

Martial Unity 241

Chapter 241: Their names

"I see..." Rui murmured engrossed in thought. "Once my Martial Art has achieved Martial Maturity, then would I become a Squire candidate?"

Headmaster Aronian nodded. "As long as you fulfill both those conditions, yes, you will be considered a Squire candidate and we will begin the process."

"We will begin the process?" Rui frowned. "It's not a self-induced naturally occurring phenomenon like the breakthrough to Martial Apprentice?"

Headmaster Aronian smiled mysteriously. "Hoho... I'll answer that question once you come a Squire candidate."

"...Alright then." Rui slowly replied.

They were incredibly stubborn on this matter. Fae and Kane hadn't heard so much as a peep about the breakthrough process to Martial Squire, furthermore none of the Squire instructors yielded so much as an inch of information regarding the matter at all.

Rui sighed inwardly; he would just have to wait until he fulfilled both conditions. He suspected the first condition may have already been fulfilled, based on Master Aronian's choice of words. In that case, it was best that moving forward he focus on fulfilling the second condition as well.

But frankly, that wouldn't change what he was doing.

His Martial Art had most certainly not yet reached Martial maturity, he could feel it.

He knew it.

It was still changing immensely and was in its flux state, it had also not reached where he wanted it to reach. It was still incomplete.

Furthermore, Rui suspected that although he basically got a free pass for originality and uniqueness, he might have an extra hard time with reaching Martial maturity.

This was because he needed to go a long distance before his Martial Art could be considered complete. With the limited number of techniques that he had it was impossible for him to be able to adapt to all Martial Art. His Martial Art would change shape a lot until it became equally well-rounded in all aspects.

"Is there anything else you would like to talk about?" Headmaster Aronian asked, stroking his beard.

"Nothing in particular." Rui said, before pausing. "How much information about the other representatives can I find out at this stage?"

"I can give you a list of names." The headmaster shrugged. "But I'm afraid I cannot give you strategic information regarding them, I'm afraid. I do not have much of such information, nor would I give it to you even if I did. I can ensure that your information won't get leaked too, as much as I can. Although details and general information of your Martial Art and combat will undoubtedly disseminate, nothing too specific and important will likely spread."

"I'll take the list of names then. And thank you for the aid." Rui bowed.

"Not at all. I would be a worthless headmaster if I couldn't accomplish this much at least." He chuckled, as he began scribbling down on a piece of paper, before handing it to Rui. "There you go. If there's nothing else, you may go."

Rui simply bowed before exiting the office.

He sighed as he put some distance between them. Even the passive pressure that Headmaster Aronian put on him was unnerving. Rui could tell he was doing something to suppress the effect of that, and he was grateful.

He glanced at the list, scrutinizing the names carefully, character-by-character.

Representative Ferlicia Ernand of the Fritzer branch.

Representative Ian Nepomniachtchi of the Farund branch.

Representative Arjun Erigaisi of the Hrava branch.

Representative Mia Marnt of the Fellen branch.

Representative Byron Harth of the Brillix branch.

Representative Vyoming Hurin of the Narfinius branch.

Representative Esfand Hanax of the Sicillia branch.

Representative Freund Garmor of the Villimaine branch.

Representative Ana Mariane of the Hyulflum branch.

Representative Surman Marliak of the Verlain branch.

Representative Derk Sermont of the Brandar branch.

Representative Servil Bisha of the Gragol branch.

Representative Askin Nodt of the Fervor branch.

Representative Kaerts Omegde of the Sarkar branch.

Representative Fiona Roschem of the Vargard branch.

His name paused at the last one.

Fiona Roschem.

Indeed, she was chosen as a representative like he had suspected.

As for the other names, none of them struck out to him. However, he suspected that most, if not all, of them were from the Martial community.

The descendants of Martial families simply had too many advantages compared to commoners like himself. Guided training from, at the very least, Martial Squires from a very young age. Access to an immense amount of valuable learning, training and growth resources of various kinds. Even if their talent was below average, their pedigree gave them a strong advantage.

Those among these descendants who possessed immense talent as well, ended up being the top of the top. Kane, Fae and Hever were such examples. Frankly, Nel and himself were just absurd freaks with ridiculous circumstances. They were far from the norm.

He would not be surprised at all if all the representatives were members of Martial Families.

He knew for a fact Fiona Roschem was.

He immediately went back to the dormitory and gathered his friends.

"So, these are the representatives of the other branches, huh?" Kane frowned as he read the list. "Well, can't say this is particularly surprising."

"Indeed." Fae nodded as she glanced over the list. "Some of these names were essentially locked for the win."

"Like Fiona Roschem?" Rui inquired.

"And Ian Nepomniachtchi." Fae nodded.

"Who's that?" Rui asked.

"Remember I told you quite a while back that there were three prodigious geniuses of our generation in the Martial Community?" Fae asked.

"Fiona and Kane were two of them, I recalled." Rui nodded.

"Ian Nepomniachtchi is the third one among them." Fae said.

"I see..." Rui's eyes narrowed.

So he was a monster, was basically what Fae was telling him.

"So he's as strong as Kane?" Rui raised an eyebrow, as Kane snorted.

"He's an insecure punk is what he is." Kane grumbled. "He's a few years older than Fiona and I. When the two of us came along, he was always hostile towards us. Neither of us can stand his arrogant ass."

"So how did you fare against him?"

"I don't remember." Kane shrugged.

"He got defeated 10-0." Fae offered.

"No, I didn't! It was 7-3!" Kane barked.

"My... so you do remember." A hint of mischievous smugness flashed across her face.

Rui sighed as the two of them got into one of their routine arguments.

Chapter 242: Information

"Alright alright, that's enough." He broke the two apart. "Are all of them descendants of Martial families?"

"Yep." Kane replied.

"Figured." Rui sighed. "Atleast, that makes reconnaissance easier. What can you tell me about them?"

"Honestly, not much." Fae sighed. "It's been two years, the information we have is extremely outdated. Look how much all of us have grown in two years, after all."

Rui nodded. "I understand that. Just tell me what type of Martial Art they have."

"Sure." Fae agreed. "I know Fiona and Ian the best, so I'll begin with them. Fiona as I told you is an extreme all-rounder with immense mastery in all aspects of combat with her sheer talent and affinity for all fields. Ian on the other hand is much more specialized."

"Specialized in what?"

"He specializes in breathing techniques."

"Interesting..." Rui's face flashed with intrigue. He hadn't heard of a breathing technique specialist before, there certainly wasn't one in the Academy.

