

Martial Unity 1521

Chapter 1521: Insufficient

The transport route between the Kandrian Empire and the Shionel Confederation was currently heavily disrupted. From the moment Rui fired off his tier-five Transverse Resonance, most people understood the dangers of the situation and immediately accelerated away or turned around, warning others who were traveling in that direction.

This was both concerning and relieving to Rui. Relieving because it meant that there were no innocent people around who would get hurt from his fight with the bodyguards of Chairman Deacon. Concerning because these people were not just running away, they were contacting the relevant authorities.

The East Panamic Transport Organization was simply an organization created by many nations in East Panama to develop and maintain travel infrastructure to facilitate high-speed carriage travel across East Panama. According to the intelligence from the Beggar's Sect, this organization was also responsible for dismantling anything that disrupted travel on the roads.

Even if they included Martial Artists.

Rui didn't know when they would come, but they did linger at the back of his head. Of course, the biggest priority was the reinforcements from Deacon Industries, he needed to ensure that this was over before they got here.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui moved at incredible speeds with rapidity that was hard to fathom. None of the three remaining Martial Seniors understood how he was dodging them so well. He evaded their attacks as if he was out of phase with time, making it seem like he was from the future.

He weaved past a barrage of attacks from the long-range wide-scale attacks, emerging on the other side as he surged towards the three Martial Seniors. In just a moment, he had arrived before one of them.

"Da-!" The Martial Senior covered his head, refusing to give Rui a clear shot at his head.

BAM!!

Rui's fist burrowed its in his solar plexus, causing him to crumple down, yet before he could finish the blow, his comrades had already acted.

BOOM!

Rui was flung away by a wide-scale shockwave that, once again, was more friendly fire than it was an attack on Rui, but it got the job done. After all, the one weakness of the pattern recognition model was that predicting and seeing the future did not always mean that one could stop it.

Rui paused for a brief moment as he studied the circumstances. 'They're just holding on by keeping me away even at the cost of friendly fire. Tsk, in any other circumstance, this would be a retarded strategy but...'

In this case, it was the best decision. Reinforcements were only ten minutes away as far as Rui could figure out. This strategy could allow them to last that long even if their strategy was self-destructive with friendly fire.

However, Rui was far from done.

WHOOSH!

He flashed into a blur, sprinting at blinding speeds as he approached from the side rather than head-on.

"No you do-!" The man's eyes widened with shock. 'Why can't I breathe?' The momentary shock from Breathing Crucifix threw his timing off by a just a moment. Rui raced into action, desperate to exploit that option. Yet before he could even reach his opponent...

BAM!!!

The self-harming attack had already arrived. All four Martial Seniors grimaced as Rui leaped back, gritting his teeth. Neo Godspeed sacrificed durability for speed, making him particularly hurt by such attacks.

The three Seniors gritted their teeth already having leaped back, putting themselves between Chairman Deacon and Rui. "Attack! Don't bother with stamina! Drain your Martial Heart!"

Rui tutted with annoyance as an enormous tsunami of attacks had already flooded his direction, they were too dense for even him to squeeze through with Neo Godspeed. Chairman Deacon had apparently hired a good leader because this man seemed to make the right decision at crucial times.

Rui tutted as he was forced to leap away to evade attacks, looking to find a good route in. 'This isn't good...' Rui narrowed his eyes. 'These bastards are willing to put themselves on death's doors just to stall for ten minutes. I need to go absolutely all out on every front. I need to use everything.'

Everything he had learned as a Martial Artist. He needed to squeeze his Martial Art for resources.

'I'll stress their counteroffensive,' Rui shifted, swerving.

The three Martial Seniors altered their trajectory accordingly, only for them to find his image fade away.

WHOOSH

'It's a feint!' He gritted his teeth blasting away in the other direction, yet Rui had already closed a good chunk of the distance, making some progress.

The three Martial Seniors fired away, doing their best to parry Rui away rather than hurt him. Even as they felt their breathing tighten and shackle, they did not hold back. They emptied and unloaded their Martial Heart as if there was no tomorrow. Furthermore, they purely applied all that power to ensure that Rui could not approach them.

"Tsk!" Rui tutted with annoyance as he flashed around at blinding speeds with Gale Force Breathing, Outer Convergence, and Parallel Walk, looking for the best way to approach them. He constantly threw

them off with Phantom Step while using Breathing Crucifix to hamper their breathing, reducing their combined output.

His current approach was not working as well as he'd hoped. Yet he couldn't accept that.

His eyes flashed with bloodlust as he eyed the carriage.

This assassination needed to succeed.

'No matter what!' He gritted his teeth.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

He accelerated even further, reaching extreme speeds that he had never reached before. And despite all his effort...

It still fell short.

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui leaped away from them as they managed to parry his approach with wide attacks that covered huge areas.

"Keep him away..." The leader choked out even as he gasped for air. Rui grew frustrated as he tried weaving past their offense, pushing not just his physical body to the limit but also his pattern recognition system to the limit.

Yet, no matter how much he peered into the future, he was unable to use it to weave his way through their offense.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!

"Rgh!" Rui grimaced as he leaped away, being forced to return to square one. Despite pushing his techniques, body, and pattern recognition system to the limit, he was unable to break through.

Chapter 1522: Unshackled

There were plenty of things Rui had learned today. He learned that when a person abandons and sacrifices the prospects of winning, the prospects of actually inflicting damage on their opponents, all for the sake of stalling for ten minutes, it was pretty difficult to stop them from succeeding at that humble goal.

In a normal fight, they would die immediately after ten minutes, but not in this fight. In this fight, they would win if they succeeded.

He had been surprised that even Neo Godspeed and the predictive model together had been unable to weave past their attacks, but he also noticed that they had diluted their power and spread them wider. Yet it had done them good.

The reason for that was because it took less power to parry his charges away than to hurt him. They compensated for a speed gap with a large area of effect by sacrificing potency.

It was a good counter. They had adapted and evolved to him very well.

Rui froze.

Time slowed down to a crawl.

'They're adapting to me...?' His eyes widened as a profound realization hit him. 'Since when did my opponents adapt to me instead of the other way around?'

How had they been able to make more progress with adaptive evolution than he did?

