosen randomly. Because, unlike everybody else, he had the ability to alter the fundamental core of his being to change his patterns, he could invalidate Rui's pattern recognition model.

And yet;

BOOM!!!

Rui's fist crashed into his abdomen, flinging him away, and leaving him grimacing.

"That's only a partial solution." Rui snorted as he raced forward. "I still can predict all your Martial Art, you can only delay the progress of my adaptation by a single attack."

Yet he understood that that was all that Ieyasu needed to bridge the gap between them. The two of them raged forth in a battle that rang across the Kaddar Region.

Chapter 1323: Plans

Senior Leonil sky-walked up behind Senior Sarak who stood in the sky, looking away into the distance.

"How long have they been at it?" Senior Leonil asked, yawning.

"A few hours now," Senior Sarak replied, sighing.

"It's impressive that their Martial Hearts are not giving out." Senior Leonil remarked. "Still, they should be keeping careful."

"They're far too competitive for that," Senior Sarak snorted. "It can't be helped given the rivalry that they have. The pinnacle of talent and potential. The most powerful Martial Paths that I have come across, and the opponent against whom they broke through in a battle that ended up being a draw. Expecting them to regard each other as an ordinary sparring partner is unrealistic."

"Haha, true. More importantly..." Senior Leonil gazed over with interest. "...Who's winning?"

"So far, all their battles have been stalemates." Senior Sarak stated. "They end up in a draw when their Martial Hearts run out and they're in their base forms."

"At this point, they're just fighting each other to win. They probably have long forgotten about any notion of simply acclimatizing themselves to the power of the Senior Realm."

"There's no doubt about that." Senior Sarak chuckled. "Still, I am not averse to them fighting out in the open where the Kaddar Treaty Organization can see."

Senior Leonil narrowed his eyes as he caught the man's drift. "...You're using them as a deterrent."

Senior Sarak nodded. "If Kaddar nations think we have gained two extra Martial Seniors on retainer, then they will never even dare to think about attacking us again."

"Makes sense." Senior Leonil nodded.

"The Kingdom of Graheria has already backed out of the Kaddar Treaty, along with a few others." Senior Sarak remarked. "If we can get a few more key nations to walk out, then Ajanta Island will finally be safe forever."

The two of them watched silently as Rui and Ieyasu clashed with each other in the distant sky.

POW POW POW!

The two of them furiously exchanged barrages of blows against each other, looking to gain an advantage. Rui narrowed his eyes as Ieyasu shifted his weight ever so slightly.

WHOOSH!

He managed to avoid a surprise spinning high kick from a rapid change in Martial Art, having predicted it.

Over the past few days, he had managed to develop a predictive model to predict what Martial Art Ieyasu would choose, allowing him to slowly overcome the small advantage that Ieyasu had gained by chaotically shifting the Martial Art that he used.

POW!

Rui grinned as he managed to land a clean hook to the face, knocking the man backward.

Yet Ieyasu was not sitting still either.

BOOM!!!

Rui grimaced as he leaped back from a clash. The two of them panted as they took their distance, pausing momentarily. Their Martial Hearts were nearly out, the battle had nearly come to a close.

Rui's eyes furrowed. "Damn, you did manage to copy Hypertrophic Surge. Or something approximating."

"I don't need to have the exact technique replicated," Ieyasu remarked. "As long as I understand the output of the technique, I can replicate using my own principles. In this case, you are simply sacrificing other performance parameters for more strength. I can replicate that principle with ease."

Rui sighed as a hint of pride appeared on Ieyasu's face. "Guess today is a draw as well?"

"There's no point in continuing without the Martial Heart, it defeats the purpose of the sparring," Ieyasu noted. "We have grown smoother and cleaner in our movements."

"True, yet the rate of growth has been reducing, so we've probably come very close to being acclimatized considering diminishing returns," Rui remarked. "My time on this island is coming to an end."

He glanced at Ieyasu. "What do you plan on doing from here on out? You've been at the Floating Sect for six years."

"That is none of your business." Ieyasu snorted.

Rui heaved an exasperated sigh. "I meant how are you going to navigate your path to a higher Realm?"

Ieyasu paused for a moment, before relenting. "...I plan to return to my Master and gain some insights before setting on another journey to gain more power."

"You have a Master?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"What about it?"

"Nothing... Just didn't expect you to have one. I thought you would be too prideful."

"I am not. I merely state fact. People interpret that as pride." Ieyasu declared in a detached manner. "There is nothing wrong with seeking guidance from a Martial Artist much further down their Martial Path and in a much higher Realm of power. It allows you to grow stronger much faster."

"Hmmm..." Rui simply stared at him with an interested expression.

He had a few Master acquaintances.

Headmaster Aronian. The good elder Master had always served as a guide, without being too overbearing. However, the distance between them was too great. Greater than Rui had ever imagined.

Of course, he understood that Masters were unimaginably stronger than Apprentices back when he was an Apprentice himself. But it was only now that he had reached the Senior Realm that he understood how astronomically superior Masters.