"He had mastered breathing techniques incredibly quickly at a young age. I have no idea how strong he is now." Fae said. "But given his talent and his age, he should have an incredibly solid Martial Art. I would suggest being careful with him."

"Will remember that." Rui said. "Anybody else?"

"Ferlicia was a heat technique user, if I remember correctly..." Kane pondered aloud.

"Right, though she had only mastered two techniques when we'd last met." Fae said.

Heat techniques. Yet another type of Martial Art Rui hadn't seen before. He had seen temperature-based techniques in the Apprentice library, of course, but he wasn't familiar with them. He wondered Ferlicia Ernard would be capable of.

"Arjun Erigaisi is an extremely strong defensive fighter. He's unbelievably tough." Kane pointed out.

"Even I had trouble hurting him back then." Fae agreed. "Mia is a sound-based fighter, by the way. I don't know her personally but I've heard plenty of her."

"Oh, you have to be wary of Byron." Kane said as he went down the list. "He's a nerve striking Martial Artist. When he hits your nerves, they really fucking hurt and he can do all kinds of things."

"A nerve striking Martial Art." Rui

"Vyoming fights with vibrations." Fae said, earning a confused look from Rui.

"Vibrations huh?" He said with interest. "I'll have to look further into that, what else?"

"Well, Esfand if I recall correctly..." Fae and Kane went on to divulge everything they knew on all the other representatives.

In the end, it didn't amount to much. However, what little he had learnt was extremely interesting and exciting.

Every single one of them was colourful and special.

Poison, heat, breathing, vibrations, nerves friction, sound and many other techniques of esoteric nature.

In some ways, Rui should have expected this, how could they possibly reach at the peak of their respective Academies if they were ordinary and normal.

It simply wasn't possible. Out of the five people in the Hajin Academy who all had a chance of being chosen as the representative, none of them were ordinary!

They were all deviants in their own ways.

The question was how well Rui would do against the other representatives.

That was a difficult question to answer. These Martial Artists had Martial Art that deviated from the norm quite significantly. He had no experience against many of these Martial Art and techniques at all before. Furthermore, he wasn't sure he had the tools to defeat many of these Martial Art.

Furthermore, the VOID algorithm was certainly ill-equipped to face many of these Martial Art techniques, even if he was being generous to it.

This had to do with the fact that the VOID algorithm was not adapted to Gaea-based Martial Art yet, making it less affective. Rui had already long recognized this shortcoming, but he had yet to overcome it, though he had taken a few steps.

Unfortunately, the further he went, the more he realized how difficult this ambition was!

How was he supposed to incorporate solutions for such almost magical Martial Art techniques? IT was truly confounding problem. Furthermore, it wasn't one or two or even handful of difficult techniques, there many of them.

Although many of the fundamentals and the core of the algorithmic system were still entirely useful, it still became quite difficult to use the secondary portions of the algorithm. Then there was the fact that Rui still hadn't fixed the viability problem of the VOID algorithm.

Originally the algorithm simply wasn't possible to master, it was too complex, too difficult. Too mentally intensive. It essentially only worked when it was run on a literal high-speed computer.

Thanks to the cognitive boosts he had received from his second cognitive growth stage and the breakthrough to Martial Apprentice, he was able to master a portion of it, but he still had some ways to go in that regard.

Perhaps his Martial Art would reach Martial maturity only when he overcome this problem somehow. That was the worst-case scenario.

He had many hurdles before him.

Regardless, his fights against the representatives were not going to be easy. He lacked to much information to make judgements on how his fights with them would unfold, or whether or not he would win or lose. But the one thing he could confidently be sure of that his fights with the representatives of all the branches of the Martial Academies was going to be extremely tough and rigorous.

Even against the average representative, he would probably be unable to hold back. Against titans like Fiona and Ian, he wasn't sure he would be able to win even if he used every ounce of power he had and every resource he had.

And yet...

He couldn't help but smile.

He would be testing his Martial Art against the best of the best.

How exciting!

Rui grinned when he read through his notes. He was so excited he could barely even wait for the Martial Contest.

He immediately got up, walking out.

"Where are you going?" Kane asked.

"Back to training."

He said, leaving the two behind.

Chapter 243: Considerations

He reached an isolated training hall that he had reserved for himself in advance.

He wanted solitude.

He sat down, meditating. He had begun mentally training his application of the VOID algorithm. Since the VOID algorithm was a system of information protocols, he didn't need to move in order to use it. He could hone it even if he was mediating.

His goal was to refine his application of the VOID algorithm. He went back through his previous fights in the preliminary contest. He had reviewed each of them mentally, taking notes on how he could have done things better.

And yet, when he closed his eyes...

He saw darkness.

He saw the void.

Ever since he had begun training, he had been trying visualize his Martial Art as an entity.

What would it look like?

What would it be?

What would it do?

He closed his eyes and looked inward. Looked at himself. Looked at his Martial Path. Looked his Martial Art.

He saw a universe.

Littered with stars. Littered with bright life.

However, at the center of it was a void of darkness.

It moved.

No, it poured. It ebbed. It flowed.

It warped, changing its form as it consumed the light in the universe. Stars disappeared one by one as the void flowed altering its form as it enveloped as smoothly possible.

It was a psychedelic vision. One that beggared the imagination.

But he understood what these strange sights were.

This were his Martial Art.

A flowing void that consumed all.

"A flowing void..." He whispered. "Hm..."

That didn't sound bad...

In fact, he quite liked the sound of that.

He shook his head, returning back to training.

* * * * *

A week passed, and it was time. Only two days were left for the Martial Contest. The Martial Academy had arranged for secure transport that would escort him from Hajin to Vargard, the capital of the Kandrian Empire, where the Martial Contest would be held.

This would be the first time he had left the Mantian region that housed his town of Hajin. But he wasn't all too bothered with that at the moment. He had sat with his eyes most of the journey, trying to retain as much of his concentration and focus on the upcoming Martial Contest.

He went over everything he knew about the Martial Contest.

Sixteen representatives.

Four rounds.

One champion.

The Martial Colosseum that the Martial Contest was being held in was a large multi-environmental field that ensured no one Martial Art would gain an unfair advantage over the other due to a singular environment.

The tournament was an elimination style tournament where half the contestants would be knocked out and eliminated from the contest every round, until there was only one person remaining. That person would be crowned the Martial Champion.