He leaped away, putting enough distance between them as he studied the two gasping Martial Seniors. He was in the middle of an assassination attempt, yet he felt the need to take just a moment to understand what was happening.

He was positively in a better condition than they were, they had burned through much of their stamina, and they were having a hard time breathing with Breathing Crucifix.

Yet despite being in a better place, they were able to adapt to him more effectively than he did.

Why was that?

'They established their goal and cleanly sacrificed everything that wasn't necessary for it. They're making an efficient application of resources.' Rui realized. '...Am I not doing the same?'

With Death's Sympathy, he didn't need power, he could kill them with a single tap. That was why he went for Neo Godspeed out of all the Metabody techniques, he needed speed more than power and defense.

On top of that, he had put a lot of effort into his predictive models.

'But it hasn't been that helpful,' He clenched his fist. 'Why not...?'

His eyes widened as the answer dawned upon him. '...Because it isn't the best option in this situation.'

He had already experienced that predicting the future did not mean he could change it. The fact of the matter was, that his opponents had essentially built a huge barrier between himself and them, and they shifted it to keep up with his movements, preventing him from approaching.

It was purely a reactive defensive game on their part, the predictive model could not fix his problems. '...And that's the difference between us. They cut away and sacrificed what couldn't fix their problems while I clung to it even harder,' Rui realized. 'Predictive model this, predictive model that. Predictive model every single time. I have been clinging to the pattern recognition system too hard all this time.'

There are many such circumstances where the pattern recognition system isn't the best, but I mindlessly use it every single time.'

The pattern recognition system was his original baby. One that he had created back on Earth, it held an extremely special place in his heart. It was that love that had blinded him. It had blinded him from the fact that it wasn't the all-powerful wish-granting superpower that he had been using it as.

At this very moment, Rui came arrived at a profound ultimatum.

'I need to abandon the pattern recognition system if I want to kill Chairman Deacon...' Rui gritted his teeth as he clenched his fists. Just the thought of doing that was painful.

Yet the moment he threw it away, he felt his shoulders lighten.

It was as though every muscle in his body had relaxed. His joints had loosened, allowing him to move freely like he never could before.

This sensation...

'Freedom...' Rui inhaled a deep breath. 'I see...'

He had been shackling himself to the pattern recognition system all this time. When was the last time he made a combat decision without the pattern recognition system?

He indulged his epiphany to its full depth. Despite the fact that he was in the middle of the most important act of his life in the past seven years.

'No...' Rui's eyes softened with realization. 'It's because this is a pivotal moment of my life.'

It was only right that he proved it was worth it.

He glanced at the three Martial Senior bodyguards.

A single emotion reigned in his heart.

Gratitude. One moment, he stood there.

The very next moment, he faded out of existence.

Their eyes widened as they immediately leaped back, landing on Deacon's carriage as they began firing off omnidirectional attacks that served as a force field to keep him away. This strategy proved to be useful against the assassin all this time, thus they were sure that it would work against him for the next ten minutes as well.

Unfortunately, they were wrong. BOOM!!

A titanic impact blasted through the omnidirectional shockwave as Rui surged forth, using Hypertrophic Surge and Phantomind Void as he blasted through their defense. It was precisely because they had chosen to spread themselves thin because that had been optimal against a speedster, but it was sorely lacking against a powerhouse.

The three Martial Seniors shook with shock as they immediately turned themselves in the direction of the invisible force that had blasted through.

But alas, it truly was too late this time.

BAM!

Rui scrambled the brains of one of the Martial Seniors to mush as he blasted him in the head with a punch. The other two Martial Seniors could barely widen their eyes in time before he swiftly followed suit.

Death often came before one realized it.

BAM BAM!

While Hypertrophic Surge was certainly nowhere near as fast as Neo Godspeed, it was certainly not slow. The two Martial Seniors collapsed lifelessly as Rui heaved a sigh, shaking his head.

'Just by changing my approach, I was able to quickly solve a problem that had seemed impossibly difficult. I have a long way to go before I achieve perfect adaptive evolution.'

He had thought that he was doing well before, but now...he realized how wrong he was, how arrogant and ignorant he had been. The final hurdle had been cleared.

Chapter 1523: Hopeful

He turned to the carriage.

BADUMP

BADUMP

BADUMP

He had already deactivated his Martial Heart, yet he could feel his heart beating harder than it ever had before.

He was finally here.

After nearly eight years, he had finally reached this point. He almost couldn't believe it. He had dreams about this moment more times than he could count.

He took off his mask, tossing it away.

"Huff..." He took a deep breath, before forcing open the carriage door and surging in with his hand stretched out, his arms reaching out.

CLASP!

He caught a hand.

A hand that held a detonator to a bomb.

A bomb in a man.

"Not so fast..." Rui whispered. "Deacon Vernes..."

There he was.

His expression crumpled with rage. Fury had turned his eyes bloodshot red. His nails drew blood from how hard his fists were clenched. He looked older than Rui had realized with Riemannian Echo. His skin had grown paler and aged. His hair had greyed significantly in the many years since their last meeting, leaning more towards salt than pepper.

"Time hasn't been kind to you, has it?" It was spontaneous, yet he had already uttered it before he realized it. He didn't know what to say.

Or rather, he had too much to say; he didn't know what not to say.

Deacon opened his mouth.

Yet no words escaped.

Instead, he stuck out his tongue before biting down with every ounce of force he could muster.

CRACK

Rui shoved the detonator between the man's teeth, jamming his suicide attempt.

"Even if you cut your tongue and bled out, your heart would not stop beating immediately. A Martial Senior like myself could effortlessly clear ten kilometers before you actually die," Rui informed with a calmness that surprised even himself.

The man's eyes widened with infuriated shock at the fact that Rui knew about his secret measure.

For a moment, there was silence as the two of them beheld each other.

"Even if I gave you the opportunity to get your last words out, you would just use it to try and kill yourself, knowing you..." Rui sighed. He turned back to the man. "You know, I've always wondered what I'd do when I got my hands on you. Would I chop you up into little bits, or would I try some of the torture methods that were practiced during the medieval age back in previous life? I was never able to decide. Yet, I was always certain I would make you suffer."

His eyes softened. "Yet now that this moment has actually arrived, I don't feel even the slightest shred of rage, fury, or hatred."

