

The information he was most concerned about was that of the Kandrian Martial Academies, it turned out there were sixteen Academies in the country. One of them was located in Mantia, Rui intended to aim for the Mantian branch. In the past six years he had deigned to do a more thorough investigation into the entrance exam. However, the Martial Academy was quite secretive about its entrance exams, the Union did not want every applicant to be able to prepare targeted solutions that made their job of evaluating their talent and drive more difficult.

They went so far as to almost completely change the exam every year so as to diminish the impact of the leaked information from recalcitrant failed applicants every year. The only thing Rui learnt was that there were multiple rounds each year and the exam invigilators changed each year as well. The difficulty of the exams was exceedingly high, furthermore it was said that a small number of applicants died, every year, while a greater proportion were greatly hurt.

('This was unexpected when I'd learnt about it, I was hoping to make targeted training regimes that could allow me to overcome these tests.') Rui sighed.

Having dedicated his life to research into Martial Arts and combat sports, Rui was an expert in evaluating the physical and performative attributes necessary for any particular activity, and setting up targeted training regimes that would most efficiently facilitate the growth of the athlete's ability to complete said physical activity.

('I'll just have to stick to what I'm already doing, I guess.') He mused.

"Rui, it's time to sleep." Lashara said, standing at the doorway.

"Alright Mom." Rui replied. All the children treated Lashara as their mother, Rui was no different, all of them had been raised by her, she was indeed a mother-like figure to all of them, the adults included. Later on, having changed into the medieval equivalent of pajamas, he lay in bed contemplating what he ought to do tomorrow.

('Cardio early in the mornings; one hour. Then twenty reps of squats, crunches, pushups, pull-ups and chest dips, three reps of plank variations all until lunch. Rest, followed by balance training at the lake till evening, followed by basic body conditioning and tempering.')

This was actually a relatively simple and mild training regime, but that was because he was only seven years old. His body was still growing, especially his bones, stressing them too much would be quite detrimental in the long run. He planned increase his exercise load as he got older.

('I should be decently well built by the time I'm done.')

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The next day, he followed through with his early morning jog. He would generally begin at the orphanage jog to the city and come back before the rush hour begins, but today he was a bit late, so he was navigating through the earliest bustle of the day. In one hand he had a carry-bag with the milk that Myra had requested him to purchase from the market.

('Tsk, it's already so busy.')

Rui tutted, as he was forced to slow down. He couldn't really just jog past a crowd of adults twice as large as him. He was forced to take a detour through an alley and skip through the crowd.

('I didn't want to break my run, maybe I should jog a little extra, but Myra did say she wanted the milk so I gue-!')

He suddenly felt two arms grabbing around him, one to prevent him from screaming and the other to carry him away.

"Heh, black hair and black eyes? That's rare, this one can sell for a fortune."  
He heard a burly voice.

"Oh? He even has some change, good bonus!" He said as he scoured through Rui's pocket.

('Fuck! I'm actually being kidnapped.') Rui began to panic. He wasn't sure what he was supposed to do as the man began carrying him away.

('I need get away, but his grip is too strong.') Rui began to brainstorm. Brute force was out of the question, he needed the man to loosen his grip, otherwise he would have no chance of escaping. magic

('Think! How do I create an opportunity to escape?') He wasn't sure. The man's burly hand was wrapped tightly over his mouth and nose to prevent him from making noise. But that gave him an idea. He decided to let his body go slack, acting as if he'd suffocated.

"Tsk." The man put Rui down for a second to take a good look to ensure his goods was alright. Yet just as he did, Rui jammed his thumb into his kidnapper's eyes and got up to run away as far as he could, even as the man screamed in pain, cradling his eye. The pain of having his eye jabbed brought the man to a halt, buying Rui only a few seconds of time, the man got up quickly and chased after Rui with a closed eye.

('I just need to reach a populated area, he won't get away with a public child crime.') Unfortunately, he couldn't get back to the market the way he came, the burly man was in the way and he most certainly would have been caught. He just needed to reach people, but unfortunately, he'd reached a dead-end instead.

('Fuck, I need to go ano-')

"Hehehe... too bad you couldn't get away eh little boy?" The man threw Rui a disgusting smile. In that moment Rui felt despair and true fear. He legs began

to shake, and he almost peed himself. Rui forced himself to take a fighting stance, but the man walked over and, ignoring Rui's meagre struggles, grabbed Rui by the neck forcing him down. Rui thought about screaming, but when he opened his mouth, nothing came out.

"Let's have you choke for real." He whispered even as his grin grew wider.

Rui froze in terror.

('He's going to kill me') Rui panicked. His heart was beating hard and fast, struggling to give Rui the power he needed, but Rui was too afraid to use it.

('It's no use, I'm too weak.') He knew this, giving up.

('I'm not just weak, I'm pathetic.')

Just as his vision was turning red-

**THUD**

The man's grip slacked and his arms let go of his neck, and Rui's body contorted as he gasped and inhaled for air, before turning around.

('What the fuck just happened?')

What he saw shocked him. The man was dead, lying on the ground. What was even more shocking was the cause of death, the top of his head was dented and broken in. There was another man standing behind him, with a fist midair.

"To attempt to snuff the life of an innocent child, is the greatest of sins one can commit." The man said scorning at the corpse. His eyes turned to Rui.

"Are you alright my child?"