

## Martial Unity 1061

### Chapter 1061: Summon

There was a small buzz among the lowest classes of the Floating Sect. Rui's domineering performance against Squire Seronin was quite attention-drawing to many Guardians.

"It looks like his victory against Saiwal was not a fluke."

"It seems that... he probably won't remain in the tenth class for too long."

"What a dark horse. We'll have to be careful of him."

Of course, any attention that he got was not positive. In the Floating Sect, Martial Artists that drew attention, drew attention for one reason only; Power. Within the Floating Sect, powerful Martial Artists were threats to other powerful Martial Artists, since they possessed the qualifications and the ability to take their chamber from them.

Particularly, the ninth class of Martial Artists had taken note of him more than others. Rui had already made his jump to the top of the tenth class, thus the Martial Artists of the tenth class were not worried about him, he had already gone above them, thus he wouldn't aim for their chambers and thus wasn't a threat to any of them.

Instead, it was the ninth class that was wary of him.

Thankfully, Rui did not run into any more 'bullies'. Guardian Drevolus and guardian Fraztil avoided him like the plague, refusing to be anywhere near him. After all, not only did he beat them, he went on to crush guardian Seronin with a ferocious dominance unlike anybody else but those of higher classes could do so.

Just when he was returning back to his chamber, he was stopped by a staff member. "Guardian Falken."

"Hm?"

"Senior Xanarn has summoned you. Please head to the central chambers of the island as soon as you are able to."

"I see... Thank you for informing me." Rui murmured.

Senior Xanarn was one of the three Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect. Rui knew about her because she was mentioned as a part of the necessary knowledge that all guardians needed to have.

What he was confused by was what the Martial Senior wanted from him. At this point in time, he did not possess any particular significance. Sure, he had jumped to the nine hundredth chamber in one go, but that did not make him truly special. Thus far, his performances, while impressive, did not merit any personal attention from a Martial Senior.

He was aware that the Martial Seniors interacted with the Martial Squires of the Floating Sect, mentoring them lightly, ensuring that they were on the right path to a higher Realm of Martial Art.

However, he doubted that they looked at every Martial Squire individually. Even if they spent all their time doing that, they would not be able to do so for all one thousand Martial Squires.

At most, the strongest and the most worthy of Martial Squires were worth their personal guidance.

Nonetheless, Rui did not dare delay the meeting. He quickly traveled toward the center of the Floating Island, traveling deeper into it than he had ever done so before.

Naturally, the gravity and the air pressure got stronger and stronger, and the density of air had almost reached that of solid, so much so that even light was being hampered.

The stress his body endured had increased greatly, yet each breath he inhaled became so much more nourishing and fulfilling. He could probably spend an hour with just one breath without feeling suffocated!

('So this is what the Martial Artists of the higher classes train under every day, huh?') Rui winced a little as cracked his neck. ('Just standing is a form of training under these circumstances.')

Yet he put these matters away as his Primordial Instinct picked up on a profound sense of power emerging from a particular direction.

The sensation was unmistakable.

('A Martial Senior.') Rui mused.

Although he held a great deal of admiration and respect for Martial Seniors, he did not have as much awe or incredulity at the thought of meeting one. He had met multiple Martial Seniors, he had even taught two of them his Pathfinder technique. Thus he had a more sober reaction to this opportunity.

"Senior Xanarn," Rui bowed his head with respect and deference. "It's an honor to meet you."

"Guardian Falken..." Her voice reverberated through the room in a strange fashion. It reverberated through his body, inside out, backward front. It was as though her voice had a life of its own. She exuded a way of power that was different from anything he had experienced thus far. It was different from the feral ferocity of the Martial Seniors of Vilun Island

It was distinct from the deep stoic confidence of Senior Geringan.

It was different from the piercing terror of Senior Ceeran.

She was different.

('It's her voice...') Rui's eyes widened as he stared at her supple lips, sizing her up. Her voluptuous proportions could not distract him from the pressure that they exert on him. He would have looked into her eyes if not for the fact that they were closed, for some reason. ('There's something special about her voice.')

"It seems you've noticed already, you are as sharp as I anticipated," She spoke softly.

Yet her voice was almost like a force in and of itself, pushing against him from within himself.

"You flatter me," Rui replied graciously. "I was informed that you summoned me, is there anything you need from me?"

"Not at all," She got up and walked towards him. "I was curious about our newest guardian, one of the few Martial Squires who made it to Floating Island unscratched, who then proceeded to demolish guardians of the ninth class."

('She was the one who tracked our approach? It was a Martial Senior as I expected, no wonder Kane's technique failed.') Rui mused. "One of those three things is not of my merit."

"I know," She smiled, her eyes still closed. "I was just wondering if you would take the credit to try and impress me."

"It would be a disservice to my friend," Rui shook his head.

## Chapter 1062: Realization

She smiled at those words. "You're this mature. At your age too, interesting."

"Everyone matures eventually," Rui modestly remarked.

"I wasn't talking about that, though there is that too, I suppose."

Rui glanced at her quizzically.

"Your Martial Art possesses a depth that I have never seen from any Martial Squire in my entire life," She murmured as she stepped closer, circling around him as she sized him up despite her closed eyes. "Intriguing, really."

She reached forward, clasping Rui's arm, lifting it up as she dropped it, almost like he were a toy.

Rui, on the other hand, was unsure whether to feel awkward or amused.

"Your Martial Art is formless," She remarked. "Yet you aren't an all-rounder. Your combat style changes and changes, like the water in an ebbing river."

"..."

"What is your Martial Path?" She asked with a hint of curiosity, as her soft yet deeply potent voice poured into his body.

"...I believe I am not obligated to divulge that," Rui steadied his nerves as he refused her question in the least confrontational way possible.

"That is true," She smiled, much to his relief. It appeared that she wasn't the egotistical type. "Most Martial Squires would readily divulge their Martial Path regardless."

"I have reasons to keep my Martial Art hidden, I'm afraid," Rui bowed his head in apology. "I hope you understand."

"No worries," She smiled softly, putting a hand on his shoulder as she stood him straight. "Still, even if you don't tell me, I can tell that it is a particularly potent Martial Path. The highest... no, the second highest grade Martial Art I have ever seen in a Martial Squire, that's for sure," She murmured, deep in thought.