Rui glanced at his hand. For some reason, he was unable to muster up any desire to torment the man that he thought he hated with a venomous intensity. He delved within himself, trying to understand himself. Naturally, his senses were at peak alertness. Every twitch the man made, everything within dozens of kilometers of Rui was within his inspection. Nothing was allowed to interrupt this moment.

"When I was too weak, I hated you more than anything. Yet, now that I am strong enough to act on my hatred, I don't feel anything..." Rui murmured as he gained a deep understanding of himself. "I see..."

It was his own weakness that he hated more than anything. His inability to eliminate a threat to himself and his family. That was the true source of his hatred.

And now it was gone, to a large degree.

Rui pulled out the detonator from the man's mouth.

The man gritted his teeth. "Yo-"

THWOOM

Rui fired off Death's Sympathy. Yet this time, he hyper-focused the projectile like a scalpel rather than a bullet. It plunged into the man's skull, crushing only his cerebral cortex and nothing else.

It annihilated his consciousness forever.

His heart, however, kept beating.

Yet Rui was not satisfied with just that.

He stepped outside of the carriage, taking one last look at Chairman Deacon's living corpse, before activating his Martial Heart and taking off.

In just a second, he was more than ten kilometers away. He turned around inhaling deeply.

THWOOM!

He fired a single sound bullet, annihilating the carriage, and preparing himself.

For two seconds, nothing happened.

Yet when it arrived, it arrived at a speed that beggared Rui's mind. BOOOOOM!!!!

An eruption of raw power that exceeded anything else he had ever come across blinded him. It was as though a fragment of the Sun had descended upon this world.

RUMBLE!!!

The world around him shook, unlike anything he had ever seen before.

WHOOOOOOOOSH!!!

A tremendous gust of wind and shockwave, the likes of which Rui could hardly believe, emerged as a result of the titanic power of the explosion. THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

Rui defended himself with a tier-five Transverse Resonance clashing with the portion of the shockwave that was going to crash into Rui.

It took a minute to subside.

The crater left behind was enormous, large enough to fill a fragment of the Shionel Dungeon.

"This is supposed to be quasi-Master level..." Rui muttered. "Sheesh."

It was a shame that Rui could not afford to admire the destructive power of the bomb. Such an enormous explosion would not go unnoticed, and would certainly not be treated normally. There was a good chance that a Martial Master would be deployed within an hour at the very most.

"Time to get the hell out of here," Rui drank some potent potions, restoring his stamina as he activated Neo Godspeed and Greater Phantomind Void, racing off with Gale Force Breathing and Outer Convergence at an extreme speed that far surpassed his conventional limits. By the time the initial deployments arrived, he would be thousands of kilometers away. The assassination had not been as

clean as he hoped, considering the eye-drawing explosion, but it was the best he could do with what he had at the time.

A long chapter of his life had finally come to an end, and a new chapter of his life was to begin.

As Rui raced away, a small smile emerged on his face as he felt more hopeful for the future than he had in the past eight years.

Chapter 1524: Investigation

No less than a few hours after Chairman Deacon died, a full-fledged investigative team had been dispatched by the East Panamic Transport Organization to investigate the heavy energy anomaly along the travel route between the Kandrian Empire and the Shionel Confederation.

"This...!" The head investigator of the team gasped with disbelief. "How can such a thing come to be?!"

The crater was mind-blowing, so much so that it beggared the mind. It was hard to actually fathom the sheer size and expanse of the crater that had appeared alongside the road.

"Master Sera, what do you make of this?" The man murmured, shocked.

A woman standing beside him narrowed her eyes as she inspected the crater. "Well... One thing I can say is that this was not caused by a clash between Martial Masters."

"How can you be so certain?"

"Unless something goes really wrong, a clash between Martial Masters won't spill over to the environment. We have immense control over our power and we usually only affect what we want to," Master Sera remarked. "Still...this feels far too large to be done by Martial Seniors, especially since it's clear it was done in one go."

"So then...?"

"Some kind of esoteric technology was definitely involved," She concluded. "However, reports from the civilians stated that a clash between Martial Artists had ensued, so maybe they were fighting over some powerful resource and something went awry during the fight. It's hard to say really."

"The explosion has completely annihilated any and all forensic evidence," The man heaved a troubled sigh. "We have basically nothing to work with."

"Looks like whoever is responsible for this probably accounted for this to happen," Master Sera realized. "It would explain why they started such a high-profile fight in front of so many witnesses. They knew that there would be nothing left by the time they were done."

"Well, they were right. There is nothing left. The only thing we have are shoddy witness testimony and a list of victims," The investigator sighed as he went through the initial reports that had been gathered by witnesses that had flocked to the nearest office to report their tales.

"Who are the victims?" She asked, curious. "Members of a traveling convoy of Deacon Industries are most likely the only victim, given that one of the parties in the conflict was a traveling convoy from Deacon Industries according to one of the witnesses." The man remarked. "Contact the Chairman and interrogate him," Master Sera simply remarked. "We are in the process of doing that right now, we'll get an answer soon. Until then, this is all we have."

It wasn't much later that the truth came to be. The butler of Deacon Industries enlightened the investigative authorities about the measures that Chairman Deacon had taken to protect himself. A quasi-Master level bomb being among them.

"Does that mean that both parties died in the explosion?" The head investigator frowned. "We have not seen any signs of survivors, and according to the butler, very few people knew about the bomb. So there is a high likelihood that it was an assassin who attacked the Chairman's convoy, killed Chairman Deacon, and died on the spot themselves."

There had been no witnesses recording any sole person traveling from the area, which supported such a theory, although it was also possible that they had excellent stealth.

The case quickly came to a close with the limited amount of information available at hand. The prevailing hypothesis was that both parties involved had perished in an explosion after Chairman Deacon died, triggering the explosion that caused the crater.

"...Just as planned," Rui murmured when he read the brief report that the Beggar's Sect had given him that relayed the results of the investigation.

Rui had chosen a course of action that would ensure that this would be the most likely outcome of the investigation.

He had also known that the identity of Chairman Deacon's assassin would never be looked into without any physical evidence. After all, without there being any forensic or physical evidence to work with, the only thing one could use to try and gauge the identity of the assassin or the person who hired the assassin would be motive.