Even today, after all the power that he had accrued he was helpless against Masters. He had felt their power up close and knew that it truly was in a Realm above.

He suspected that the jump between Senior and Master was probably quite important. There was a fundamental difference between the Upper and Lower Realms, and he had a feeling he knew what it was.

Now that he had activated his Martial Heart, he could truly feel that his body had nothing left to offer. There were no further deeper wells of physical power that he could reach to access even greater power.

Whatever the Master Realm was based on, it was not physical power. Perhaps he too ought to get himself a Master to gain a bit of guidance on the Master Realm. It was truly a shame that he didn't get to hang out with Master Deivon as a Martial Senior.

The man would be truly proud of Rui when he learned about his breakthrough to the Senior Realm.

Chapter 1324: Beggar's Sect

"Had your fun with your new friend?" Senior Sarak smiled as he sat down in his office, offering a seat to Rui.

"I wouldn't say we are friends," Rui replied. "But yes, it was fun. The power of the Senior Realm is intoxicating."

"Indeed, every Martial Senior feels that way at the start." Senior Sarak remarked. "Now then, what is it that you wanted to speak about?"

"I wanted some help from the intelligence department of the Floating Sect," Rui stated. "I was hoping they could point me in the right direction. Specifically, what I am looking for is strategic intelligence on the chairman of the international corporation Deacon Industries. His security measures, schedule, travel patterns, etc. Any and everything that one might need to kill him."

Rui didn't mind exposing this to Senior Sarak. There was enough trust between the two that the man would not use the intelligence in an untoward manner.

Senior Sarak had the sense to not ask why Rui wanted such information. He merely fell into some thought.

"Well, for starters, you can consult forces within the Shionel Confederation." Senior Sarak stated. "There are a lot of people within the nation who have reason to plot against Chairman Deacon, they will have the intelligence you're looking for."

"Let's say that I can't go anywhere near the Shionel Confederation due to various reasons." Rui shook his head.

"Hm, in that case, it's best to contact the surrounding nations in the geographic vicinity." Senior Sarak thoughtfully responded. "They too will have collected such intelligence."

"I am aware," Rui replied. "I am also aware that the further away I go from the Shionel Confederation, the lower the probability that I will find the intelligence I am looking for."

"In that case..."

"The issue is that I want to be as discreet as possible. I do not want to ring any alarms, which is not impossible considering the surrounding nations are only Master-level at most, and it is quite likely that chairman has enough influence to detect someone snooping for him." Rui informed him.

"Is that so? Hmm... I am a little out of my depth here."

A few minutes later, the deputy director of the intelligence department himself entered Senior Sarak's office.

"You summoned me, sir?"

Rui recognized the man. This was the same man who had summoned Rui after Rui discovered the gravitational stabilizer weapon that the Kingdom of Graheria had procured.

It wasn't long before he was filled up on that matter.

"You are correct, Senior Falken." The deputy director stated. "It is not improbable that you will trigger alarms in the Deacon Industries' intelligence department. The best intelligence divisions do not suppress information about their organization but rather place spies within various networks that sell that information to see who is interested in purchasing such information."

Rui nodded.

If he haphazardly contacted a surrounding nation that was not diplomatically on the best terms with the Shionel Confederation, then there was a good chance that it would get leaked and Chairman Deacon would be notified of a Martial Senior targeting him.

"What you require is something more distanced from the influence of Deacon Industries with high-quality information-gathering abilities." The deputy director explained. "However, the more distant they are, the more powerful they need to be to be able to gather strategic intelligence on Chairman Deacon from afar. Furthermore, the price for such information will also be higher due to the distance. It won't be easy to negotiate with such a powerful force even as a Martial Senior and the price will also be considerable."

Rui narrowed his eyes as he fell into thought. His own conclusions more or less agreed with the deputy director's analysis, though he may underestimated the difficulty a bit.

"...If I had to recommend an endeavor based on my knowledge and experience. then it would have to be approaching the Beggar's Sect." The director stated.

Rui narrowed his eyes.

It wasn't that he hadn't heard of that name before, but it was not something he knew much about.

"The Beggar's Sect is perhaps the most unique intelligence organization in existence." The deputy director stated. "The reason for this is because it is an organization that is almost exclusively comprised of low-class individuals. Workers and laborers and even literal beggars. They are everywhere and are among the most invisible class of people, while also forming the most important substrate of human civilization. Farmers, manual laborers of all kinds as well as low-skill laborers for processing and transporting goods and services are a universal necessity. This gives them power. Together they have eyes and ears everywhere in the Human Domain in totality."

Rui grew more curious about this organization.

Not only did they sound quite interesting, but it did sound as if they could get him what he needed.

"Furthermore, they do all of this without employing extravagant espionage technology or Martial Art." The deputy director stated. "They are an embodiment of the power of quantity, as opposed to quality. They have ten thousand ordinary men, women, and even children for every elite intelligence agent that most organizations have. The sheer quantity of information they deal in is staggering."