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Second?"

"Hmmm..." She nodded, deep in thought.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows. She couldn't just say something like that and leave him hanging. Who was above him?

But it appeared that she wasn't paying attention to his reactions. She still hadn't opened her eyes, which Rui was starting to find odd.

"Uh..." Rui tried to draw her attention. "Is there anything else you need, mam?"

He wasn't sure why he was here. For the most part, it appeared as though she simply wanted to satisfy her curiosity.

She broke out of her stupor as she glared lightly at him, knitting her eyebrows "Don't call me that. It makes me feel old.

"How would you like me to address you?"

"Let's see...You can call me big sister."

"...Right."

"But the reason I called you here has nothing to do with what you can do for me," She smiled softly.  
"But what I can do for you."

Rui raised an eyebrow.

"You, you aren't aware of the effect that your Martial Art can have on others, do you?" She asked with a serious tone.

Rui knitted his eyebrows. "Excuse me?"

"Squire Seronin." She replied, turning toward him with her closed eyes. "You broke him."

Rui's eyes narrowed. "I did not. I only struck with him normal strikes. His mental breakdown at the fight was not as a result of a technique of mine."

"Not a technique, no," She murmured. "No technique can break a Martial Path."

"What?!" Rui's eyes widened. "I did no such thing!"

"To think that you aren't even self-aware of it," She murmured. "It looks like it was a good thing to bring it up to you. As a leader of the Floating Sect, I cannot have you breaking our assets every time you get heated and give your everything."

Rui frowned as he stared at her with incredulity. "Mam, I pro-"

He paused after a wave of displeasure arose from her, washing over him. "I mean, big sister."

"What is it? Little Falken?" She smiled sweetly.

Rui's lips twitched. He did not appreciate being babied, even if it was by a Martial Senior. "My Martial Art does not have anything that could allow for such effects, it's more likely that he is being afflicted by a neurological disorder, the symptoms of which began displaying themselves in combat. Acute blunt force trauma is a known contributing factor to the propensity of neurological behavioral symptoms. Alternatively, it is possible that some brain damage caused by my attacks triggered an underlying-" "- Enough"

She interrupted him with a troubled sigh. "This is a dangerous lack of self-awareness. You are too self-absorbed in combat. You certainly do pay attention to your opponent while deconstructing their Martial Art, yet you are unable to see what you do to their minds because your Martial Art requires you to tunnel vision on their Martial Art, and nothing else."

Rui's eyes narrowed. He reflexively felt the need to defend himself, but that last statement was not wrong. "I don't understand, where is this coming from."

"I inspected Squire Seronin after he physically recovered." She replied. "Yet I was unable to sense his Martial Path when I looked into his eyes."

Rui's eyes widened. A Martial Senior's intuition and senses were definitely not something that could be dismissed out of hand. "...What?"

"It's true," She replied seriously. "I tried questioning him, but he simply did not respond. He was like a vegetable."

She turned toward Rui with her closed eyes. "Until I mentioned you. Then he had another psychotic mental breakdown."

Rui's eyes widened.

She turned away from him, walking towards her chambers. "Revisit your past. Look for it. You will find it. You did this, I'm sure of it."

Rui's eyes began wandering as he scanned through his memories. He froze as a memory from a long time ago surfaced in his mind. ('That Martial Apprentice bandit... He broke down even though the fight was far from over.')

Several memories flashed through his head, several oddities that he had never quite strung together and connected. But now that he did. He couldn't help but feel shocked.

Just how many Martial Paths had he destroyed? Just the thought of it sent a shiver down his spine. It wasn't that such a thing was intrinsically never justifiable, not at all. It was just chilling to know that he had perhaps done it many times without his own awareness.



"As expected," She sighed.

"But I have also sparred and fought many times where such a thing did not happen," Rui offered.

She shook her head. "Your Martial Path is dangerous, Squire Falken. Defeat as many guardians as you like. Defeat them all, if you are able to do so in the first place. But I cannot have you crippling them. There are no healing potions for the psyche."

Rui understood why she had summoned him soon after his match with Seronin. This was not something she could simply let go of as a leader of the Floating Sect. While it was true that what he did, did not break the rules, it was also true that the way this was too disruptive to be ignored.

The system in place of the Floating Sect was designed to have a thousand highly qualified elite Martial Squires to protect the Floating Sect and offer their services in the interest of its survival. Ajanta Island had a limited amount of land that could be divided into a limited number of highly desirable avenues of training. Each Martial Squire was a precious asset, especially the longer they stayed. The longer they stayed, the more they were trustable.

That was why a destructive wild card that ran around crumbling the efforts of the Floating Sect, to whatever degree was not something she could tolerate.

"As for how you can control this..."

"Discipline," Rui sighed. He had already swiftly analyzed the situation now that he had become aware of something that had been hidden in his psychological blindspots. "Given that I haven't broken the Martial Paths of friends, but also my Martial Apprentice students while using my Martial Art against them to varying degrees, I'm guessing my emotion for my opponents plays a huge role."

"You most certainly bore hostility towards Squire Seronin, correct?" She remarked. "You need to be more mindful of this from now on if you wish to remain in the Floating Sect. Although there are plenty of powerful and strong-minded Martial Squires with remarkable fortitude that you probably will not be able to hurt, it is also true that the younger ones will be susceptible to breaking. Keep your Martial Art in check, or pay the consequences."

Her smile had all but gone. A stern expression issuing a strong warning to him took its place. He knew that she hadn't called him for frivolous reasons. Martial Seniors had too much to do to waste their time on such trivial matters.

"I will be sure to remember that," Rui sighed.

He wasn't even sure what to feel. He had certainly been exposed to the consequences of his Martial Path on other people. He hadn't even fully processed all his thoughts, but he already had strong conjectures.

Martial Paths were journeys fields of specialty that one was inclined towards due to the sum of all experiences of all kinds throughout their lifetime, or lifetimes, like in Rui's case. It was possible for it to change, as he learned, but it would take a truly impactful event on their psyche for it to change, and even then it was practically impossible.