There were far too many people with motives to kill him. Rui knew that there was an extremely high chance that the investigative authorities would abandon this line of investigation when they went through the sheer list of the times that Chairman Deacon had had assassinations attempted on him.

Ultimately, this was a simple investigative department of a transport organization, he didn't expect much from it based on this fact alone. What he was more concerned about was the other entities that were much more affected by Chairman Deacon's disappearance. Thankfully, however, they didn't have any means of knowing the truth.

Too many people wanted the man dead. And many of them were powerful. Rui would be a lot more concerned if he was the only person of power who had an enmity against him. But someone like Deacon had undoubtedly made enemies out of tons of powerful folks across the entire continent.

An insignificant Martial Squire who had picked a fight with the man eight years ago was nothing, nowhere near the top of the list of likely perpetrators. People would just have to move on quite quickly.

Still, Rui did not want to be too hasty, so he decided to spend just a little time until the initial wave of shock blew over.

Considering his prominence in the Shionel Confederation, he knew that Guildmaster Bradt was probably one of the largest suspects within the nation since Deacon was a constant thorn in his side.

"Hah, poor old man, taking the heat for my deed," Rui smirked mischievously.

For the time being, he resided in a bustling commercial town quite some distance from the crater, keeping a low profile. It wouldn't be long before he made his way back to his home. Just the thought of returning made him so excited that he could hardly sleep.

Chapter 1525: Smooth

Weeks passed before people moved on from the man's death. According to reports, one of the man's sons, an executive in the company who had been groomed to succeed him eventually, had inherited his stake and ownership of the country, becoming the new chairman of Deacon Industries. According to the Beggar's Sect, the new chairman had already begun dismantling, assimilating, and liquefying all the investments that Chairman Deacon had made in the Kandrian Empire over the past eight years.

It appeared that the apple had not fallen anywhere near the tree this time. The new chairman appeared to have regarded all of his father's efforts in the Kandrian Empire as a waste of capital for a goal that yielded no profit.

He immediately began absorbing or selling whatever he could to at least salvage as much as possible to use those funds to strengthen the core of the business rather than to focus on fringe activities that did not bring in revenue for the company.

'It doesn't appear that the man gives a damn about Rui Quarrier,' Rui mused. 'That's good. It would be a pain in the ass if he had the same inclinations that his father did.'

Apparently, he didn't care for his brother as much as Chairman Deacon cared about his son.

This was the green light that Rui needed to finally make a move and head back home. All the preparations had been made, he had returned his hair back to its original color. He had gotten used to the silver all this time and it actually felt quite dysphoric to have black hair and eyes after all this time.

He pulled out the original license that had been supplied by the Martial Union when he first became a Martial Artist, a document that he hadn't touched in a long, long time, before setting out to the Kandrian Empire.

The journey back home was unlike anything he had ever experienced.

It was as though he had become a Disney princess. The world seemed brighter. He could have sworn that flowers bloomed as he passed them while all of nature seemed to rejoice in his return back home.

He was unable to even contain his excitement. A small grin cracked at the edge of his mouth throughout his entire journey back as he sky-walked through the clouds feeling as free as a bird.

Yet he also couldn't contain the nervousness in his heart. An uncomfortable tingling sensation deep in his heart was stronger than even how nervous he felt when he undertook the assassination from Chairman Deacon.

It couldn't be helped.

He had left his family for nearly eight years. He hadn't even bid them goodbye.

He had put his family at risk.

He knew that Senior Xanarn would have divulged a fraction of the truth that would have allowed them to understand what happened, at least just a little bit better than before, however, he also knew that that would have caused pain to them.

Although he was happy to return to the Kandrian Empire, he felt a deep amount of guilt for all the torment that he had put his family through. He felt especially guilty when he thought about how his adoptive mother Lashara and the kids that looked up to him must have felt. He had been missing during a crucial era of growth that the twin siblings Max and Mana would have gone through when they were kids. The only refuge he had was knowing that Headmaster Aronian, Squire Kyrie, and Squire Dylon would have undoubtedly guided them better than he could. While being separated from him would have undoubtedly caused them pain and uncertainty about their future, it would undoubtedly have done them good for their growth as Martial Artists and as individuals.

One of the people he felt most guilty thinking about, however, was Julian. The two of them had shared a special unique bond that was different from any other they had. The two of them would often thoroughly discuss and debate about a variety of topics, having the kind of conversations they knew that they couldn't have with anyone else.

He had heard that Julian had taken his disappearance particularly hard, something that made his heartache with guilt.

Another group of people he looked forward to meeting were his friends. He was certainly looking forward to meeting Kane whom he hadn't seen in four, now nearly five, years, but he was especially keenly looking forward to meeting Fae, Nel, Hever, Dalen, and Milliana.

A complex muck of emotions and thoughts flooded his mind as he made his way back to the Kandrian Empire.

It was only days later that the nostalgically familiar mighty walls bordering the Kandrian Empire came into view. Unlike most nations, the Kandrian Empire was wealthy enough to fortify its borders extremely well. With the highly competent Kandrian Border Patrol Force that manned and patrolled the walls, most Martial Artists could not infiltrate the borders through force or stealth.

It was a symbol of power and prestige. It stretched as far as the eye could see, disappearing deep into the mist that characterized the air during this time of the year. As Rui sky-walked towards the massive empire, he could see that the queue at the transit port to enter the nation was much longer and denser than the line of carriages departing from the nation.

There simply was a much larger influx of people who wanted to enter the nation than the people who wanted to exit it. And Rui was one of them.

It wasn't long before Rui found himself at the entry check-in for traveling individuals.

"ID please. Name and purpose of visiting?" The officer on the other end of the table asked.

"Rui Quarrier." He spoke the name loud and proud. "...Coming back home."

He placed his Martial Union license in front of the man, pushing it forward.

"Squire Quarrier, is it?" The man noted Rui's details down, nodding with respect. "Welcome back, sir. Hope you had a smooth journey back."

"Smooth..." Rui chuckled softly. "I wish."

Chapter 1526: Late

1526 Late

It wasn't long before he took his first step back into the Kandrian Empire.