His opponents were distinguished warriors with unique and powerful Martial Art. Over the past week, Rui had often visited the Apprentice library. The reason he did was not because he wanted to purchase any techniques for himself, but rather to go through the techniques of the styles that he knew his opponents had.

He did this to get a deeper understanding of how they might approach the fight and what their combat style might end up looking like.

Of course, it was still quite shallow since he didn't know what techniques they had, nor did he know the techniques themselves very well.

Unless he purchased the techniques, he would not be able to read all the data the Martial Academy had on the techniques. The very best he would be able to do is avoid blunders and make more targeted precautionary measures against each of them, as much help that would be.

Of course, since he didn't have much time, these measures were also simplistic and elementary. He would be able to build upon them as the Martial Contest progressed.

The best part was that he would get to see almost all fighters fight at the very least once before he ran into them himself. The difference being his opponent in the very first round, who he would have to fight blind.

However, for all the other rounds he would be able to construct a more thorough adapted style via the VOID algorithm. This effectively meant he would become a more and more difficult opponent to fight as time passed on. This format benefitted him while it disadvantaged normal fighters.

His opponents would become easier to deal with because they would be forced to reveal more of their Martial Art as time passed on, and although this was also true for him. He had his adaptive evolution that mitigated that downside and compensated for it.

In a way, the first round had a chance of being the most difficult hurdle of them all. Because he was walking in almost blind with no information. He needed to be extremely careful, otherwise he might end up getting defeated by a trump card before he even got a chance to adapt to his opponent.

However, this was unlikely. Revealing a trump card of that sort in the first round was not a good idea. Since it meant your future opponents would be quite prepared for it. Rui estimated that his opponents would try to use as little as possible in the first round.

This was his plan as well.

He would definitely not use Stinger and Blink unless he genuinely had to. He would also try to keep the Phantom Step technique a secret if he could get away with doing so.

However, that might too greedy.

All in all, he wanted to stay on the side of caution while still trying to get away with whatever he could. It was a thin line to walk. Too greedy and he might lose, too cautious and he might not be able to win the contest because he revealed too much to the other representatives.

All these consideration were flashing through his head despite his composed demeanor.

Chapter 244: She

He had arrived much quicker than he had expected. However, he had been transported in a much faster vehicle than a normal horse-pulled carriage. He assumed it was something powered by some esoteric technology, but he didn't have time to think about it. He didn't want to be distracted.

Yet even he couldn't help but marvel at Vargard, the capital of the Kandrian Empire. It was truly spectacular. The core of Hajin was an impressive trade hub but Vargard looked like some futuristic-fantasy utopia. It really sold the image as the capital of the Kandrian Empire.

"How far is the designated housing dormitory, instructor Kyrie?" Rui asked.

"Not too far in distance." Squire Kyrie replied. "But I'm afraid it will take some time."

Each representative was supported by Squire staff from the Academy, Rui had been assigned Kyrie and Dylan.

"Relax kid." Squire Dylan told him, waving his hands. "No need to be in a hurry or worry. The housing arrangements will be quite luxurious, I can tell you that."

The Martial Contest was not an event that would end in a single day. Each round was designated to take at least a day. Thus, the entire contest would extend over four days.

"Will I be in the same dorm as the other representatives?" Rui wondered.

Dylan sneered at him. "What else? Did you expect the Academies to give you different luxury rooms in different parts of the town?"

"No..."

"The dormitory housing is quite close to the Martial Colosseum, you're all gonna be kept close by so that it's convenient and there're no complications." Dylan shrugged.

"Isn't it weird to be living in the same block as your competitors?" Rui asked, amused.

"It's how things were even when I was the representative of the Hajin branch." She replied.

"I see." He shrugged; it wasn't a big deal.

As time passed, they finally arrived.

The Martial Colosseum was gigantic. It stood tall and mighty and could be seen from kilometers away. Its architecture reminded Rui a lot of ancient Roman architecture back on Earth.

At a location not geographically far from the Colosseum was a facility that had the emblem of the Martial Academy.

"Is that it?" Rui asked.

"Yep." Dylon nodded. "It has everything you could want. All training facilities you could need if you want to practice and warm up. That's why it's so big."

"That's good to hear." Rui replied. But he didn't think he would be training for the Martial Contest at all. There was less than twenty-four hours for the contest to begin. He knew there was absolutely nothing more additional that he possibly could have done at this stage. Now he could only calmly do his very best.

Once they arrived, they quickly got off and headed towards the facility.

"Welcome, your housing accommodations have already been arranged." A staff member greeted.
"Please allow us to guide you to your respective accommodations."

"Catch you later Rui." Squire Dylon said. "Try to catch some rest and freshen up."

Rui nodded, before they splitting ways with the instructors.

"Have the other representatives arrived yet?" Rui asked.

"One of them has." The attendant replied. "The representative of Vargard arrived yesterday, ahead of schedule."

The representative of Vargard was...

('Fiona Roschem.')

Rui recalled. "I see."

Perhaps he would run into her.

Soon they reached his room.

"These will be your accommodations for your stay during in this facility." The staff attendant informed.
"If you have any needs, please do not hesitate to seek our aid."

"Thank you." Rui replied before walking in.

The room was rather large and luxurious. The bag of clothes he had packed had already arrived ahead of time.

"Good service." he nodded.

The representatives were probably given such comfort so that there would be no doubt there was nothing discomforting that could detract from their prime condition for their matches.

"The bathroom is gigantic too, geez." He muttered. Not that he was complaining, of course.

He quickly fixed himself a tub bath before relaxing in it. He felt his weariness and fatigue melt away. He had to admit, they did a good job ensuring the representatives would be comfortable.

He absolutely wouldn't mind spending four days here.

"Once I'm finished, I should get something to eat. I'm famished." Rui muttered.

He expected the food to be great too. It'd been quite some time before he had indulged in a luxurious meal.

"I ought to meet up with instructors Kyrie and Dylon too." He recalled.

A good half an hour relaxed him quite well, though he was still constantly shifting his thoughts and concentration to the Martial Contest as much as wanted.

Once he got out, dried and dressed up.

He heard a knock at the door.

He frowned.

Who was at the door? The Squire instructors?

"Hm?" When he opened the door, he saw nobody. Then he looked down a bit and his vision landed on a short petite girl with brown hair and silver eyes. Her appearance was not intimidating.

What was intimidating was her passive mental pressure.

"Hi." She said. "So you're Rui Quarrier."

She murmured, studying him top to bottom.