However, if it could change, then surely it could... just cease being their Martial Art as well. What if they underwent such a traumatic experience centered around their Martial Path, that something in their head breaks, causing it to no longer be their chosen field?

What if they underwent such a traumatically powerful experience, that it completely overwrote everything they ever experienced, effectively breaking their Martial Path?

He felt a small shiver climb up his spine. That was truly disturbing to think of. He did not like being a destroyer of Martial Art. He liked Martial Art. Even if he liked the Flowing Void Style the most out of all of them, he still enjoyed other Martial Art as well. He did not think that they deserved to be broken down.

Even Squire Seronin, as annoying as he was, was not somebody that Rui wanted to break in such a cruel and inhumane manner. Hell, he would rather kill the man before subjecting him to something like this.

At the very least, he would rather die a hundred deaths than have his Martial Path broken. Just the very thought of it gave him secondhand agony.

He had only intended to beat him to a pulp, which, while painful, was something that could easily be fixed and reversed with no long-term detrimental effects.

He found it quite strange to consider, considering that his Martial Path was not just destructive, it was also constructive when it came to other Martial Art. It had allowed Mana and Max to break through at extremely young ages.

So depending on his emotions, he could choose to either destroy or create.

('I'd definitely rather create than destroy,') He immediately decided. ('I am a Martial Artist, and ultimately I am part of the Martial Artist world. I don't mind choosing to be a benefactor to it.')

Of course, as shocking as the news of Rui destroying Martial Paths would be, it would be even more shocking if the world found out what his Martial Art could do.

He glanced at her.

Her soft yet mature features were encapsulating, yet he knew that beneath her gentle expression was a strong-willed Martial Artist that had persevered to break through not once, not twice, but a total of three times, reaching the limit of the lower Realms. If she found out that he could pump Martial Apprentices out of ordinary kids, she would probably capture him at this very moment and extract all his secrets. If the secret lay in a technique, she would extract one way or another, using perhaps a mental technique.

"Still," She murmured. "I believe that you are an asset to the Floating Sect, and will be of great help to it in your time here. Allow me to offer you something that you are ready for."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Which is...?"

"The conditions for the breakthrough to the Senior Realm."

Rui could feel his heart beating fast. A slight grin of excitement crept up on his face.

It had been several years since he stepped into the Squire Realm, and today he was a high-grade Martial Squire without a doubt, he finally had come across an opportunity to learn about the Squire Realm.

"Unlike with the secret to the Squire Realm, the truth about the Senior Realm is not something that is universally divulged at one particular stage," She began. "Different nations, organizations, and groups have their own ideas of what stage to inform Martial Squires about the truth of the Senior Realm. There are many who go to extremes in the opposite direction, some believe that Martial Squires never ought to be told about the truth. Others believe that all Martial Squires should be told everything the second they step into the Squire Realm."

Rui raised an eyebrow at those words. That was quite interesting to know, he hadn't expected that the Martial World would be so divided on this matter. He wasn't in a position to have an informed opinion on the matter, but the two extremes did sound... extreme.

"Never telling versus telling all of them immediately," Rui pondered aloud. "Surely there has to be a reasonable middle in between."

"I agree," She nodded. "As does the majority. Most nations and groups inform Martial Squires about the necessity of becoming a Senior seed. I'm sure you have already been informed of this by whoever it is that performed the Squire breakthrough process on your body."

Rui nodded. He recalled being informed of the importance of developing the individuality of Martial Arts as a Martial Squire. That it was the path forward to higher Realms. However, that was very vague and general advice. It was just enough to set them on the right path.

"An even bigger controversy exists on whether Martial Squires should be told about the trigger to the Senior Realm," She continued.

"That's different from the truth about the Senior Realm?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

She nodded. "Informing you about what the Senior Realm is about serves to increase your motivation to achieve it, arguably, but the trigger of how to reach it is a separate matter."

"Hmmm..." Rui's eyes narrowed. "And what do you intend to do?"

She smiled, her eyes closed. She turned around, facing her back towards him.

Rui's widened as she began slowly undressing, taking off her one-piece garment.

Rui liked to think that he had a lot of control over his body. But he soon realized he was overestimating himself a bit. His twenty-one-year-old body begged to differ.

It had other ideas.

Yet just as her garment lowered to her glutes, Rui's eyes narrowed as he came across scattered scars on her lower back.

They were light, as though time had eroded them away. They were messy and they crumpled her skin mildly, turning it into a darker shade than the rest of her body.

"When I was fourteen, a great storm ravaged are village, seemingly appearing out of nowhere," She began. "My grandmother and I escaped, trying to get as far as possible. Yet, unfortunately... a tree collapsed on my body, injuring me gravely... Being the young girl that I was back then, I hadn't even been able to so much as even budge the trunk an inch."

Rui grew solemn.

It wasn't just the tragedy in the story.

It was her voice. It carried over profound emotions in its gentle melodies, permeating through Rui's body. It was as though she was imbuing her emotion into her environment with her voice alone.

He couldn't help but feel overcome with a sense of grave severity.

"I should have died that day," She murmured with a soft voice. "Yet, I didn't."

She turned to Rui, facing him, uncaring for her inappropriate exposure.

Yet Rui hadn't even noticed.

He was too busy staring into her open eyes.

They were completely white.

('She's... blind!')

"The injuries it gave me scarred my body, it led to the loss of my vision due to the injuries to my head. It should have led to my death as well. Yet, I didn't die."

Rui stared into her eyes with bewildered anticipation.

He had so many questions.

Yet he bit them back.

He could feel it. It was as though the atmosphere had held its breath because of what was to come. What she was to say.

"Do you know why I didn't die?" She asked, pausing for a moment, before looking into Rui's eyes. "Because my decrepit grandmother lifted the tree with her bare hands, and threw it away."

"...What?"

"It was an experience that shaped me into the warrior that I am today." She murmured. "Witnessing my grandmother lift a heavy tree off of me as though she was a Martial Artist, throwing it away, before picking me up and running away."

Rui's stared at her with an open jaw. "..."