The more the director spoke about them, the more Rui was willing to give them a chance. The fact that they did not employ esoteric espionage technology or Martial Art was not a negative point as long as they could get the job done.

It was actually a good point, it meant that as a Martial Senior, he would be able to offer services that they otherwise could not access. Even if they were managed by regular people, there were things that no amount of quantity could possibly substitute. A Martial Senior was not low in value, and he did not have extravagant prices, all he wanted was intelligence on Chairman Deacon, that's it.

"Where can I meet them?" Rui asked with raised eyebrows.

"That is a bit... complicated." The deputy director smiled wryly. "Because they do not have access to anti-espionage technology or the resources to build highly concealed and secure bases, they have mastered to the highest degree the art of hiding in plain sight as opposed to concealing themselves entirely. They have also mastered the art of using chaos to obscure their presence. Finding them is impossible if they do not want to be found."

Chapter 1325: Capabilities

He had already decided.

It was a more alluring option than approaching any conventional intelligence organization, or states and other organizations with intelligence divisions and departments.

"There are many publically known channels to reaching the Beggar's Sect, actually. Locations where it is said that one can approach them."

Rui frowned. "That doesn't sound like hiding in plain sight."

The deputy director shook his head. "Trust me, you'll understand if you actually visit those places. For now, I can prepare a list of public channels to meet. However, there are some things that you should keep in mind if you do decide to go for this option."

"Ok..." Rui listened carefully.

"Firstly, they're going to identify you as a Martial Artist long before you step into that place. I am aware that you have remarkable disguising ability based on your covert operation in the Graheria Kingdom, but it is far from sufficient to fool the eyes of the Beggar's Sect. It is best if you do not try too hard to fool them because the only thing you will accomplish is informing them that you want to deceive them. That does not leave a good first impression. They are very distrusting people."

Rui expected as much. He highly doubted Mind Mask would be anywhere near sufficient to fool them into thinking he was just an ordinary person. Just suppressing his aura wasn't enough.

They had most likely mastered the art of observation to the highest degree humanly possible. It was their only means of gathering information, after all.

"One more thing to keep in mind is that they are not purely a commercial intelligence organization," The director told Rui. "They are an organization that is comprised of ordinary people, by ordinary people. Naturally, their agendas lean toward the common folk as well. They lend their intelligence capabilities to forces whose interests at the very least do not conflict with the common folk. That means if the reason you want the information you seek is against the interests of common folks, then they will not only find out but also refuse to cooperate with you."

"Interesting..." Rui's eyebrow rose.

Thankfully, he did not intend to harm the interests of common folk. Taking Chairman Deacon was probably in the interests of common folk. He had formed an oligopoly in the esoteric supply and esoteric technological manufacturing sector that not only aggressively crushed smaller competitors run by more ordinary people but also squeezed the maximum utility out of his laborers and workers for as minimal of compensation as he could get away to maximize profit margins.

Although he didn't cross the boundaries of illegal, what was legal in a country as libertarian as the Shionel Confederation was probably considered unethical everywhere else, including the Beggar's Sect.

Thus he highly doubted that they would be displeased to learn that he was targeting Chairman Deacon. If anything, they would be pleased to deal a heavy blow to the Shionel Confederation if possible.

"And you do vouch for their ability to gather the information I seek?" Rui raised an eyebrow. "If they can't do that, then there is no point. If they can, then I am willing to accommodate a lot of things in exchange for the intelligence I need."

"Oh, there's no doubt that they're capable of that. There are many times that they have proven themselves. The most recent being their operation regarding the Kandrian Empire of the far East."

"...Can you elaborate on that one?"

"Well, you don't know, but there is a conflict brewing in the Kandrian Empire." The deputy director continued blissfully. "It is known as the Kandrian Throne War in political and intelligence circles across the continent. With the current emperor in visible decline, a civil war between the princes and princesses vying for the throne will most likely break out within the decade. The Kandrian Empire is so powerful that this is an issue that affects everybody, and thus everybody has been trying to influence it by supporting more desirable candidates or sabotaging less desirable candidates."

"And the Beggar's Sect was involved too?" Rui narrowed his eyes.

"Of course," The deputy director. "They recently sabotaged Princess Raemina who seeks to implement a nationalistic communist program that essentially exploits the citizens for the sake of the nation. They managed to infiltrate into her faction and got their hands on the entirety of all of her plans for political expansion, before selling them to another prince who used it to shut her down. An incredible feat that impressed the entire intelligence community."

"..." Rui didn't even know what to make of that.

This was the second time the Throne War had popped up in a conversation in recent times, and it gave him an ominous feeling. It appeared that the Kandrian Empire was truly in for a storm that could very well tear the entire nation apart in a decade.

He shook his head inwardly.