"Uh..." He wasn't sure what he was supposed to say. "I presume you're the representative of the Vargard branch?"

"Ye." She turned up, meeting his eyes. "My name is Fiona Roschem."

"..."

"..."

They simply stared at each other.

"So... do you want something?" Rui asked.

Fiona shrugged. "Nothing at all. Why do you ask?"

She tilted her head, genuinely confused and curious. Rui looked at her like she was an idiot.

"Why are you here?" Rui frowned. "Are you lost?"

"No." She replied. "I just wanted to see the commoner boy who beat Kane. It found it quite hard to believe when I first read about it. How did you do it?"

Well, she suddenly went from circular to straightforward.

Yet strangely, when he gazed into her silver eyes, he only saw curiosity.

Rui shrugged. "Fought hard. Fought smart."

"I see." She said. "Anyways, bye-bye."

She pranced away before Rui could even reply, leaving him standing at the doorway staring at her retreating form.

Chapter 245: Interactions

Rui didn't even know what to say. His image of her was shattered. He expected a cold, detached and arrogant temperament, but she came off as a scatterbrain girl with a lot of curiosity.

But one thing he did get right was that she was strong.

Incredibly strong.

Her passive mental pressure was deep, she was strong without even trying. Without even wanting.

Just her very curiosity alone exerted weight on his mind.

Rui suspected she might have even been a Squire candidate, though he wasn't sure.

Soon, he headed to the cafeteria. To his surprise, the other representatives had not only arrived but had also gathered around the same table. Only then had recalled that they were all acquaintances with each other for the most part, since they were all part of the Martial community.

They exchanged glances.

Rui could feel their scrutinizing gazes even as he scrutinized them.

('They're strong.') He smiled just a little.

"Rui." Squire Kyrie called out to him.

"Instructor." Rui turned, facing her.

"Eat quick. Also, feel free to join them." She gestured. "Although you are competitors, you are all the best of your generation."

"I don't particularly care to interact with them over dinner-" "Hey RUI!" The voice of a girl called to him.

He recognized it instantly.

He wordlessly turned, facing Fiona.

She gestured to an empty seat at the table they were all seated at.

Squire Kyrie smiled wryly.

Rui stared at her for a moment before shrugging.

There was no harm to be done. Although he didn't care enough to go out of his way to reach out to them, he would not refuse a direct invitation. He was curious about them.

Even as he walked over, one of the men in the group threw looks of disdain at her.

"Going out of your way to invite a mongrel commoner to your table." He grumbled. "Fiona, you haven't changed at all in the past two years."

"Is it that big a deal?" She threw him an inquisiting look. "You're the only one complaining. Aren't you curious about the commoner boy who beat Kane, Fae and Hever?"

"No." He coldly retorted. "Even if I did, I wouldn't invite him to eat at my table. You're as careless of your status as always."

Rui was more amused than offended. Generic insults weren't really a big deal, and he had frankly anticipated snobby behavior from some of the representatives

She shrugged, unperturbed. "I care for what I care for. He's interesting, so I'm interested. I'm interested so I invited him."

He snorted wordlessly, turning towards Rui, scrutinizing him condescendingly before sighing. "To think Kane lost to a commoner with dirty hair and eyes like yourself. Why the Martial Community thinks his talent is on par with mine is beyond me."

Rui tilted his head as a realization flashed in him. "Ah, you must be Ian Nepomniachtchi."

"Oh?" Ian chuckled. "Did Kane mention me?"

"He did." Rui nodded. "He described your insecurity and inferiority complex quite well, I have to say."

Ian's eyes narrowed at those words. "Bold words coming from a commoner. You dare insult me?"

Rui shrugged with a wry smile. "Only an insult if you want it to be."

"And what if I do?" The mental pressure he exerted on Rui increased. The other representatives at the table watched silently in interest.

"Well..." Rui scratched his chin. "Then the Martial Contest is truly conveniently timed, isn't it?" He said with a playful smile.

Ian stared at him as a mild smirk cracked on his cold face. "Finally, we can agree on something. I'll educate you in front of the entire empire. Free of cost, of course." He chuckled. "I know your poor plebeian ass doesn't have the funds to pay me."

"Don't worry, I have a habit of returning favours." He shrugged. "With interest."

The tension at the table escalated.

"If you want, I can give you that free lesson right here and now." He said coldly. "No need to wait for the Martial Contest."

"That's not allowed." Fiona chirped. "You'd get disqualified, you know? Ah maybe that's for the best. Please continue, don't mind me."

She said, breaking the tension. She was entirely unbothered by the mounting irritated pressure the Ian exerted on her.

"Hmph." He snorted, closing his eyes and getting up. "We'll continue this in the Martial Contest." He said. "I'll have to educate both of you, it seems."

He walked away.

"Well." A girl broke the silence. "He hasn't changed in the past two years either."

"Indeed." A boy with orange hair said. "He's as arrogant and domineering as always."

Rui recognized his features, and also the insignia on his clothes. They belonged to the Garmor Martial Family.

Which made him representative Freund Garmor of the Villimaine branch. He had a heavy pressure to him, he was strong without a doubt.

"He's boring, let's stop talking about him." Fiona said. "What I'm more interested in is..."

She turned to face Rui with curious eyes. "You. Seriously, how did you beat Kane, Fae and Hever? That's so much more interesting."

"Do you really think he'd tell you?" A girl besides her asked. "He's a competitor, he's not going to reveal anything meaningful about his combat."

Rui identified her as well. Representative Ferlicia Ernard of the Fritzer branch. She had a calm demeanor that painted a picture of confident power.

"Yeah, but aren't you curious?" Fiona asked.

"To say I'm not... would be a lie." Her eyes turned towards Rui with some interest.

"Is it really that hard to believe?" Rui smiled wryly.

"Very." Another man among them replied. He was gigantic, his presence was like an imposing mountain. "Kane is prodigiously talented, and is also part of one of the most powerful Martial Families in the Kandrian Empire. Yet here comes along a commoner who beat him despite having broken through only after he joined the Academy. It's an almost absurd tale."

Rui identified him immediately. Arjun Erigaisi, the defensive powerhouse.

Rui smiled. He did agree that it was an absurd tale. Frankly, the reason he was able to grow strong enough to beat Kane was due to truly otherworldly circumstances.

Literally.

Chapter 246: It was time.

But how he was supposed to explain that to them?

He shook his head in resignation. "I happen to be blessed with special circumstances."