"Her arms and fingers had broken in the process, and she died soon after, but she saved my life by summoning power hidden deep within her. All to protect her granddaughter who she loved with all her heart, who she desired to protect with all her heart. Her Heart." She murmured. "She is the reason I became Martial Artist despite my disability."

Rui's eyes widened as realization dawned upon him. The reason she was telling this story, was the secret of the Senior Realm.

It all came to him in a thunderous flash.

"Oh, look at you," She giggled. "You have already figured it out, despite having yet to have it explained to you. I like intelligent men."

"The secret to the Senior Realm is..." Rui whispered, shocked.

She stepped forward, blushing a bit as she recalled she was naked.

"That's right..." She spoke softly as she stopped right before him, placing her hand on his chest, feeling his strong heartbeat. "The secret to the Senior Realm is the discovery of the Martial Heart. Every human possesses a well of untapped physical power within their heart that, in times of grave crisis, they are able to surpass their limits with great will and perseverance at a great cost. That well of power does not vanish with the advent of the Martial body, nay, it is even stronger. However, it is difficult to access, and requires many things, self-awareness, individuality, the ability to survive and endure the Martial Heart, and unfortunately; luck."

BADUMP

BADUMP

BADUMP

Rui's heart beat harder and harder. It was this grand revelation and had motivated his heart to work harder!

It blasted against his chest, sending mind ripples through his body, into her slender arms, through her body.

Rui just stared at her.

Yet he wasn't looking at her.

His awareness was preoccupied with other matters.

An explosion had permeated through his mind, shaking his Mind Palace and even his Martial Path!

His mind furiously processed the information he had just received with such intensity that put even computers to shame!

('No wonder!') Rui exclaimed mentally. ('The glowing circulatory system... The abrupt rise in their power from their 'base' forms... It all makes sense. They were tapping into the hidden latent well of power within the human body, no, within their Martial body. The glowing veins are simply an outcome of their heart pumping at exponentially higher rates than normal. This is tachycardia!')

Tachycardia was a state where the heart rate was greatly increased. A rush of power produced by a beating heart that was so great that it caused blood to glow, in the case of Martial Seniors and their Martial Hearts.



Rui was far from unfamiliar with the concept of human beings accomplishing feats that were otherwise impossible to them in times of crisis. The phenomenon was very well-documented in neurology.

It was actually a collection of phenomena, not just

The intense crisis causes unprecedented heart rate and levels of secretions of adrenaline, endorphins, and other hormones and agents that allowed for a human being to momentarily surpass the limits of their physicality. They exert a force that they would deeply unconsciously not exert due to the detriments it would have on their body, or due to the lacking ingredients and phenomena.

If the power was that great in normal humans, how great would it be in a super-evolved homosapien that is astronomically and categorically superior to humans in almost every aspect?

('It would be titanic!') Rui grew excited as he closed his eyes.

He replayed the mental video of the fight between Senior Ceeran and the leaders of the K'ulnen Tribe. The gigantic displays of power they exhibited were all thanks to the Martial Heart!

('That's how they are able to do things that feel like shouldn't be possible with such small comparatively small bodies!') Rui had always felt as though the power displayed by Martial Seniors didn't make sense fundamentally. Their bodies were smaller, and it wasn't as though they could undergo a second round of evolution due to already being evolved to the limit before their DNA would break under the radiation.

He had always wondered where the surplus of power emerged from, and now he finally knew.

Rui began pouring through everything he knew about the Senior Realm. Senior Ceeran had already let slip that the breakthrough was spontaneous and acute, considering that he broke through in the middle of combat.

That meant the trigger could not be something that required time and active preparation, it was inconceivable that he had time to make active preparations in a fight where he was most likely pushed to his very limits.

Rui could thus infer that the breakthrough was spontaneous and acute, but also subconscious to a certain extent, for the same reasons as above, he was in the middle of a pressing fight, and he most likely had no ability to do something that attention-intensive.

('The immediate possibility that came to my mind was that the breakthrough to the Senior Realm is the same as the conditions to humans tapping into their wells of latent power; persevering determination in grave crises but...')

But he had instantly dismissed that theory. Martial Squires subjected themselves to grave crises all the time. It was almost part of the job description. Martial Artists brushed against death and did persevere through them with determination.

Yet, the breakthrough to the Squire Realm was extremely scarce. Despite so many Martial Squires persevering through life-and-death situations with determination, very few Martial Squires broke through to the Senior Realm. Many Martial Squires died before reaching the Senior Realm despite all their desperation.

His time on the Ajanta Island had shown him that. How many challengers had died to guardians without breaking through?

('All of them,') Rui recalled Squire Saiwal's ferocious resistance, yet she did not break through.

('Conclusion; The conditions to trigger the activation of the Martial Heart are higher than it is for humans to tap into their locked latent power.') Rui realized. ('It makes sense intuitively. Greater power, greater difficulty.')

Then what was the precise condition to trigger the breakthrough to the Senior Realm?

"I know I've retained my figure, but it's rude to stare, you know."

Rui broke out of his reverie as her voice permeated through his body, grabbing his attention by force.

"Oh... I'm sorry," He averted his gaze as he realized he had been staring at her chest while lost in thought.

"It seems you were lost in excitement at this revelation," She giggled softly as her eyes fell. "Excited in more than one way."

Rui groaned as he felt an uncomfortable tightness in his groin. It was at times like this he cursed the youthfulness of his body. While his mind wanted nothing more but to explore the mysteries of the Senior Realm with his newfound understanding, it appeared that his body had other intentions.

BADUMP!

His roaring heartbeat shook the dainty hand that caressed his chest.

"Perhaps... you would like to accompany me for some time."

Rui didn't even have any willpower to resist at that moment, he felt as though he had burned a lot of mental power in just a split second furiously processing a multitude of information about the Senior Realm.

He ended up spending a few hours longer in her quarters that day. By the time he left, returning to his chamber, his thoughts were chaotic, on one hand, he was torn by his desire to return to the considerations he had prior, but on the other, the experience he had just been blessed with was an overpowering imprint, drawing away his attention from time to time.

"I need to get some damn rest." He muttered, before retiring in his own personal quarters.