The familiar cool breeze tickled his skin chilling under the influence of the light snowfall that was characteristic of the Kandrian Empire's weather during the monsoons. A mild hint of saltiness and humidity also trickled into the air, characteristic of coastal regions.

The Kandrian Empire was a rare combination of a country with a large amount of coastal exposure to the Nam Ocean in addition to having a freezing cold North, resulting in a unique climate and weather combination that one would not expect.

Yet to Rui, this was home. It wasn't just the weather and air that triggered waves of nostalgia that clouded his heart, it was everything.

The infrastructure, the roads, and buildings.

The people and the ethnic attire that was native to the Kandrian Empire.

The sense of modernized refinement to a degree that not even the Shionel Confederation had. Outside of more rural places, the Kandrian Empire made significant utility of motorized carriages instead of horse-drawn carriages. The roads and the tons were largely dung-free something that was much less common in the many other nations that Rui had visited over the many years.

"Hah...as expected of the Kandrian Empire, I suppose," Rui smirked with a hint of pride.

He had never been an extremely nationalistic person ever, but he had developed an attachment to this nation, especially since it was the place where his family resided and lived. Although life had never been easy for them, at the very least, the nation did not abuse and exploit them.

Considering some of the inhumane and horrible places he had seen during his time away from the Kandrian Empire like the nations of the Derschek Region and the Saiful Region, he was grateful that the nation allowed the kids and caretakers of the orphanage to live normal peaceful lives, even if hard.

"Man..." He murmured with a bittersweet smile and a voice that quivered with emotion. "...I'm back... I actually finally back...!"

His throat choked as he felt his eyes sting. Yet he quickly shook his head, pulling himself together as he quickly navigated through the streets. Much had changed in the past eight years, yet the layouts and the broader details had remain unchanged, the old map of the Kandrian Empire that he had stored in his Mind Palace was still quite accurate for the most part.

He had many things to do.

Many people to visit.

He was sure that the Martial Union had already become aware of his return. Yet before he dealt with them and others, there was one thing that he needed to do more than anything..

"I have to return home," He activated his Martial Heart, uncaring for the eyes he drew, before taking off into the air.

He needed to be careful, of course. With the power of the Martial Heart at top speed, just the shockwaves and flames he generated from his sheer speed would kill tens of thousands of people, and injure many more.

Such was the power of the Senior Realm.

He blasted off once he reached high enough, zipping through the air at incredible speeds. It wasn't much too long before he finally reached the town of Hajin, and more importantly, the areas surrounding the town of Hajin.

In the distance, he could even see the orphanage with his superior vision, landing a good kilometer away from it to avoid causing a panic.

Yet the second he stepped down on the ground, he felt the touch of the cold metal of a sword on his neck.

As well as a Martial Heart behind him.

Not just behind him, he felt seven Martial Hearts activate a short distance away all around him.

He had been surrounded even before he landed.

"Impressive," Rui smirked wryly.

"State your name and purpose for approaching the orphanage," The woman behind him coldly commanded him. "Move an inch, and I'll sever your head."

"...Well, I'm glad to see that the Martial Union didn't shirk on my commission," Rui couldn't help but chuckle. "Thank you for everything that you've done for my family for the past eight years."

"What...?" She narrowed her eyes. "I said sta-"

BZZZT!

She suddenly paused as she received a message on her communication device, taking a moment to read it even as she kept a close eye on him.

"...You're authorized to pass." She slowly remarked, before she and her unit disappeared.

This confirmed Rui's suspicions that the Martial Union had become aware of his return. Yet he put the thought aside. He could have reached the orphanage in a single step, yet he felt the need to walk slowly. It only felt appropriate. He simply didn't want to admit that he was too nervous.

Yet, by the time he reached, he simply stopped, staring the house from the woods. Senior Xanarn had long noticed him. She smiled warmly, yet she didn't say a word.

It was lunch time, and Mayra had prepared a large meal for everyone gathered in the dining room.

Countless memories sprang into his head as he finally found the courage to walk up to the front of the door, knocking on it.

"Someone's at the door," Horatio called it.

"Tsk, who the heck is coming now, of all times," Rui smiled as he heard Farion grumbling.

"I'll get it!" Alice declared, excited.

"Finish your meals, I'll get it," His eyes widened as he heard his mother's soothing yet aged voice.

Time slowed down to a crawl in his vision as she approached the door. 'Oh man...'

He didn't know if he could keep it together.

CLICK

The door flew wide open.

Her skin had grown a tad wrinkled, her hair had gained a white accent to its blond. Her eyes seemed darker than he had remembered. Yet they lit up with shock when she beheld Rui. A wave of shock passed through her body as she dropped the jar of water she held.

"Rui...?" She whispered.

He choked on his own voice, refusing to break down sobbing, yet not even he could stop the tears rolling down his cheek.

"Welcome back...!" She sobbed as her warm voice rippled with love.

Before he knew it, she had already wrapped him in her arms, hugging him with every ounce of force she could muster, melting away all of the fear and guilt that wrapped his heart.

"...I'm sorry I'm late, mother."

Chapter 1527: Progressing Lives

1527 Progressing Lives

What unfolded that day would go on to become one of Rui's most cherished memories. His mother welcomed him back without even the slightest hint of hesitation despite all he had done. The rest of the orphanage soon became alerted to his presence, erupting with joy.

"RUUUUU!" Alice leaped at him as she hugged him. "You're actually back!"

"Took you long enough," Farion grumbled.

"He probably saw some awesome Martial Art technique and forgot to come back home," Horatio laughed.

"He has always been fascinated with Martial Art," Mika admitted. "I still recall how he made us help him train on that frozen lake when he was a kid preparing to get into the academy. He didn't let us go back home even if there was a storm coming!"

The adults swarmed Rui one after the other as they lightened the air with humor, at Rui's expense, of course. Not that Rui minded, after all that he had put them through, he would be shameless if he didn't quietly take at least this much.

However, it wasn't just the adults who were cooed over him. The kids were excited to have their older brother.

Naturally, they had become unrecognizable in the many years that he had been apart.

"Finally back home, eh big brother?"

"We're going to have you train us in Martial Art once more!"

"You've grown so tall!" Rui marveled at the sharp contrast between the kids he was familiar with and the adolescents and young adults that he was beholding right now.