A girl among them snorted. "Anybody can tell that. You do not overcome large disadvantages in talent, resources and time without extraordinary circumstances."

Rui glanced at her, recognizing the emblem of her family.

Representative Ana Mariane of the Hyuflum branch.

Rui shrugged, not deigning to continue the conversation.

Eventually, the conversation grew strained even as the food arrived. At the end of the day, they were only interacting with each other because most of them were long-time acquaintances of each other. However, they had not gathered here today for a reunion.

They were competitors in one of the most important and prestigious events in the entire Martial Festival.

Rui quickly took his leave once he finished his meals, meeting up with his instructors.

"So? How did it go?" Squire Dylan asked. "Made some new friends?"

Rui snorted. "As if. Anybody who can make friends under these circumstances deserves an award."

"Tsk tsk." Squire Dylan tutted. "You're still young, you should make friends. When I was your age, I had friends gallore. Ask Kyrie."

She snorted. "You were just a fool who ran around getting along with everything that breathed."

"The two of you were in the same batch?" Rui asked.

"Unfortunately, yes." She sighed.

They bantered a bit before reaching the split in the corridor.

"Be sure to get some good rest Rui." Squire Kyrie told him. "Don't rely on potions if you can. Save them. Tomorrow, you need to be at your peak form."

Rui nodded. "Good night."

He bade them goodnight before returning to his dorm room.

He had a lot to think about. He thought about his interactions with the other representatives. He had tried to gauge them but, of course, couldn't possibly obtain any meaningful tactical intelligence.

All he could tell was each one of them was incredibly strong. However, even among them, there were clearly stronger ones.

There was, of course, Ian Nepomniachtchi.

His attitude and personality may have been rotten, but his power was real. Rui could tell he was incredibly strong. He exerted an immense amount of pressure on Rui in his attempts to push Rui back.

And then there was Fiona.

Her temperament was not what he expected. But her strength was.

A master of all.

He wouldn't be surprised. She was not domineering, arrogant or haughty.

She didn't need to be.

She exerted a gravity on everybody despite her carefree and curious temperament. She didn't need to put on airs to emphasize her strength, her strength emphasized itself.

Rui smiled. He couldn't wait to run into her in the Martial Contest. He wished he could have fought all of them, unfortunately he would get to fight only four of them. And that was only if he made it to the very finals.

It was a shame.

He shook his head, thinking about tomorrow.

Tomorrow the first round of the Martial Contest would commence. The matchups would be decided shortly before the round began. So, Rui would have no idea who he was fighting until sometime before he fought.

Not that it mattered. He simply needed to his best, and hopefully win.

There wasn't much more to it than that.

The next morning, he got up early, brimming with vitality. He had somehow managed to get a good night of sleep despite his excitement.

The day had arrived. He could scarcely believe it. He clenched his quivering fist with anticipation, regaining his composure.

He fixed himself a tub bath, not because of luxury but because it helped him calm down and focus. He wanted to be in peak mental condition by the time he was ready.

Once he got out, he quickly dried and dressed up, heading for the main hall. He was supposed to be present there at precisely the stipulated time, he did not want to be late.

The others had also arrived.

Everyone was there.

Soon, a heavy mental pressure weighed down upon them.

Rui's eyes narrowed as he recognized this sensation.

('Martial Master.')

"Gather around." The voice of an elderly woman reverberated as she walked into the facility, followed by the Martial Squire instructors of all the branches of the Martial Academies.

Although she had the appearance of an old woman, not a single person in the room doubted that she would be able to solo all of them combined.

"I am Master Firilia." She said. "I am the Contest Master, I will be overseeing the twenty-seventh Martial Contest. Each of you is here today after overcoming a tremendous amount of hurdles and obstacles to reach where you are today. The feat of being chosen as the representative of the Martial Academy is an impressive feat without a doubt. Each of you has the right to be proud of your accomplishment."

She paused, before continuing. "However, each of you has the opportunity to be more. To be more than just a representative. Each of you has the opportunity and potential to be crowned the Martial Champion. An accomplishment of boundless prestige that will change your life forever. Your name will go down in history, as it should. Should each of you overcome your opponents, this honour will be yours. I expect a lot of each of you, do not disappoint me."

She said bluntly. Yet it was not the words, but the person saying them that mattered the most. The representatives felt burdened by such a blunt declaration of her expectations.

However, Rui only felt excited. He clenched his fist again, suppressing his tingling nerves as best he can before regaining his calm and composure.

This was it.

It was time.

"It is time." She said. "Each of you will be taken to the Martial Colosseum. Come."

Outside there were dozens of carriages designated to the representatives and their Squire instructors as well as the Martial Master herself and other staff members.

It was time.

Chapter 247: Matchups

Even as they travelled to the colosseum, Rui could feel the tension and energy in the air. The population density as they travelled to the Martial Colosseum had been increasing.

It peaked once they arrived.

There were countless rickshaws and carriages parked near the Martial Colosseum and a huge number of people from, not just Vargard, but also from other towns had arrived. The crowd was noisy and chaotic as they funneled into a huge line that was trickling into the Martial Colosseum.

The Martial Colosseum itself was gigantic. Its architecture was grand. It was elaborate yet detailed. It inspired a sense of majesty in its bearers. Rui couldn't help but feel he was privileged to have the honour of fighting in it in the Martial Contest.

The carriages of the contestants and staff accompanying them did not join the crowd of spectators but instead stopped on another side of the Martial Colosseum, reserved for authorized personnel and

individuals only thankfully. Rui was glad he didn't have to join that painfully long line to attend his own event.

Soon each of the contestants were escorted to their own temporary quarters, separated from their Squire instructors.

In his quarters, he found his Martial uniform. It had undergone thorough checking to ensure there was no modification and alteration of foul play. He found it initially surprising when they were so strict but he knew that foul play was probably was easier and far more deadly in this world than back on Earth due to esoteric technology.

Once he donned it, his Squire instructors had arrived.

"Ready?" Squire Dylan asked.

"Quite." He replied.

Thanks to the continuous priming and conditioning of his mind for the Martial Contest over the past two weeks, he was able to enter into a focused and composed state easier.

"The opening ceremony will begin in an hour." Squire Kyrie said.

Rui nodded. He simply sat cross-legged and began meditating, conditioning himself even more.

An hour rolled by quickly.

He was escorted by his instructors as they made their way to the lower levels, walking towards an opening into the arena of the Martial Contest.

"... And now, we invite sixteen representatives of the Martial Contest to the stage!"