Chapter 1066: Potential

He had slept like a coma patient, sleeping through the night and halfway through the next day.

Kane stared at him with a bewildered expression. "What the hell happened? Did you sleep through?! You?!"

"I don't want to hear it, 'Nake'" Rui sighed as he felt incredibly comfortable and relaxed after a good amount of rest. "Yesterday was crazy."

"Where did you go?" Kane asked. "I tried looking for you to spar with last night but you weren't there."

"Yeah, I was speaking with Senior Xanarn," Rui sighed.

"What did she want?"

"Apparently, my Martial Art is dangerous," Rui said. "And she also told me about the secret of the Senior Realm."

"What?" Kane's eyebrow rose.

Rui proceeded to explain the gist of what she had divulged to him. Although he considered keeping it a secret for his own sake, he ultimately decided against it. The fact that there was no consensus on when disclosure of the secret of the Senior Realm ought to occur meant that there were no truly correct or incorrect choices, otherwise, the world would probably be on one page like they were with the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

"Martial Heart..." Kane murmured. "Incredible. Did she tell you what all the glowing red lines and streaks we saw on Senior Ceeran were?"

"No, but I long figured that out myself," Rui shook his head as he proceeded to explain it all to Kane.

He withheld the fact that he had spent hours with her in the bed, of course. It was too personal, furthermore, he didn't want to reveal it without the consent of Senior Xanarn. After all, she was way too old and mature to appreciate being the center of romantic gossip. It was just good practice to not divulge things that both partners hadn't agreed to.

Rui eventually returned to the considerations that had been plaguing him prior. He was determined to figure out the trigger.

He had already concluded that it wasn't the same as it was for normal humans. It was clear that the Martial Heart was its own beast compared to the more paltry power that humans gained when they tapped into their locked latent power.

However, even if the Martial Heart was far superior, and even if the conditions for triggering its activation were far greater, he couldn't help but feel that they were probably conceptually the same.

One of the conditions to reach the Senior Realm was accruing enough individuality, and Rui didn't need Senior Xanarn to explain why.

('Individuality deepens the Martial Path, which correlates to higher cognitive functions of the brain granted by the discovery of the Martial Path, and the physical functions of the Martial Body centered around the Martial Path,') Rui mused. ('However, unlike the Squire breakthrough process, these enhancements are not transformative. They do not change the brain on any fundamental level... It simply enhances our capabilities by allowing us to make use of what is there.')

The breakthrough to the Apprentice Realm did not cause mutations to the brain to enhance it. Rui knew from his talks with Julian that the brains of Martial Apprentices were indistinguishable from the brains of normal humans physiologically. It was impossible to distinguish the two brains empirically.

To Rui, that was strong evidence that the discovery of the Martial Path simply mobilized the cognitive capabilities of the brain better, allowing the Martial Apprentice to perform combat-related cognitive functions far superior to before.

The discovery of the Martial Path simply tapped into neurological power that existed in the brain, deepening of the Martial Path deepened the degree to which Martial Squires accessed the untapped capabilities of the brain. This allowed Martial Apprentices to make extremely efficient use of every ounce of energy their bodies produced, converting all of it hyper-efficiently into speed, power, and durability.

There should have been a limit to how much the Martial Path allowed one to tap into the potential of the brain and, indirectly, the body, after all, the brain was not infinite. Martial Apprentices too would

eventually hit a ceiling in regards to how much of the cognitive functions of the conscious mind could be mobilized towards combat, and how much of a boost it could provide to the body.

('That changed with the Squire evolution breakthrough,') Rui realized. ('The Squire evolution breakthrough evolved the body in a process that could be survived by the fortitude granted by the Martial Path. It not only evolved the body but also evolved the untapped power that was within the body, the Martial Heart!')

This artificial manmade Realm inadvertently created more potential for the Martial Path to tap into just like it did with the breakthrough to the Apprentice Realm. Except, in this case, it tapped into the enormous well of power that existed in the Martial body.

('The Realms of Martial Art... are they stages of tapping into different kinds and levels of potential that exist in the human body?') Rui's widened. ('The Apprentice Realm tapped into the potential of the conscious brain, the Squire Realm required tapping into the potential for evolution of the body, the Senior Realm requires harnessing the potential of the latent well of power that existed within the newly evolved Martial body. The Martial Path... is a journey of uncovering all of the existential potentials within the Human Being through Martial Art!')

It made sense to Rui.

After all, what was Martial Art as a concept at its very core?

('A system of movements and training designed to be able to maximize the potential of the human body in combat,')

Martial Art, and martial arts, as concepts at their very cores, were simply the process of realizing the potential of the human body in physical conflict. Anything, anything at all, that did that, was Martial Art.

The Martial Path, in turn, was simply the journey of maximizing the Martial Art, which in turn was simply maximizing potential.

The different Realms along the Martial Path were simply checkpoints for maximizing new kinds of potential. Cognitive potential, evolutionary potential, and Heart potential.

Who knew what kind of potential would be explored in the higher Realms?

Rui couldn't even begin to fathom it, yet his desire to tread his Martial Path soared higher than ever!

A maelstrom of chaos engorged his mind as a flurry of epiphanies rang amuck!

#### Chapter 1067: Opportunity

The discovery of the Martial Path, the Martial body, and the Martial Heart. These were three conditions to step into the three lower Realms. Three milestones of potential along the Martial Path, along the journey to maximizing one's Martial Art to its perfect form.

Rui suspected that he had come across information that he wasn't supposed to know yet. However, that didn't necessarily stop him from coming to know more.

('I've already inferred that the trigger to the breakthrough to the Senior Realm is most likely a non-conscious acute process. Furthermore, I've already concluded difficulty of breaking through to the Senior Realm is harder than the conditions for normal humans to tap into their wells of untapped power.')

That gave him a lot of clues as to what exactly the precise trigger of the breakthrough to the Senior Realm was.

('Senior Ceeran mentioned that the strength of the desire that drives them to pursue Martial Art is what decides how far Martial Artists would ascend,') Rui narrowed his eyes. ('Could it be that only the fundamental desire for why one wants to pursue Martial Art can be the trigger to the breakthrough of the Senior Realm?')