Yet among them, two of them in particular caught his eye.

"Max...Mana..." He murmured. "You've become Martial Squires!"

"Hah, of course, we did!"

He quickly studied their Martial Bodies, he was relatively certain that they had made use of his Hungry Pain technique, at the moment, the threat level that he perceived from them put them about a low-grade Martial Squire, approaching mid-grade.

Which was pretty decent progress considering how young they were. He had no intention of holding them to his own pacing which was undoubtedly the fastest ever in the history of Martial Art.

"We'll definitely have to spar later on, I'm curious to see how much progress you've made," Rui remarked.

"Can we spar now?" Max asked, excited.

"I wish to show you how much I've grown since then, big brother," Mana impatiently declared.

"You haven't finished your meals yet," Lashara firmly refused. "Aw man!".

Rui glanced over, scanning the crowd that had formed. "Where's Julian?"

"He's in Hajin, at the institute. He's become quite busy ever since he became the deputy director of the Martial Art department in the Ministry of Research and Development," Lashara smiled, proud. Rui's eyebrows rose. To become the deputy director of a research department within the Ministry at his age was an incredible accomplishment that was usually reserved for the eldest scholars and researchers with more than a century of experience in their field.

Of course, he wasn't surprised. Julian had always been extraordinarily bright even as a kid. He had begun reading at the age of two, around the same as Rui. Unlike Rui, however, he wasn't cheating by being an adult as a baby. He was a genuine prodigy, and Rui was glad that he had made the most out of his talents.

"I'll have to speak with him when he comes back, I suppose," Rui smiled, looking forward to the meeting.

He paused for a moment as he ran into Senior Xanarn.

"You kept your word," Rui smiled. "I appreciate that."

"No need to thank me, Rui. I was just fulfilling my debt," She emphasized, before smiling. "It appears that you have finally accomplished what you set out to. I always knew you would."

Her words were kind, but he sensed some distance between them.

Then again, four years had passed just after they had affirmed their feelings for each other. Besides, he too knew that there were difficult hurdles that stood in the way of a relationship with each other.

"Yeah, but I would be much less at ease if not for the fact that I knew that you were protecting my family," Rui sighed. "Not to mention, telling them the truth."bender

Eventually, people broke out of their reverie of amazement and fascination, returning to their own devices. As much as Rui was loved, the day needed to move on, and many of them had responsibilities to tend to.

Over the many years, many of the young adults and caretakers had gotten married together and started families. Rui had noticed many small houses around in the vicinity when he arrived, putting two and two together.

"We got married seven years ago," Alice smiled as she pulled Farion in. "Ultimately, we decided to settle down very close to the Orphanage. That way it would be as though we never left the Orphanage while still having our own home!"

Rui smiled, hurting that he had missed that. He had known her his entire life and ultimately missed one of the most important days of her life.

"It worked out really well when we did it, and everybody from the Orphanage who got married did the same thing, and now we formed a small community," She laughed cheerily.

"That's quite amazing, it's like a big family stretched out over the entire area," Rui noted.

The orphanage was much larger than when he was born, thanks to the wealth that Rui and Julian had earned. However, it still had a limited capacity, so it was better for adults to move out but set up a home very nearby, especially if they had a family.

"And this is..." Rui's attention turned to a small girl who had arrived at Alice's side.

"This is our daughter, Ruina," Alice smiled. "I decided to name her after you, you see."

"Alice..." Rui's eyes widened as he felt himself growing emotional again. "...I don't know what to say."

"You know, I had been afraid for many years that you had forgotten about us and had moved on with your life after becoming an important Martial Artist. I thought that I was happy for you, and hoped you were happy." Alice smiled bittersweetly. "But now that you've come back...I'm so happy you haven't forgotten us."

"I'd never forget you, Alice. I've spent the past eight years thinking about all of you. No matter how many years, decades, or even centuries pass, I couldn't forget," Rui declared, not just to her, but also to himself.

Chapter 1528: Responsibility

An entire day had gone by as Rui slowly caught up with each of the members of the Orphanage. With so many years having gone by, each of them had many stories to share. Many of them had gotten married, and many of them had managed to get into new occupations and make a better living. There were simply too many tales to tell, a single was far from enough. The community of the Quarrier Orphanage had spread in this little region as many of the kids from Rui's generation had also grown up.

"You've created your own orphanage, Nina?" Rui's eyes widened with surprise.

"Mhm, we tried expanding our home, but the construction group that Julian had approached told us that there were many issues with trying to expand the Quarrier home into a bigger home, so ultimately I decided to have another one built right beside it," Nina smirked, evidently proud of herself. "Of course, it hasn't been easy, but all those years helping mom has given me good experience."

"Wow..." Rui murmured. "At this rate, it won't be another generation before we will be big enough to become a village. Maybe we can call it the Quarrier Village."

"Hehehe..." Nina smirked. "You should speak to mother about that. I'm sure she'd love that."

He didn't doubt those words either. His mother had always been fiercely driven when it came to children. If she could get away with creating an orphanage village that accepted tons of homeless children, he knew that she would do it in a heartbeat.

Still, it got him thinking. 'A village is pretty doable,' Rui pondered to himself. 'Especially with Julian and I funding it.'

He had no doubt that Julian was earning handsomely, and as a Martial Senior, he easily earned enough to buy entire villages if he wanted.

For now, he decided to keep the idea aside, perhaps he could approach Lashara with it at another time.

Eventually, Julian arrived home. Rui found it admirable that after all these years, he still resided in the original orphanage building, although he had clearly expanded his own cabin to fulfill his needs and requirements. He froze when he ran into Rui, shocked and speechless.

"Hehehe, look who came back, Julian." Alice teased him. "We kept it a secret from you so it could be a surprise."

Rui studied Julian carefully. He could tell that the man had been under some stress lately with a gaunter face and eye bags under his eyes. Still, that didn't halt his joy. If anything, he appeared even more joyful

"I knew it...I knew that you would return. I always did," He whispered as his eyes watered. "It's been long."

"Far too long..." Rui sighed. "I'm sorry for that. I truly am."

He glanced at Rui. "Come. Walk with me outside. I want to catch up with you."