Rui heard a loud projected voice say.

"From the Fellen branch, representative Mia Marnt!"

Rui saw Fiona enter the Colosseum arena, walking quickly as she reached the stage.

The host called upon all of them one-by-one.

When it was Rui's turn, he felt a huge wave of emotional energy hit into him when he walked out in the open in front of God-knew-how-many people. The crowd cheered for him loudly much to his surprise, it seems his accomplishments and position overshadowed his odd and ominous hair and eyes.

"Ladies and gentlemen, there they are! The sixteen greatest Martial Artists of their generation! We look forward to witnessing which one of them takes the title of Martial Champion. Who will win? If you're confident in your eyes then put your money where your mouth is!"

The crowd roared in approval!

Rui suppressed an expression of amusement.

He had momentarily forgotten that the Martial Contest was part of a festival.

And festivals were fun. And were supposed to have fun activities.

Gambling was one of them.

He shook his head inwardly.

"... And without further ado, let us decide the matchups! As you all know, this is an elimination tournament where half the contestants will be knocked out every round! We will decide the matchups that will knock over every contest via random draws.

Soon a board with a typical elimination tournament structure with sixteen numbered slots and eight matchups in the first round was brought. Along with it came a box with a hole in it.

"Representatives!" he addressed the sixteen of them energetically. "Within the concealed box lies numbers from one to sixteen. Reach into the hole and pick a chit. The number on the chit will be the slot that you will be partaking in!"

It was structured such that number one slot was to fight the number two slot, the number three slot was to fight the number four slot and so on and so forth till the sixteenth slot.

He gestured to the box. "In the order that you were called please. Representative Mia Marnt! Please step forward and pick a number!"

Mia stepped forward, walking towards the box. She picked a chit, unfolding it.

"Eleven." She said, holding the chit up.

"Eleven it is!" The representative cried as a support staff member wrote Mia's name in the slot numbered three.

One-by-one they all went up, picked a chit and got slotted accordingly.

The results were interesting, to say the least.

Match one: Ian Nepomniachtchi vs Vyoming Hurin

Match two: Esfand Hanax vs Freund Gamor

Match three: Arjun Erigaisi vs Servil Bisha

Match Four: Rui Quarrier vs Surman Marliak

Match five: Ferlicia Ernand vs Askin Nodt

Match six: Mia Marnt vs Ana Mariane

Match seven: Bryson Harth vs Kaerts Omegde

Match eight: Fiona Roschem vs Derk Sermont

Rui had been drawn number seven and had been paired against Surman Marliak, who had drawn eight. They were to fight in the fourth match.

He glanced over at the other matchups, noting ones he was interested in. The very first match featured Ian Nepomniachtchi. If Rui and Ian both won twice, they would face each other in the quarterfinals.

The one he was most interested in was Fiona. She was way over on the other block. They would both need to win thrice to face each other in the finals.

"...And with that the opening ceremony has concluded!" The host rambled on. "The first match of the first round will begin soon! Be sure to be at your seats with your snacks and drinks shortly or you'll miss it! Representatives, please head back to your quarters and be prepared."

They dispersed back to the entrances. Rui immediately ran into Squire Kyrie and Dylon.

"Your first matchup is interesting."

"Interesting Indeed." Rui replied with a barely contained smirk.

Chapter 248: Impressive Sight

Mental manipulation.

That was Surman Marliak's specialty, according to Fae. His Martial Art and techniques were centered around affecting his opponents' minds adversely and apparently, he was quite good at it too.

This included things like misdirection, hypnosis, impression imprinting and other psychological-oriented skills. Rui had done some research into the matter in order to understand how Surman might end up fighting against him.

He looked forward to the fight. It wasn't everyday he got to fight against someone this unusual.

He made his way to the observer balcony reserved to for participants.

What he did not expect was the presence of the other representatives!

He glanced around at the several martial Squire guards inside and outside the balcony.

('Easier to protect us if we're in the same place?') He wondered. It seemed that the Martial Academies did not want to take any risks. He simply ignored them as he leaned onto the railing, ignoring them. He would pay them attention when their matches rolled up, until then, they were not important. Thankfully the balcony was incredibly wide and there was plenty of distance between each of them.

He glanced at an observation balcony on the other side of the Colosseum, his sharp eyes distinguishing the headmasters of the sixteen Academies along with the Contest Master and some other VIPs, before an announcement caught his ears.

"Aaaand we will not commence the first match of the first round right away!"

"On one hand we have Representative Ian Nepomniachtchi of the Breathing Mountain style representing Farund branch! Touted as one of the greatest prodigies of this generation, he is known as the Breathing Goliath in the Martial Community! Join me in welcoming him!"

The crowd cheered loudly as Ian entered the arena, stopping at the center. He simply folded his arms, waiting.

Rui cringed slightly. "Epithets? They actually have titles."

"They're not uncommon." Squire Dylan explained. "Prominent Martial Artists generally tend to gain one. It's a tradition primarily in the Martial Community that ended up bleeding into culture as time passed. Kyrie here was known as the Berzerker of Hajin during her prime."

"Focus." Kyrie replied.

"On the other hand, we have representative Vyoming Hurin of the Weaving Lightning style representing the Narfinius branch! Known as the Flashing Drift for his incredible speed! Give him a round of applause!"

Vyoming entered the arena, stopping some distance away from Ian.

"Representatives." The referee of the fight addressed both of them. "I'll be going over the rules one last time. No killing and no leaving the boundaries of the arena, either of those will result in a disqualification and a loss respectively. If you wish to forfeit, you may merely will it and the special device attached to your Martial uniform will alert us of your resignation, knowingly attacking after the fight ends will also result in a disqualification. Do you agree to abide by these rules?"

"I do." Ian replied.

"I do." Vyoming echoed.

"Then without further ado, begin!" He commenced the first match.

"Aaand the first match is underway!" the host announced.

WHOOSH

Vyoming blurred as he instantly crossed the distance between himself and Ian.

POW POW

He landed a double combo within the briefest of moments!

WHOOSH

Ian swung at him, only for him to hit empty air as Vyoming effortlessly dodged.

Vyoming relentlessly flashed around charging at Ian repeatedly aggressively in an impressive display of speed.

Rui's eyebrows raised at the sight. "He's comparable to Kane. He's faster in linear motion but Kane is much more agile and fluid in curvilinear motion. I see, he's an offensive maneuverer."