It would make more sense if that was the case, however, he couldn't be certain of it. Rui couldn't be too sure about it.

"Hey, are you listening to me?" Kane asked.

"Hm?"

"I said let's go grab something to eat," Kane remarked. "I'm hungry as hell after a morning's training."

"Sure,"

Rui immediately understood what the goal of a common eating area was the second he learned about it. The Floating Sect was too impersonal to be called a sect, in reality. It was more like an... association.

That had its advantages, it drew in the truly strong in mind and body. However, it also meant that there wasn't a sense of unity or belonging. It meant that these Martial Artists were less inclined to protect it than they would have had they had this sense of belonging.

It also made it harder to deploy and use the Martial Artists for the sake of the Floating Sect. The Floating Sect, by design, did not demand as many commitments from its members as other Martial Sects and groups did. As long as Martial Squires were willing to participate in operations needed to protect the Floating Sect, they had nothing else to offer.

That was burdening because the Floating Sect's expenses weren't small, they managed to handle the expenses by largely being self-sufficient. Most of the workforce in the Floating Sect was permanently tied to the Floating Sect, either through bondage or deep life commitments. The island was able to produce food and energy, and they had already stockpiled the necessary goods and supplies needed to deal with most needs.

The sect was forced to become self-sufficient because the cost of hauling things to the island was too great!

Ordinarily, the Floating Sect would be able to demand more from the Martial Squires for providing all these services, but Rui understood why it didn't.

('The three Martial Seniors that lead the Floating Sect are not interested in creating a flourishing economy or society,') He mused. ('They are Martial Artists who are chasing after greater power. Ajanta Island is a good avenue to train themselves and progressively grow stronger. However, their training is



threatened by the nations of the Kaddar Region, thus they need an army. That is the only reason the Floating Sect exists.')

They were interested in the quality of Martial Squires because Ajanta Island had a limited amount of holding capacity. The island was unfortunately fragile to a certain extent due to its structure and shape, which meant that special training environments needed to be created to protect the island from the power of Martial Squires.

However, due to the size of these training environments, only a thousand Martial Squires could be accommodated.

That was why the Floating Sect's requirements of commitments from its members were low. Powerful Martial Squires did not bow their head too easily, and they wanted the most powerful of Martial Squires since their holding capacity was limited to a thousand.

If quantity was not obtainable, then they would compensate with quality. Rui could easily see that that was why the Floating Sect was organized the way it was.

('I highly doubt that those Martial Seniors were the ones who came up with all of this,') Rui mused.

He wasn't calling them stupid, but statesmanship, management, and administration were far from their field of specialty. If they were tasked with creating the Floating Sect from the ground up, they would have undoubtedly screwed things up.

('They must have founded the Floating Sect with some highly competent subordinates.')

Soon enough, they reached the cafeteria. It was a spacious area with many tables and chairs, enough to accommodate all of the guardians individually. Yet most guardians sat with their peers.

After all, the Floating Sect was a gathering of like-minded warriors who were willing to risk death multiple times in order to be a part of the Floating Sect. They were committed to their training to grow stronger. It made sense for Martial Artists with similar Martial Art and Martial Paths to hang out with each other to exchange with each other.

Rui could easily see that guardians that were sitting with each other were those that had similar Martial bodies.

He even spotted a group of creepy guardians with strange appearances seated with each other.

('Poison-oriented Martial Artists,') Rui briefly noted.

"Hey, look," Kane drew his attention. "There's a new notice."

"Hm?" Rui glanced over.

"Apparently Senior Xanarn is going to be conducting sparring sessions with guardians one class a day over the next ten days," Kane remarked. "We get to fight Martial Seniors!"

That was indeed quite alluring.

"Yet only Martial Squires willing to apply for extra field and operational work are eligible for the sparring," Rui smirked as he continued reading the notice. "They're trying to squeeze more work out of Martial Squires in exchange for benefits like this."

#### Chapter 1068: Incentives

It was not a bad plan, not at all.

('Most Martial Squires do not get this opportunity,') Rui mused.

A good chunk of all Martial Squires was in nations with few or no Martial Seniors, the probability of them being able to earn a Martial Senior's time was far too low.

Even in nations that possessed Martial Artists of the upper Realms, it was not easy to gain the time and attention of Martial Seniors.

That was why the leaders of the Floating Sect dangling that as a carrot was effective. There were Martial Squires who would most certainly complete missions in order to get the insight of Martial Seniors.

This was especially true for the Martial Squires of the Floating Sect, who were driven enough to go out of their way to do things that they believed would be beneficial to their growth.

Martial Seniors were those Martial Squires who had successfully broken through, and thus knew what it took to break through to the higher Realms. Their insights were invaluable to Martial Squires.

"What do you say, 'Falken'?"

"Sounds good, 'Nake',"

The two of them were most certainly interested in this. Rui especially didn't mind spending more time with Senior Xanarn. She was definitely thoughtful and insightful, and she was definitely stronger.

He didn't mind getting closer to her either.

The two of them quickly fixed themselves some food as they were about to sit down at an empty table.

"Nake!" Someone called Kane out.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows, turning in surprise.

"Come here!" A young woman invited him to sit at a table with several others.

"You made friends?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Yeah, they're fellow speed and maneuvering-oriented Martial Artists, what, are you jealous you don't have anything in common with anybody else besides from that one guy you broke mentally?" Kane smirked.

"Ouch," Rui huffed with a resigned smile.

The two of them proceeded over to the table.

"Hey, Fera, mind if my friend 'Falken' here joins us?"

"Everyone knows his name, it's no problem,"

"Pleasure to meet you all," Rui offered.

The two of them sat down while the conversation proceeded. Rui felt strangely nostalgic, this was something that he had experienced in the Academy, and also to a little degree in his previous life. It was like hanging out with friends at lunchtime.

"Speaking of which," Fera interjected, drawing his attention. "Who's going to apply for the round sparring training with Senior Xanarn?"

"I am, I want to see how the new technique I modified does against a Martial Senior."

"I also wanted to get her input as to why I feel like I haven't been getting stronger."

"I want to see if I can evade her attacks," Kane mentioned. "I might do better than almost everybody, maybe I'll even last the longest even if I do not contribute to the fight at all haha."