The two of them strolled around the area as Rui took his time studying the new humble houses that had been constructed in the vicinity. He had to admit, it did add a sense of community and belonging that perhaps was not there before.

"You know, I brought you out here because the others would hit me if they heard what I have to tell you. Especially mother," Julian smiled wryly. "They love and adore you far too much. They're also indebted to you far too much. They could never bring themselves to tell you what I am going to."

Rui didn't reply. He had a feeling he knew where this was going. He didn't intend to stop it.

"I am the only one in a position to tell you. That is why I must be the one to tell you," He stopped on the spot.

Rui turned, staring straight at him.

"We love you, and we always will. However..." His eyes sharpened by a few degrees. "Your actions put the entire orphanage in danger. I know that you are more than intelligent enough to understand the ramifications of your actions. I know that you understand the risks of picking a fight with a powerful business tycoon with a known reputation to be ruthlessly persevering in his vengeance. Yet, you nonetheless did it. And worse, you ended up putting the innocent children and the brothers and sisters, who grew up with you and took care of you when you were a child, at risk. You put your own mother at risk."

Rui's expression fell at those words as an expression of guilt and remorse emerged on his face.

"I am grateful that you have secured incredible protection for the Orphanage, but you should know better than anyone that it isn't absolute. What if Chairman Deacon had succeeded in killing Mother while she shopped for the monthly groceries in Hajin? What if that madman had massacred the Orphanage by deploying a Martial Master? If that had happened, your return to the Orphanage would become the worst day of your life instead of one of the best," Julian's tone was composed and calm, yet unwaveringly firm. He wasn't venting the emotional turmoil that he had undoubtedly felt over the past eight years. His criticism of Rui came from a place of thought and not emotion.

"I'm aware that the life of a Martial Artist comes with many risks. Risking death is bread and butter. I am aware. However, you need to remember you chose those risks, not your family. You have a responsibility to ensure that the risks you take only extend to you, and no further," Julian firmly asserted. "Our family...they deserve to not suffer the consequences of your actions."

Rui could tell he was willing to fight with Rui over this matter if Rui pushed back refusing to accept any of his words. Rui was not that shameless, however.

In the first place, everything he said was absolutely correct as far as Rui was concerned. It was a fact that Rui was willing to risk his life as a Martial Artist. It was also a fact that he could not put his family at risk just because he himself was taking risks. It was a fact that he had a responsibility to ensure his actions only affected him, and not innocent loved ones who had nothing to do with his choices.

Rui bowed his head. "You're right. In every way. I'm not even going to pretend that it isn't as bad as it seemed or anything like that. The fact of the matter is that I put my family in more danger than even you realize. I have already ensured taken steps and measures to ensure that such a thing will never happen again."

Chapter 1529: Source of Stress

Julian stared at Rui's forlorn figure for a few seconds, before smiling, shaking his head. "Forget about it. It was not my intention to unfortunately sour the mood. The fact of the matter is that you did successfully protect the orphanage with an exorbitant amount of protection. The fact of the matter is that you have undoubtedly worked extraordinarily hard for nearly eight years all for the sake of your family. To eliminate the threat to your family. Your devotion is admirable and heart-warming, that much cannot be denied."

He walked up to Rui putting an arm around his shoulder. "Chin up. I have missed you."

"As have I...Julian."

"Tell me about your time away," Julian remarked. "You have become a Martial Senior in record time. That is an astonishing accomplishment that will undoubtedly ripple across the Martial World. It is a great sign of progress in Martial Art."

Julian seemed particularly enthused by this. As a researcher in Martial Art, this was undoubtedly a good thing for all of Martial Art.

"I'm surprised you can tell," Rui keenly noticed. "I haven't told any of them that I'm a Martial Senior yet. It seems you have become much more intimately familiar with Martial Artists than I'd have expected. As expected of the deputy director of the Martial Art department."

Julian smiled with pride at Rui's praise. "It means much to hear that from you of all people, Rui. I have grown very familiar with Martial Artists of the Lower Realms. I've led many teams that have made progress in improving the existing training program models meant to help novices discover their Martial Paths. I've also applied my background in esoteric material science to improve the configurations of the filtration evolution processes during the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure to produce more powerful Martial Bodies, and in the past four years, I have been working on developing on a research project that studies the development of the Martial Mind."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise at the last one. The fact that Julian, as a non-Martial Artist, had been authorized to learn about the Martial Mind showed just how much the Ministry of Research and Development had recognized his brilliance and genius as a researcher scholar.

The Martial Mind was a highly confidential subject. Rui couldn't even begin to imagine just how much expertise a researcher needed to accumulate and how many contributions he needed to make in order to be enlightened about the breakthrough to the Master Realm, and also be allowed to undertake a research subject regarding it.

"It seems you have been informed about the breakthrough to the Master Realm, as you rightfully deserve and need to," Julian smiled knowingly. "I'm sure you've made a lot of progress too. It is almost as if you were born for the Master Realm."

Julian had known Rui his entire life. He knew better than anybody just what kind of a monstrous talent for the Master Realm Rui hid. He was even excited at the prospects of Rui's ascent to the Master Realm.

"I did learn about it from a Martial Master more than two years ago, Rui responded, before smirking. "And you're damn right about that."

"A Martial Master hm? Well, do go on. I can't wait to hear the adventures you've been through," Julian's curiosity got the better of him.

"Don't worry, I'll tell you along with everyone else, it's too long of a story to repeat over and over," Rui sighed. "I'm more curious about yourself. You... don't look too well."

Julian's expression fell as Rui pointed out his less-than-healthy appearance. "...I was actually doing quite well, until recently, about half a year ago."

Rui waited silently, curious.

"I was approached in the Ministry by a woman by the name of Marin Vilmentine" Julian stated. "She's the chief of staff of Princess Raemina's faction. A high-level executive in the Raemina Foundation."

Rui's eyes narrowed at that revelation.

"She made a large donation," Julian sighed. "And when I say large, I do mean large...before inviting me to a ball held by the princess."

It didn't take a genius to figure out the intentions behind such actions, even if it did, both of them were geniuses so they were fine regardless.