Now was not the time to worry about that. Chairman Deacon was definitely number one on the list of priorities. If anything, Rui ought to focus even more attention on killing the man sooner so that he wouldn't be bogged down by him if the Kandrian Empire did undergo tumultuous times.

"Alright, if they can do that to a Kandrian princess then that means that their espionage capabilities are at the highest level," Rui concluded. "They are certainly capable, probably willing, and definitely not going to lead to the chairman being aware of my intentions. I'll choose to reach out to them, please give me all the relevant information on them."

"Most certainly, Senior Falken." The man bowed his head. "Rest assured that they do not have access to any intelligence on this island. Due to the lack of technology and Martial Art. Physical impossibilities like reaching this island are actually the best ways to hamper the Beggar's Sect."

Rui nodded. That was also good news. It meant that they most likely had no cognition on Squire Falken, and certainly none on Senior Falken. It meant he wouldn't be at an intelligence disadvantage.

Chapter 1326: Derimont Bazaar

The more Rui heard about the Beggar's Sect, the more interested he grew. It appeared that not only could they get the job done, but there was a good overlap of interests between Rui's goal and the interests of the common folk. Furthermore, as a Martial Senior, he was sure that he could provide them with valuable services that they would have difficulty accomplishing independently as an intelligence organization of baseline humans.

"You are correct in your estimation that they extract Martial Art services from Martial Art clientele." The deputy director stated. "You will most likely have to complete a task of some sort I imagine. It's not going to be a short or easy one either."

Rui nodded. "That's fine by me. Please provide me with all the relevant information on them."

"I will be sure to do that immediately." The deputy director confirmed.

"I appreciate the aid," Rui turned towards Senior Sarak.

"It wasn't much." He smiled. "I bid you good luck on all your endeavors."

Soon enough, the meeting broke up as Rui returned to his newly assigned quarter. He had spent more time thinking about his journey after he left the Floating Sect. The time for action had finally arrived, and it was no longer enough to aimlessly wander around simply looking to become stronger.

Over the next few days, Rui made his final preparations to leave.

He even went as far as to procure the Master-level mask that he got from Master Deivon that he had tossed away when Master Uma had been chasing him. Thankfully, he knew exactly where he buried it and after taking some precautions, he was able to extract it and leave.

He constantly looked over his shoulder, afraid that Master Uma would pop out of nowhere. However, such a thing had never happened.

The mask was too valuable, after getting its look and appearance refitted by the Floating Sect, it would be just as useful as before in concealing his appearance. And it was something that he couldn't afford to let go of.

He was also confident that it would be useful when dealing with the Beggar's Sect. He did not want them to glean his appearance, and he highly doubted they could. Their biggest advantage was their numbers and the fact that they were almost everywhere in the Human Domain, but accomplishing feats that required extraordinary means was probably their greatest deficiency.

It wasn't long before Rui received a list of locations and the information on them that he began planning his first step.

He was surprised at the sheer number of locations that they could be reached through. An ordinary intelligence department or division that was part of a much bigger nation or corporation would not need to do such things since one needed to approach the parent organization in order to make use of their intelligence capabilities.

He skimmed through the list of locations that he had been provided glancing at their coordinates before instantly running some calculations in his mind.

"This one is the closest to the Shionel Confederation," Rui murmured.

He couldn't pick one that was too distant otherwise the price of information would rise, or they would straightforwardly refer him to closer branches.

"The Derimont Bazaar, eh?"

According to the intelligence, it was an enormous town in the Saiful region that was close to the Beast Domain at the heart of the continent. It was said to be a lawless zone that was outside the territory of

the nations surrounding it, a no man's land where an open market that sold just about everything existed.

That was the Derimont Bazaar.

Apparently, although the Saiful Region contained Senior-level nations that together possessed the military power needed to overrun and erase the Derimont Bazaar, it was said that none of the nations dared to do anything to the market.

The reason they abstained was rather simple.

Fear.

The reason they were too afraid of doing anything to the Derimont Bazaar was because the bazaar belonged to the Beggar's Sect. It was said that the Beggar's Sect created the bazaar nearly a century ago, and not a single force dared to stand in their way.

This was what happened when billions of people across the continent came under one cohesive organization with disciplined order and the will to sacrifice their lives to accomplish their goals and secure their agendas.

You ended up with a powerful continent-wide force that nobody wished to make an enemy out of.

Rui couldn't help but admire the Beggar's Sect. Despite not relying on the power of Martial Art or esoteric technology much, if at all, they ended up becoming a force so powerful that their deterrence matched with other powerful forces like the Virodhabhasa Faith.

All while almost entirely relying on the power of the common man and woman.

It was an admirable feat worthy of his respect. There were probably very few intelligence organizations that commanded the kind of fear and respect that the Beggar's Sect. Rui would much rather face a Martial Art organization of a small number of powerful Martial Artists than billions and billions of hidden spies that he was unable to identify.

The latter was much scarier to him.