"You probably will," Fera raised an eyebrow. "I believe you're the only evasive maneuverer in our tenth class, no?"

"True... But there are other guardians who can be truly troublesome to land a strike on," Kane glanced at Rui meaningfully, throwing all the attention on him.

All of the guardians at the table grew silent as they grew confused.

"You're not a maneuvering-oriented Martial Artist, are you?" One man spoke up.

"I saw his fight against that bastard Seronin, he's an all-rounder, I think."

Rui sighed inwardly. He did not like being the center of attention. "Yes."

"You're selling yourself short," Fera turned back to Kane. "All-rounders are not specialists. He definitely is strong, but he cannot beat a specialist in their field of expertise."

"Perhaps, but I have learned never to bet against him." Kane smiled wryly. "Anyways, what do you think about this new maneuvering technique idea that I came up with..."

The maneuvering gang got absorbed into a conversation as Rui got absorbed into his thoughts. He did feel as though the stronger he grew, the less he was able to relate to other Martial Artists. The way he trained was different, the way he developed his Marital Art individualistically was different. His mental age was different from that of his peers, and correspondingly his maturity as well. On top of that, the depth of his Martial Art, and his entire thought process was just alien compared to theirs.

He had already experienced how different he was when he had Kane explain the way that he created the Fulminata technique. Listening to these Martial Squires talk about Martial Art and techniques just further drove the difference between them for him.

('They're kids,') Rui sighed as he felt tired just listening to their energetic and juvenile banter. He felt like an uncle being forced to watch his nephew and friends playing. He just wasn't able to get invested in their conversations, try as he might.

He would rather spend this time talking with someone his own age, mentally.

('Someone like Xanarn...') He couldn't help but recall last night.

She was still much younger than he was, of course, but she was still definitely leaning towards older nonetheless. Of course, she retained her youthful appearance by virtue of being a Martial Artist, so he wasn't able to tell. However, just by being a Martial Senior, he knew that there was no way she was old.

The conversations that they had were much more to his speed. His mind delved back into pleasant memories of the night just as he was interrupted

"Hey, are you listening?" Kane poked at his head.

"Hm?" He furrowed his eyebrows, turning towards Kane. "What."

"Do you want to join them in a mission for the Floating Sect to be able to partake in the Senior sparring sessions?"

Rui glanced at the four Martial Artists around the table. They certainly weren't weak, they couldn't be by virtue of being part of the Floating Sect, so he wasn't too concerned about that.

"It depends," Rui shrugged. "If there is a mission that suits six Martial Squires of our Martial Art, then sure."

## Chapter 1069: Delivery

However, he wasn't sure if there would be a mission that would require five maneuvering Martial Artists and one all-rounder. That sounded like a rather strange mission for the Floating Sect.

In the Kandrian Empire, he would find countless missions that fit the bill in the Martial Union, but not so much in the Floating Sect.

The Martial Union had a huge load of missions from its large market and client that it supplied to countless Martial Artists across the entirety of the nation. The Floating Sect's missions were almost

certainly not services or commodities being sold to clients who were interested in purchasing the services of Martial Artists.

Any missions from the Floating Sect would be centered around its own self-interest, especially the interest of self-preservation.

('Self-preservation from the nations of the Kaddar Region, which are its only threat.') Rui mused.

He did predict that most of the missions of the Floating Sect would be centered around the Kaddar Region.

And he was right.

Later after their meal, the six of them visited the deployment department, looking for work that they could do in order to be able to spar with Martial Seniors.

The first thing that Rui thought of when he received a big book containing all the possible operations that they could engage in was that the system there was far less sophisticated than the system of the Martial Union.

In hindsight, he couldn't help but admire how great the system of missions of the Martial Union was. It cleanly took every commission from every clientele, processed it before then splitting them by Realm, field, location and geography, required skillset, estimated time, and even net difficulty. Then the information of the commissions was cleanly processed and assimilated into small booklets; the mission bills, which were then organized by multiple factors, allowed Martial Artists to very easily look for a suitable mission.

It was a sophisticated and robust well-oiled machine.

In comparison, the Floating Sect was a lot more lacking. The missions were not well-organized or sorted. Furthermore, the information that Rui got was not nearly as insightful as the information that he got from the mission bill of the Martial Union.

Of course, he didn't necessarily expect the Floating Sect to be nearly as good as the Martial Union in that regard. It was the literal and core purpose of the Martial Union versus a smaller department within the Floating Sect.

"Hm, hunting for Dervin mushrooms in the Kaddar Everglades..." Kane murmured.

"Protecting a supply shipment to the Floating Sect from the Kaddar Martial Squires surveilling the area..."

"Damaging known long-range artillery weapons of the Darociouen Empire..."

They sounded unsure to Rui, which made sense, admittedly. None of these missions were particularly alluring to them as they were maneuvering-oriented Martial Artists.

"Hey, I found a good one!" Kane exclaimed. "Deliveries from and to the Floating Sect. This is right up our alley."

The others nodded as they grouped up.

Any back and forth between the Floating Sect and the land nations was rife with danger, and the best way to deal with it was simply to avoid it, which the maneuvering-oriented Martial Artists could certainly do better than anybody else.

However, while this was certainly an alluring mission for them, it was rather boring to Rui. He would rather pick something that was more stimulating and would also yield more merits that would allow him to gain more training time with Senior Xanarn.

"I think I'll sit this one out," Rui told Kane. "It's not something I am inclined towards at the moment."

"Damn..." Kane murmured. "Shame the two of us will have to choose something else then."



"No, it's fine," Rui shook his head. "You go with them. This mission will be good training for you, you can exercise your Fulminata technique and compare yourself with your peers."

In hindsight, it was better for Kane to also spend more time with normal Martial Squires to gain a less skewed version of himself. Because of how extraordinary Rui was at times, it was hard for Kane to feel too accomplished about himself.

Spending time with other normal Martial Squires would make him more aware of what normal looked like, and would probably boost his self-esteem and confidence.

