

He was naïve. He had underestimated what it meant to be a warrior. This wasn't a movie, or an anime, this was real life. He would have died on the spot if his saviour was too late. Rui thought he could just train and become a warrior, but he had severely underestimated the temperament and resolve needed to fight with his life on the line. How could he, a former denizen of the twenty-first century understand? He had never fought in his life, ever. He didn't understand just how strong the primal fear of death was ingrained into one's soul.

Martial Artists weren't decorative and aesthetical artists whose jobs were to look cool. They were warriors, assassins, protectors, hunters, pioneers, they were people who fought everyday with their lives on the line. They tread up the Martial path knowing that every step could very easily be their last.

Did he possess such resolve?

That day had made the answer clear.

He did not. He was unworthy of being a warrior, a Martial Artist.

"You're wrong."

Said the man who saved him. He walked over and sat beside him, patting his head. His gesture was warm and gentle, but his hand was heavy and rough, like a boulder.

"Kid, you wanna be a Martial Artist, correct?"

Rui nodded; he was still choked with emotions.

"Mm, of course you do. There is no other reason a kid your age would put yourself through the training that you have." He noted.

"Do you think yourself unworthy of being a Warrior because of the fear and despair you felt?"

It was as if the man could read Rui's heart. Rui nodded, reluctantly. The man smiled in response.

"Indeed, you were quite pathetic, not gonna lie. You quivered in fear and despair as you were pushed into the ground..."

The words tore a hole in Rui's heart.

"... But whether or not you're worthy of being a Warrior, my child, depends on what you do from here on out."

He turned to Rui, who met his gaze in return.

"There isn't a single soul who hasn't felt crippling fear and despair. Even the strongest of Martial Artists who can split the Earth with a finger have experienced what you have. What separates the strong from the weak, is whether or not one overcomes that fear and strives forward."

Rui clenched his fists and gritted his teeth.

"Tell me, boy, will you succumb to your fear?"

"Never... Never again!" Rui swore even as tears of frustration, shame and anger poured out of his eyes. Every muscle in his body went taught, he felt as if every cell in his body stood united as he engrained his oath into each and every single one of them.

"I will never let fear and despair get the best of me again!"

The man he smiled as he glanced at the fire in the young boy's eyes.

Rui got up and bowed deeply to the man. "Thank you for saving my life."

"I'm just doing my duty." the man got up, patted Rui's head one last time and walked away.

"Stay safe boy. I'd like to see you become a Warrior, you have what it takes."

Rui nodded, before bowing down one last time. He made his way to the market, before returning down the path home.

"Ah, I forgot to ask his name."

He ran into Farion on the way back home, explaining what had happened, leaving Farion in shock. Things only got worse when he reached back home. All the adult caretakers would not stop fawning over him, and constantly patting and hugging him, partially to reaffirm his well-being and also to soothe their anxiety. Lashara went so far as to almost ban him from leaving the Orphanage out of paranoia, but he managed to get her to change her mind about that, albeit not completely. Rui had to stay within the vicinity of the orphanage, or be under supervision if he wanted to go further.

He had no choice but to acquiesce with great reluctance.

He'd decided to skip the training for the rest of the day, and hang out with his brothers and sisters, he wanted a change of pace.

"Heh you've finally decided to join us in playing Cards eh Rui?" Horatio asked as he made space for Rui.

In the past seven years he'd forged unbreakable bonds with each of the Orphanage members. He enjoyed spending time with the grumpy Farion, the mischievous Nina, the pragmatic Horatio, the reserved Mica, and the intelligent Julian. When Rui first joined the orphanage, the adults ignored the silly superstition surrounding his hair and eyes, and children quickly followed suit largely due to their ignorance, expressing adoration about how cute he was.

The past seven years had caused him to develop a great amount of affection for each of them, and the Orphanage as a whole. Almost to the point he'd rather stay with them than leave to become a Martial Artist.

('Almost, but still not enough.') He mused.

His renewed will and determination after that morning's incident would not allow him to not become a Martial Artist, he just felt a tinge of sadness that it would eventually drive him away from his family. The Academy not only took care of housing and food, but mandated its students to stay in the Academy dormitories. The Martial Path was one that required discipline, which could only be fully enforced if the Academy regulated the students' lives from dawn to dusk. Even once he graduated, he suspected he would have to spend long hours, days and maybe even weeks away from his family.

He would most certainly grow a little distant from them, it was inevitable. Although he would always love them, prolonged periods of separation would likely dampen his emotions. He was not a very social person, even in his previous life, his parents died early, and since then he had never forged a single significant relationship or even friendship.

('I'll make the most of these times, then, for the next six years... Then I'll have to leave them.') It was a shame to Rui. He quickly shook away these thoughts before getting invested in the game.