He actually looked forward to going to the Derimont Bazaar, the issue was that it would probably take quite some time. Although he was definitely an order of magnitude faster than he was as a Martial Squire, that was with the Martial Heart.

Senior Sarak had already warned him about using the Martial Heart frivolously. If he did something as stupid as use it for mundane travel, then he would end up vulnerable to other Martial Seniors if and when he was to face them in combat. That was an unacceptable trade-off.

"The sooner I get started, the sooner I reach." He murmured.

He quickly began gathering the resources he would need while finalizing arrangements with his friends and acquaintances. He would not be returning for a long time, if ever, so it was best to get all of the things that could only be done here, out of the way.

Chapter 1327: Departure

A few days later, Rui stood at the edge of Ajanta Island, facing the island. His belt was heavily equipped with everything that he would need for a long journey. Before him were the four most important people to him in the Floating Sect.

Kane and the three Martial Seniors of the sect.

"Don't worry about me." Kane smiled as he shook the man's hand. "I'll catch up to you in no time. You're not getting rid of me that easily."

Rui chuckled. "Take your time. You've chosen a difficult path forward with many tribulations. It is best to be as prepared as possible. When the time comes, just give it your very best."

He nodded seriously. The two exchanged a knowing look with each other.

Kane had chosen a particularly risky and dangerous path to the Senior Realm. His determination to succeed in it had only grown ever since he decided on it. All Rui could do was give him some tips and hope for the best.

Senior Xanarn smiled as they exchanged an intimate hug and a brief soft kiss.

"You're going to have to tread carefully when Kane is ready to return to the Kandrian Empire," Rui warned her. "Don't forget everything I've told you about the Empire and the Martial Union as well as Chairman Deacon."

"Oh you, stop worrying so much," She giggled. "It will be fine. I'm actually a little excited to travel to the Kandrian Empire and meet your family. I'm going to learn everything about you, including all the embarrassing stories about you from your childhood!"

"Right..." A wry resigned smile appeared on his face. "I'm glad you have your priorities in order."

"Why thank you, kind sir." A hint of fake pride welled up on her face.

Rui had ultimately decided to have her travel to the Kandrian Empire along with Kane. The probability of something going wrong was much lower with Kane guiding her to where she was to go.

In the first place, the Martial Union would not dare to allow an unknown Martial Senior to go anywhere near his family. It would be an incompetent organization if it did. The second she approached even a few hundred meters of the Quarrier Orphanage, the Senior-level security detail would intervene and not only barricade her from reaching it but also strongly 'encourage' her to come in for questioning.

The Martial Union took its job far too seriously for anything less than that. That was the reason that it had cultivated an image of absolute reliability and credibility across East Panama.

That was why Rui had decided it was best for her to go with Kane, along with an unsigned letter that he had prepared for Commissioner Reze. The letter was not only unsigned but also contained his fingerprint in his blood at the bottom. The Martial Union which undoubtedly had his samples would be

able to verify that it was his blood. As long as Commissioner Reze was extremely discreet, no one would be able to come away with more than the truth.

He had also thoroughly prepared clandestine means of entering the Kandrian Empire while concealing Kane's identity. He would back up the letter that Rui had prepared for Commissioner Reze, adding more credibility to Senior Xanarn, which would eventually allow her to join the Quarrier Orphanage. He had painstakingly come up with a sophisticated and complex multi-layered plan to ensure that Chairman Deacon would not be able to use Senior Xanarn to locate him.

From taking an extremely obscure route devoid of human settlement such that there would be no records of their travel, to covert entries into the Kandrian Empire with the cooperation of the Martial Union, to having her reside in the Kandrian Empire for a while before abruptly joining the Orphanage one day to give the impression that she had been by Rui commissioned after entering the Kandrian Empire.

All of this to not only avoid giving Chairman Deacon the impression that Rui was outside the Kandrian Empire, but to reinforce that he was in the Kandrian Empire. After drilling the convoluted plan into both their heads, he was finally satisfied to leave it in their hands.

"Thank you for this. Really. You have no idea what it means to me." He whispered to her as a mixture of guilt and gratitude appeared on his face.

She leaned forward, bumping her forehead against his. "Thank you for saving my life."

He smiled before his voice reduced to the softest of whispers. "I... love you."

A cycle of abashed embarrassment was visible on her face. They felt like teenagers despite being far older and more mature.

"I love you too." She managed to squeeze out as her cheeks reddened.

The two of them separated as Rui turned to the other two Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect who were at a distance out of respect and consideration.

"I am grateful for everything that the Floating Sect has done for me. Should the Floating Sect ever need me, you need only contact me and I will return immediately and do my best to defend it. This sect has already become akin to a second home for me."

Senior Leonil nodded. "We appreciate that."

Senior Sarak smiled. "The Floating Sect will aid you in your endeavors as much as it can. Do not hesitate to rely on us."

Rui nodded. "Alright then, farewell to all of you."