Furthermore, it was probably for the best that he could spend time with more normal-minded younger Martial Artists like the small friend group that he had made. Rui was basically a grandpa to him, and it did affect the conversations they had, as much as Rui tried not to allow it to happen.

Furthermore, he didn't want Kane to grow psychologically dependent or too attached to Rui either. The fact he thought of not going with the other four in order to go with whatever Rui wanted to be showed that perhaps it had already happened to a certain extent, especially after they left the Shionel Confederation.

The five of them quickly picked the mission before heading out to complete it.

Rui, on the other hand, took his time. He was in no hurry. Furthermore, he had a nostalgic feeling of skimming through missions looking for the best one from back in his early days.

It had been many years since he had last stood in the mission library, choosing a mission that he would swiftly complete.

It was nostalgic, but also quite melancholic.

('Things used to be a lot more simple back then,') He sighed. It was true, of course, he wasn't confronted with many hardships, and although it hadn't been easy, it hadn't been painful like it was now looking back on those memories.

('I swear to god, when I return to the Kandrian Empire, I'm going to pick a mission from the mission library of the Martial Union and then just complete it before heading back home to eat a good heavy dinner after a long day's work.')

It was funny how back when he used to do that, he would yearn for more, and now he just wished he could experience that once more.

#### Chapter 1070: Rejected

If he wanted to rack up some merits, it was probably best to undertake a mission that would allow him to accrue as much of a contribution so that he could train with the Martial Seniors for longer and perhaps received greater tutelage from them.

He hadn't yet entirely figured out what the ultimate trigger for the Senior Realm truly was, unfortunately, he was working with too much speculation, unfortunately, to make reliable deductions.

That was why he tossed aside more mundane missions like the ones Kane and his new-found acquaintances had chosen. The merits that they would get from such a mission were little.

('Then again, the Floating Sect does not have an objective system of merits,') Rui mused. ('It doesn't even have an internal currency despite being so isolated from the rest of the world economically.')

The island was remarkably self-sufficient, however, it wasn't complex enough to warrant its own currency. After all, although Ajanta Island was a small city in and of itself, it didn't always feel that way because of how low the population was.

The chambers were huge structures hundreds of meters in length and breadth.

They needed to be, in order to accommodate Martial Squires of all ranges, and fit in the training environments and machines for all kinds of Martial Paths and Art.

If there were just a handful or several of them, it actually would not be a big deal. But there were one thousand and three such structures, and the amount of area that went towards them was huge. The

actual number of people residing on the island was disproportionately lower than what you would expect from a place of the size of the island.

Furthermore, with no open market of any sort, it was possible to manage without something as troublesome as a currency.

However, even without an official credit or merit system, contributions would definitely be recognized and rewarded with how ruthlessly meritocratic the Floating Sect was. If they did not do that, then Martial Squires would not be incentivized to contribute extra work to the sect.

[Deterrence operation: Conduct an attack on a patrolling guard of the Kaddar Region

Operation summary: Kill, maim, or capture a patrol guard of the Kaddar Region meant to deter initiates from entering the island. Any number of guardians may take on this operation taking on any number of patrols. Credit will be judged based on contributions based on the discretion of Senior Xanarn.]

A simple enough operation, given that the guardians were not Martial Artists necessarily personally familiar with each other, their coordination was most certainly sub-par, it was meaningless to assign highly sophisticated missions.

Missions like these were most optimal for the Floating Sect. All he would need to was kill a Martial Squire that was deployed by one of the Kaddar Regions to deter foreign Martial Squires from trying to join the Floating Sect.

('Meh,') Rui dismissed it.

It was grunt work. Just a mission that was meant to keep the Kaddar Martial Squires from getting too comfortable while they performed that duty, it was worthless. Even if he killed multiple Martial Squires, its impact wasn't too noticeable.

He came across several more missions like that, it was clear that most missions were like that, and Rui was able to instantly analyze the value of a mission just through a brief skim. Most of them were defense-oriented or offense-oriented missions.

"Tsk,"

He shook his head as he kept on reading through before he stumbled onto something interesting.

[Espionage operation: The Graheria Kingdom has completed a transaction with Frigga Industries, a major arms and military technology supplier, receiving a large shipment from the corporate supplier. The objective of this operation is to gain as much intelligence on the transaction and the purchased goods as possible.]

"Hm," Rui's eyebrow lit up in interest.

He knew of Frigga Industries, of course. They were one of the largest clients of Esosale Suppliers from across the continent. This meant that they had purchased tons of esoteric ore supplies from Rui, according to the sales data that he received from Guildmaster Bradt. As one of the largest suppliers of military technology, they had naturally fostered a deep relationship with Bradt Distribution Services to supply their goods across large expanses of the continent.

"Interesting," Rui murmured. "This would be good to do with Kane but..."

He didn't want to pull him away after he told Kane there was no problem with him hanging out with more like-minded Martial Artists.

"Ah, well... it's fine I guess," Rui shrugged. Although Kane's Void Step would undoubtedly be of great use here, it wasn't as though he was helpless without it.

Rui possessed extremely powerful senses which made him quite good at espionage, surveillance, and reconnaissance.

And while he couldn't become invisible like Kane could. He most certainly was capable of disguising his nature as a Martial Artist with a powerful Mind Mask.

He quickly skimmed through the details that existed. Unlike the Martial Union which had a strict need-to-know basis of information disclosure and dissemination for the sake of client privacy, the Floating Sect freely shared all the information with the Martial Squires.

('Unsophisticated compared to the Martial Union but understandable.')

The information provided featured a map of the Graheria Kingdom and the various locations where the package was spotted, and the latest known position believed to be the current location of the package.

The location was in a military complex guarded by Martial Squires and Apprentices, highly fenced and armed to the tooth with long-range artillery weapons for all of those that attempted to try and raid the military complex.

('Hm, just based on the information provided here, infiltrating the through force is definitely impossible,') Rui concluded. ('I'd be swarmed with Martial Squires, and Squire-grade artillery weapons. And reinforcements would definitely be on their way. That's hopeless.')

Furthermore, he couldn't brute force stealth his way through either. It was dangerous even with Kane, this wasn't the Shionel Dungeon where senses were deeply hampered and there was no chance of anyone sensing Void Step.