Rui grimaced. "I see, so the conflict for the throne has begun revving up..." Julian nodded. "I'm surprised you are already aware of it, but yes. It had been more of a slow cold war in the past five years, but it has begun escalating in both intensity, pace, and openness. More and more ordinary civilians are becoming aware of the brewing tensions between the Royal Princes and Princesses. If that was just the one happening, it wouldn't matter much. But my department had received several more donations at regular intervals since then, and I have been receiving an increasing number of visits from Miss Marin Vilmentine since then."

Rui could tell that Julian was deeply uncomfortable with being entangled in this business. He was a researcher with a deep curiosity for the sciences, he was not someone who was politically adept.

In that regard, Rui was actually far better. He had received training in diplomacy and geopolitics and was even said to exceed the threshold of competence that was required to serve as an ambassador for the Kandrian Empire to Senior-level forces. The experience that gave him was also more relevant in handling such dicey situations.

His experiences with Guildmaster Bradt also allowed him to better navigate such situations and successfully get what he needed.

"If you want, I can..."

"No," Julian shook his head. "It's discomforting, but ultimately it is something that I need to face head on. I intend to inform Marin Vilmentine straightforwardly and bluntly that I do not wish to participate in Her Highness' political campaign."

Rui didn't think that was the best way of going about it. "Did you actually meet Her Highness?"

"I did," Julian sighed. "She spoke many a kind word about the Ministry and its accomplishments, but I could tell that she didn't give the slightest bit of a damn about the actual state and progress of research and development. She just wanted to gather as many higher-level executives within the executive government as she could."

Chapter 1530: Plans

"...Alright, if that's how you want to go about it, then go ahead with it," Rui replied. "Let's put aside the matter of the Kandrian Throne War for now," Julian heaved a sigh. "I did not come here to talk about such heavy topics."

He turned to Rui. "Tell me, what do you plan to do now that you're back here?"

Rui considered the question wordlessly. "...In the short term, I think I just want to it a little slow for now. I have been away for nearly eight years, and I just want to experience a bit of what I've missed all this time."

It was quite surreal to think that he had already returned home. He couldn't quite get enough of it, especially considering it hadn't even been a full day since he arrived.

"That's understandable, I'm glad you're not going to run off on some other long-term distant commission or something like that. It's good to take things slow when you've been living fast and hard," Julian gently coaxed Rui.

"After that...I'm going to work on reaching the Master Realm," Rui replied. "I also have plenty of business and matters to handle."

He knew that the Martial Union was undoubtedly waiting for him. Though he was glad that they had enough tact and respect for his personal liberty that they didn't try and send a messenger summoning him to the head office of the Martial Union. That gave him a better impression of them.

"Isn't it a bit too soon for you to think about the Master Realm?" Julian asked hesitantly. "The youngest breakthrough to the Master Realm occurred at the age of sixty, after all."

"I don't intend to take that long. I have a more immediate need for that kind of power," Rui thought about the matter of Master Uma long and hard.

There was no way she wouldn't find him before he turned sixty. Although the Panama Continent was enormous and the information connectivity across the continent was shit, it was still only a matter of time before she found him.

The main reasons for this were that his facial features were rare, and he was going to be more famous than he ever had been before. It would probably take years, but eventually, Master Uma would run into a picture of Rui Quarrier and recognize him.

That's why Rui needed to delay that from happening. He had just gotten back to a peaceful life, and he had no intention of losing it yet again. He already had some pretty good ideas on how to prevent that from happening. This time, he had no intention of taking any half-assed measures to ensure that he wasn't discovered.

And once he broke through to the Master Realm, he would kill her the very day he did.

For now, that was still a while away.

"I also intend to familiarize myself with the Kandrian Empire more than I already have," Rui replied.

"Although I wasn't necessarily unfamiliar with this nation, I only realized how great this empire is after visiting other places. While far from perfect, the people of the Kandrian Empire are generally not unhappy, I've even ventured to say that this is a happy nation, all things considered. I'd rather nothing happen to the peace and harmony within the Empire."

Of course, he knew that was already false. With the cold throne war silently brewing at the highest echelons, it was only a matter of time before it escalated even further, threatening the pace that he had come to belatedly learn the value of.

Then there were bastards like the Carnil Mafia, who also threatened the peace and harmony of the Kandrian Empire.

Unfortunately, Rui lacks the power to deal with these events. Even if he was a Martial Sage, it was unlikely that he would be able to do anything. After all, there were fourteen Martial Sages in the Kandrian Empire.

He shook his head. 'Rather than focusing on things that I can't affect, I should focus on things that I can.'

Rui chatted a bit more with Julian as the two of them broached lighter topics. "Ah, I've meant to ask you... That Martial Senior...is she your girlfriend?" Julian peeked at Rui curiously.

Rui did his best to maintain a composed expression. "...She's special, but we're not in a committed relationship. There are practical impediments. We want different things in life. I can't stand stagnating in one place for too long, especially after what I've experienced in the past eight years. I know for a fact I would be much weaker had the fiasco of the Shionel Confederation not occurred, derailing my life."

He probably wouldn't even be a Martial Senior.

"I see. Your lifestyle differences are too great, are they?" Rui nodded. "I enjoy her company, she has a funny sense of humor and is fun to talk to. But she's the type who enjoys peaceful monotony. But I have

ambitions in life that require me to push myself, to subject myself to danger to stimulate myself. And that usually means not being in the Kandrian Empire."

"It is hard to imagine a Martial Senior associated with the Martial Union experiencing grave danger on a daily basis inside the Kandrian Empire," Julian admitted. "The Kandrian Empire is too stable for me to feel any sense of danger," Rui replied. "It's why I began doing foreign missions as a Martial Apprentice in the first place. The Martial Union may as well be nigh-omnipotent within the boundaries of the Kandrian Empire. What could possibly make me feel desperate?"

The only thing he would find as a Martial Senior in the Kandrian Empire are bodyguard jobs for the most powerful figures in the nation. Perhaps some business magnates and tycoons like Charles DiViliers. Important bureaucratic figures within the government and Martial Union.

The kind of people who were rarely truly in danger with the obscene amount of protection they received.

"Sounds like you'll eventually get bored of the Kandrian Empire," Julian smiled wryly.

"Eventually, probably. But for now, I'm here to stay. I've been away for far too long."