He bid them goodbye before taking off into the air, escalating in height until he reached a level where he wouldn't be spotted by the Kaddar nations. Senior Sarak had requested him to obscure his departure so that the Kaddar nations would be under the impression that the two extra Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect were still a part of the sect.

That would serve as a powerful deterrence for a long time.

It wasn't until he reached quite the height that he actually began striding forward. He had to admit, the temptation to use his Martial Heart was high, but it was probably because of that that Senior Sarak sternly warned him against doing so right after he became a Martial Senior in order to prevent him from developing any bad habits and set him straight from the get-go.

Chapter 1328: Growth Considerations

In the time that he spent crossing the Kaddar Region, his thoughts wandered aimlessly, jumping from topic to topic.

He wondered what the Beggar's Sect's founder was like.

He wondered how Master Deivon was doing these days.

He wondered where Ieyasu was.

The man had left well before Rui did without so much as making a peep. Rui did not go see him off either. He was right when he stated that they weren't friends. They were tools to each other at the very most.

It was unlikely that they would ever meet again. That was how gigantic the Panama continent was. Thus, Ieyasu did not see any point in meeting Rui one final time.

"Shame." Rui remarked.

Rui enjoyed the feeling of someone who was truly his equal. Kane was a prodigious genius who broke through to the Apprentice Realm at the age of eleven, six years earlier than the average, yet even he struggled to keep up with Rui.

That was not the case with Ieyasu.

Their spars had always been stalemates where neither side was able to gain a meaningful advantage. It was enjoyable to have someone he could relate to. There were many parallels between them. It was rather unfortunate that Ieyasu was extremely detached, though Rui suspected that it was that trait among others that led to the development of such an absurd Martial Path.

Regardless, they would meet if they were fated to. The chances of it happening increased the stronger the both of them got.

His superfluous thoughts came to an end once he finally left the Kaddar Region and began heading to the east side of the continent.

Currently, he was on the west side of the continent, having been traveling west for the past three years away from the Kandrian Empire. The fact that he was heading east for the first time since leaving the Shionel Confederation was also a milestone in and of itself.

It was a sign that he was finally returning to handle unfinished business. In his mind, a long-term plan had already begun forming.

The first step as he already surmised was gaining all the relevant information he needed to evaluate the nature and the difficulty of killing Chairman Deacon. This alone was not going to be easy because he doubted that the Beggar's Sect was going to be too easy to deal with. He doubted that gathering all of the information he needed was going to be easy either.

Regardless, he had a little under seven years left. He didn't mind if the intelligence part alone took a few years if that was the price of being extremely thorough and careful.

Besides, it wasn't as though he could immediately come up with a plan and execute it even if he did get every ounce of the information he needed. He was still not strong enough, although he had taken massive strides in power recently. He estimated that several years of training and developing his Martial Art were needed before he was qualified to undertake this task.

Years of intelligence gathering while building up his personal power and cooking up a plan so that he could decisively land a death blow on Chairman Deacon before the decade-long protection ended.

From here on out, he would need to demonstrate a lot of patience and dedication. The times for frolicking around the continent from place to place with his best friend were over.

Another thing he had given a lot of consideration to was his growth trajectory from here on out.

He needed to grow stronger, but he also needed to pay attention to how he grew stronger. The stronger he got, the less clear the path to greater power was.

For much of his time as a Martial Artist, his foundation was incomplete. When he started out as a Martial Apprentice, he spent a few years building up his Martial Art, covering all bases.

By the time he truly built a solid foundation in all fields, it was time to break through to the Squire Realm, and all his progress had been undone. He needed to start from scratch. It took even longer in the Squire Realm to reach a state where his foundation was solid. He estimated that he had reached that state shortly after he left Crexet Town.

Then he undertook the Metabody System which took a few years itself.

And now, he broke through to the Senior Realm. Thus it begged the question as to what path he was going to take forward to greater strength.

Fortunately, there were several possibilities.

The first possibility was exploring primordial seed. The wonderful substance that he had come across in the third round of the Martial Contest was of great interest to him. The powerful substance had limitless possibilities as it could turn into anything. It allowed abyssfeeders to adapt extremely well despite their lack of minds. He had grown extremely interested when he first learned about it.

Another possibility was developing techniques that were suited to taking down Chairman Deacon after he gathered some intelligence on his security and protective measures and failsafe. Stealth techniques and assassination techniques, among other kinds of things. That was also an option worth considering.

The third possibility was exploring mental techniques. This had always been an area of interest to him. One that he wasn't able to explore due to having an incomplete foundation. His Martial Path required him to be able to adapt and evolve to all other Martial Art, and that necessarily meant being good at offense, defense, and maneuvering, while also being good at all ranges of combat. Those took precedence over a less fundamentally important field like mental techniques. There were fewer Martial Art he could precisely adapt and evolve to using due to them not being primary, thus they were less important.

But now that he had an extremely powerful and solid foundation, they were worth considering as an option especially since he had an affinity for them.