Rui found that to be quite interesting. The differences in their styles were quite apparent, despite both of them being maneuvering-oriented. Vyoming was much more aggressing and proactive with his offense conventionally, whereas Kane's Martial Art evasive and counteroffensive.

"Indeed." Squire Kyrie nodded. "His greatest strength is his impressive offensive combat speed."

Rui nodded. "And yet..."

Rui glanced at Ian. "He's unharmed."

Not only was he unharmed, he was also unmoved. Literally, Vyoming was unable to even shift his position.

WHOOSH

Vyoming charged at him throwing an incredibly swift attack.

CLASP

Rui's eyes widened at what he saw.

Ian who was struggling and failing to keep up, suddenly caught Wyoming's fist easily.

What had changed?

"Is this the best you can do?" He asked Wyoming as cold pressure flushed from him pressing on Wyoming even as the he struggled to break free. "Too bad, it's not enough."

BAM!!

He delivered an incredibly powerful attack Wyoming's gut.

The sheer force he struck the latter with caused the former spit out blood.

THUD

Vyoming collapsed to his knees in pain and shock.

BAM!

Ian kicked him across the arena with a slow but powerful kick. His speed had suddenly dropped immensely from when he intercepted Wyoming's fist, but his power had risen tremendously.

The sheer impact had caused the very ground to shiver!

It was truly impressive, yet...

Rui narrowed his eyes in confusion. He could immediately tell something was off.

How did his speed suddenly spike mid-fight allowing him to intercept Wyoming with ease when he couldn't do so before?

How did his power increase so much? His striking power was just a notch below that of Fae's!

And why did his speed decrease so much again?

There were unnatural fluctuations in his parameters that Rui was unable to explain. It was then that Rui recalled that he was a breathing technique specialist.

"This must be because of a breathing technique then." Rui realized.

"Yep." Squire Dylan nodded. "Multiple breathing techniques to be more precise."

"Multiple?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"There are breathing techniques above basic foundational techniques like the Helical Breathing you've mastered. He seems to have mastered the Fire Breathing, Earth Breathing and Lightning Breathing breathing techniques to quite a high degree." Squire Kyrie explained. "They boost strength, durability and speed respectively to an immensely high degree. However, they cannot be used fully simultaneously. Hence, he switches between them as and when he wants or uses multiple partially. That's why his parameters fluctuate unnaturally."

Rui's eyes flew wide open at that statement. That was extremely formidable, if that was indeed the case. Ian's power and speed were shockingly impressive. Rui assumed the Earth Breathing would also be similarly impressive.

It was truly an impressive sight, indeed.

Chapter 249: Outcome

He could switch instantly between striking power very close to that of Fae's to combat speed on par or perhaps even greater with Wyoming. Furthermore, it was practically guaranteed that he had several other techniques at bare minimum!

In which case, Ian was a menace!

Rui grinned, gaping in amazement. His personality was rotten, but his power was the real deal. He truly deserved to be placed in the same realm as Kane as far as talent went.

In fact, without the Void Step technique, Kane stood very little chance of defeating him.

Rui watched on with great interest as Ian Nepomniachtchi went onto dominate Wyoming, carefully observing his breathing noting its traits and forms.

The breathing he used to amplify power; Fire Breathing was rather slower in frequency but much deeper and larger. Rui suspected the surge of a large amount of oxygen in a short amount of time allowed for the maximization of power.

The Lightning Breathing was a high-frequency breathing technique that supplied continuous oxygen boosting speed continuously.

The different forms of respiration in the different breathing techniques caused Rui to realize that he had perhaps underestimated the power of breathing techniques. If Rui had such breathing techniques he would be able to adapt much better than he currently was able to.

('Maybe I ought to take a look at techniques like those when I get back.')

"Aaaand we have a winner!" The host declared. "Ian Nepomniachtchi moves onto the second round after a stunning victory against Vyoming Hurin!"

Ian snorted, turning his back on the mangled body of Vyoming.

"He's going to be to be an extremely rough opponent for you." Squire Kyrie noted.

"Indeed." Rui nodded. Ian's fluctuating physical parameters made evolving to him a truly difficult endeavor; Rui would need to be careful not to make a single mistake.

"And coming up next we have Representative Esfand Hanax of the Grip Scraping Style, representing the Sicillia branch!" The commentator announced, as Esfand walked into the arena.

"His opponent is Freund Gamor of the Dreamy Poison Style! He is here representing the Villimaine branch! Known as the Toxinmonger in the Martial Community, he is one of the favoured representatives of the Martial Contest!"

The crowd erupted in cheers as Freund entered the arena.

Freund had sickly-looking skin that had a shade of purple to it. Not a single person had any doubt that his entire skin was poisonous and that touching it would be a disaster.

What Rui found suspicious was that he was wearing a mouth mask.

The fact that he was wearing it meant that the mask was thoroughly scrutinized by the security staff of the Martial Contest, meaning it was not something that unfairly gave him an advantage atleast.

But generally, when someone covered something, it meant they had something to hide. Rui assumed the mouth mask wasn't a fashion choice, atleast.

"Take your stances." The referee instructed.

Rui raised an eyebrow as both of them took aggressive stances against each other that prioritized offense.

"And begin!" The referee commenced the match.

They dashed towards each other.

SPLAT

Rui's eyes flew wide open at what unfolded.

Freund came out of the exchange bleeding while Esfand came out seemingly unharmed, with slight bruises at the very most.

Rui glanced at Esfand, who was grinning.

('Wow, he's rough just like Fae told me.')

Esfand was a Martial Artist centered around friction. He had taken skin conditioning to the most extreme level and his skin was beyond what mere 'rough' could encapsulate. His skin had so much friction that simply pressing and rubbing one's skin against it caused bleeding!

In combat, he applied his impressive offensive power through his dangerous skin allowing to unleash frightening damage and lethality!

Rui raised an eye brow, he was quite impressed. Frankly, if Esfand had been part of the Hajin branch, he would have been able to stand in the top five atleast, in all likelihood. Rui could easily see how he managed to get chosen as the representative of his branch.

SCRAP

POW

The two exchanged blows after blows, however the battle had begun to shift decisively in favour of Esfand. He was able to deal immediate damage, and had already dealt immense amount of damage.

WOBBLE

Suddenly, Esfand staggered.

His vision blurred and as he began losing all power in his muscles at an alarming rate!

WHOOSH!

He threw a haymaker that Freund easily avoided.

POW POW POW

Freund began pummeling him with blow after blow.

The battle had suddenly turned tides!

"His poison kicked in in time." Rui noted.