He could also consider doing all three to certain degrees if he wanted to, but that would take more effort, so he wasn't sure if that was a good idea.

Chapter 1329: Ferendul

All three options had their allure.

He had yearned for the capabilities of the abyssfeeder the second he learned about them. Their ability to adapt themselves to basically everything was truly impressive and extremely relevant to him.

Of course, he was aware that he would never be able to fully replicate the abilities of the abyssfeeder, but that was fine. Anything he could get was something he would welcome greatly.

The second option was also a pretty good idea, but it was a little bit more controversial. He didn't know if it was a good idea entirely to shape the development of his Martial Art over the next few years around a single person. Of course, there was the point that he was generally improving techniques that would be useful in many other circumstances.

He just needed to make sure that he didn't get too one-track-minded in the development of his Martial Art.

The third option of mental techniques was something that he had in mind for quite some time, and he was finally at a stage where he could afford to focus on it. He didn't want to miss this chance to get some powerful mental techniques in the bag.

The next question was that even if he wanted to go for any or all these paths, where would he get the foundation and resources needed to develop powerful techniques in any of the three chosen paths?

Unlike normal techniques, these techniques were not techniques that he could delve into without any foundation or experience. Even when he developed other techniques, they were usually predicated on principles or elements of techniques that he had mastered or based on principles of physics and human anatomy.

Mental techniques firmly fell outside the foundation of knowledge that Rui had. Thus he most certainly needed a source of foundational information and a knowledge base.

'I'll probably have to rely on the Beggar's Sect to get what I need.' He was already relying on them to get the intelligence on Chairman Deacon. In comparison, asking for help with avenues of Martial Art training was a lot less dangerous.

Time passed as Rui swiftly crossed the continent, heading back to the east. He crossed mountain ranges, valleys, inland oceans, and other topographies for nearly two weeks before he finally reached the Saiful Region, overlooking it from atop a large mountain.

"Super flat," Rui murmured as he gazed at it.

It was an incredibly flat plateau spanning thousands of kilometers in diameter. He knew that the Derimont Bazaar was somewhere in the center of the region, but at this distance, not even his enhanced vision was able to spot it, not without the Martial Heart anyway.

Dim lights glowed across the Saiful region in the darkness of dusk.

He had heard that the Derimont Bazaar was the most active at night, thus he decisively chose to begin his search as soon as possible.

He swiftly leaped off the mountain cliff side, plummeting straight towards the Saiful Region headfirst. However, he was sure that he would be able to get away when he was spotted because these nations, like the Kaddar nations, did not possess too many Martial Seniors. He ultimately decided it wasn't worth it, becoming a vigilante the moment he entered the Saiful Region was not worth it.

He did not want to give the Beggar's Sect the impression that he was a force of the chaotic evil faction.

That was why he actually went out of his way to enter through the official port of entry, something he didn't really need to do with his skills. Crossing a border was far too easy for him.

Thankfully, the process was not too lengthy. He concealed the fact that he was a Martial Artist with Mind Mask, and had simply registered under his newest alias 'John'. He did not want to use the name Falken since it too had become compromised. Master Uma would undoubtedly be searching for any traces of records that bore that name.

In that regard, he was glad that the Floating Sect was informationally isolated from the rest of the world. That would certainly make his life easier than if it wasn't.

"Welcome to the Republic of Ferendul."

Rui stepped into the nation with a rather surprised expression on his face once he entered the nation, before glancing back.

'How eerily quiet.' The port of entry was dead silent. It seemed that basically no one was entering or leaving the nation.

It was ominous.

Yet not nearly as disturbing as the things he saw once he actually entered the nation.

The commercial area that greeted the port of entry was silent, which was universally uncommon for commercial areas. Grocery stores, small shops, stalls, and carts were shabby and half-empty. There was basically nothing to sell, and what was left was so bad that it was better off not being purchased.

The few people that he saw manning these shops didn't even react as he walked past their humble establishments.

They didn't so much as twitch.

Their eyes were dark and hollow, devoid of light. Their bodies were skinny with bones visibly sticking out under the meagre amounts of flesh that clung to them. They were poster children for malnutrition.

Measly scraps of clothes did a poor job of covering their bodies and providing them warmth from the cold winds that stung them.

The infrastructure was probably the worst that Rui had ever seen in any country he had ever traveled to. There wasn't a single fully intact building. Holes peppered the walls and the roofs. Many buildings weren't even in a single piece.

What particularly tightened his heart was the state of the children. He had always had a soft spot for children given that he grew up with them in the orphanage, seeing them in their malnourished state was definitely not something that he could spectate passively.

It was in moments like these that Rui was truly grateful for the privilege of being born in a sound powerful nation like the Kandrian Empire. There could have been many places that would have led him to lead a much darker and harsher life. Although he wasn't particularly brought up in the best financial condition, he couldn't complain since he was given three square meals, shelter, and a family that showered him with love.