Squire Kyrie nodded. "From the very start, both sides were aware that this fight was a race. They were both offensive type Martial Artists with high lethality. It seems it was a race that Esfand is losing and Freund is winning."

THUD

Esfand hit the ground, the referee kneeled in closer to him before waving his hand.

"Aaaand we have a winner ladies and gentlemen!" The commentator declared. "Emerging victorious out of representative Esfand Hanax's relentless assault; Representative Freund Gamor will be moving on to the next round! He will be facing Ian Nepomniachtchi in round two!"

Rui stared at Freund

"His poison kicked in quicker and neutralized its victim quicker than that of Avi Seth." He noted.

"Freund's poison is much more powerful than that of Avi Seth's." Squire Kyrie noted. "Poison-based Martial Art's potency is largely based on the poisons that they can wield, Talen in this field is decided by the most powerful poison that one can become immune to and then integrate into one's body. In that regard, Freund is well above Avi."

Rui nodded, agreeing with her judgement.

Esfand was quickly extracted and treated by a team of medics while Freund consumed several healing potions while he was escorted by staff out of the arena.

"Aaaand we now move on to the third match of the first round!" The commentator declared.

Rui's eyes narrowed. He was particularly interested in this matchup because if he won, he would be facing the winner of this matchup in the next round.

Chapter 250: Unconditioned

"On one hand we have representative Arjun Erigaisi and his Adamant Boulder style representing the Hrava branch! He's touted as the Adamant Boulder in the Martial Community for his impregnable defense! Join me in welcoming him!" The commentator declared.

The crowd burst into cheers and an applause.

Arjun Erigaisi entered the arena, immediately drawing all attention to him. His stature and physique were enormous, he was nearly seven-feet tall. He had the presence of a looming mountain towering over everybody that laid eyes on him!

"On the other hand, we have representative Servil Bisha and her Flickering Core style representing the Gragol branch. Known as the Flickering Ghoul in the Martial Community, none of you will want to miss out on this fight!"

Servil looked like she hadn't slept in a while. She had bags under her eyes. Yet she exuded an aura of peril. Primordial Sense did not even want to touch her.

She was one of the few Martial Artists that none of his friends knew much about.

"Take your stances." The referee instructed.

Arjun adopted an incredibly defensive stance, as Rui expected. He divided his legs, stabilizing his balance and planting himself in one place firmly. His arms were in front of him, guarding him. It was a stance that was at the epitome of defense.

Servil instead adopted a rather neutral stance. Yet Primordial Sense still indicated to him that something was wrong. Her stance was quite tame, yet the danger she exuded was most certainly not.

"Begin!" The referee commenced the match.

Servil dashed towards Arjun as he remained stationary. She launched powerful several attacks at him.

POW POW POW

All of them bounced off his guard seemingly harmlessly. He didn't even seem to use any techniques.

"Conditioning?" Rui wondered.

"Not just any conditioning." Kyrie said. "He's conditioned the toughness of his body on every level. Skin, flesh, muscles and bones. He's tough inside-out."

Rui raised an eye, he had to admit that it was truly impressive. His defense put even Dalen to shame. At the rate the current battle was going on, he would win quite dominantly.

Yet Rui had learned to trust his instincts. He didn't think Servil was weak.

Soon, a changed occurred.

BAM!

Arjun's eyes flew open as he felt an immense amount of pain from that blow, he staggered back.

Rui's eyes narrowed. "What was that?"

BAM BAM BAM

Arjun threw together a guard as her blows began hurting more! He began backing down more and more as each blow was staggering him!

"Ah." Squire Dylon realized. "I see. Most interesting."

"What is it, instructor Dylon?" Rui asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Vibration." Dylon replied. "She's managing to penetrate the impact beyond his exteriors to do damage to vital interiors. It's novel form of damage infliction that permeates impacts using vibrations. Thus, she's able inflict greater damage with each blow. It's a powerful offensive field, very difficult to master, of course."

Rui's eyes widened as he glanced back at her. He used Seismic Mapping as he tried focusing on the seismic radiation.

('He's right.') Rui realized. ('Her entire body is vibrating.')

Vibrations were commonly used in technology in for penetrative and permeating effects. They were used in drills to for greater penetrative effect, they were even used in medical technology for treatment of kidney stones where vibrations were used to break kidney stones done from the outside without the need of an invasive procedure.

Servil was using those very principles to inflict far greater damage on Arjun Erigaisi than she normally would!

BAM BAM BAM

She was relentless in her pressurizing.

Yet, she had underestimated Arjun's fortitude and endurance.

He weathered her every attack once he realized she could hurt him. He turtled up, going into full defensive and damage mitigation mode. This made Servil's task harder and harder.

Rui got the feeling that she wasn't accustomed to someone withstanding her blows for as long as Arjun was. It was her misfortune that Arjun's body was conditioned so extensively and deeply, that even the permeation of her impacts deeper into his body were not enough to take him down in a short amount of time.

That didn't mean Arjun was doing fine and dandy. He felt pain in places deep within his body. His internal organs were sore, and there was a limit to how much he could toughen the vulnerable core of the human body, her powerful Apprentice-level power impacting him inside out was truly testing his defense and endurance unlike anything he had been subjected to asides from the torturous conditioning training regimes.

('Let's see what is greater, your power, or my constitution!') He took it up as a challenge. As a competitive man who took immense pride in his durability, he felt the need to prove himself in this tribulation.

This fight was special in that regard.

If he won this fight, he would be reaffirming his Martial Path, diverging it from external influences and traversing deeper down his own Martial Path.

Perhaps this fight would be the most important for him in the entire Martial Contest!

He grew more and more driven and fanatic about winning.

And yet...

WHAM!

A powerful jab crashed onto his throat. The throat was one of the most vulnerable areas of the human body, even with Arjun's powerful conditioning, it was not as incredibly tough as the rest of his body.

Yet.

He persevered.

The pain was incredible, but he refused to fall.

BAM

A second strike slipped past an opening in his guard, slamming against his head. The permeative nature of Servil's strike rattled his brain, crossing a line.

The brain could not be conditioned, any attempt to do so would be met with permanent brain damage.

THUD

He collapsed to the ground as the shaking had caused blunt force brain trauma, causing his conscious mind to shut down.

For a moment, everyone was silent.

"Aaaand we have a winner folks!" The commentator immediately resumed. "Servil Bisha has passed the first round, breaking through Arjun Erigaisi's incredible defense!"