Chapter 1330: Evaluation

He hadn't even spent more than ten minutes in Ferendul, but he had managed to gain a good understanding of the nation with keen observation and his sharp intellect.

He glanced at the ravaged infrastructure. 'This isn't due to poor civil engineering. The structures are extremely simple, it is harder to mess them up than to get them wrong in the first place. Furthermore...'

He glanced at the ground. 'This nation is blessed with a solid bedrock that flatly extends indefinitely across the entire nation and even region. It is highly conducive to infrastructure and civil engineering.'

There was only one conclusion to be drawn. 'The cause of the infrastructure was ruined by man. I suppose it could be an earthquake, however, the port of entry was unharmed and pristine in comparison. So that doesn't make sense.'

That combined with the state of the people of the nation and it was painfully evident that the reason for the state of this nation was definitely a combination of political and economic.

He wagered it was the former. The state of the nation indicated a lack of governmental aid of any kind whatsoever. He had already judged that the buildings were not recently ruined or damaged, and yet he was unable to spot even the slightest bit of disaster relief governmental initiative whatsoever.

That indicated a corrupt or incompetent government.

VROOOOM!

Rui hid as he detected the first motorized carriage in the nation.

A military carriage carrying a bunch of soldiers bearing elementary muskets traversed the roads vigilantly. Their uniforms were pristine in comparison to the tattered clothes of the citizens of Ferendul.

'A military dictatorship...?' He did think he was on the money. There was no shortage of that on Earth throughout its history. Militaries could overwhelm any resistance through force and could not be stopped as long as they were unified under a single leader.

His senses caught another presence approaching their general area.

A Martial Apprentice.

Also in military attire.

'A Martial military dictatorship eh?'

The fact that the government bothered on patrols of these sorts that did nothing more than enforce their authority in the minds of the citizens when they were suffering so much due to deprivations of basic fundamental needs told Rui everything he needed to know.

Most likely, this was a nation where Martial Artists were integrated into the military. The Martial Senior of the Ferendul nation probably rallied the military and tried to take over the nation in a coup leading to civil war that ravaged the nation, leaving the citizens in this state.

That was a guess. Several details could easily be different, but he understood the core gist of the matter.

Regardless, perhaps he should have skipped this nation. He was concerned about leaving an impression that he didn't care about the common folk if he used force simply to barge through anybody who stood in his way. He was sure that the Beggar's Sect would learn about everything.

'I should just focus on getting to the Derimon Bazaar.'

Rui quickly weaved through the many alleyways as he avoided attention. He did not want to get into any trouble.

However, he needed some information.

"What's the matter? Don't have any money? Tax fraud is a serious crime you know?"

Rui paused as he heard a certain voice, extending his senses in that direction.

"Mama!"

"P-Please spare us. T-There's no money anywhere in town." He heard a woman's quivering voice as she hid her son.

"Then how do you plan to pay the taxes? You have to pay the taxes you know?" The man asked.

"T-That..."

"If you can't fess up the money up-front, then... you'll have to pay with your body." The Martial Apprentice grinned as he started taking off his belt. "Taxes need to be paid, you see?"

One moment, the woman was preparing herself for the worst under his sickly gaze.

The next moment.

THUD

He fell, unconscious. Behind him loomed an even bigger masked figure.

The woman and her son stared dumbfounded. He didn't have the horrifying sense of peril that Martial Artists generated in her. Yet when she looked into her eyes, instincts told her that he was profoundly more powerful than any Martial Artist she had ever seen.

"You ok?" Rui spoke in the international language, hoping she would understand

She nodded profusely, before bowing. "Thank you. Thank you so much. but..."

"Don't worry," Rui reassured her, glancing at the Martial Apprentice. "This one will disappear forever. They won't know what happened."

"...I don't have any money to pay you. Please forgive me." She remained bowed, profusely apologizing.

Rui understood her misunderstanding. It wasn't surprising she expected him to squeeze her for money in exchange for saving her if she lived in a country with these kinds of Martial Artists. She was probably terrified that Rui would pick up what the Martial Apprentice was about to do to her.

"I don't need money," Rui told her. "Though I could use some help. Information. How do I contact the Beggar's Sect in the Derimont Bazaar?"

She winced at that name with a melancholic expression. "...You do not find them. They will find you. If you are looking for them then they already know. If they are interested in contacting you, then it will happen. otherwise, it won't ever happen."

Rui recalled that the Beggar's Sect was pretty much comprised of ordinary people. He couldn't help but wonder if the woman before him was a member of the sect. Although the sect as a whole was very powerful, individual members could not leverage the authority and power of the sect, so maybe she was as helpless as the other citizens.

He doubted he would ever know if she was a member of the sect.

"I see..." Rui murmured. "Thank you. You should get out of here."

He suddenly disappeared from her vision leaving but the slightest gust of wind behind. The Martial Apprentice had also magically disappeared as well.

She heaved a sigh of relief as she lifted her child before running away from the area. A knowing glint flashed in her eyes as she narrowed them.