

Martial Unity 1151

Chapter 1151: Dire

Yet, she wasn't the only one who was having trouble. She wasn't the only one who had been forced to fight four Martial Seniors at once.

Senior Leonil gritted his teeth as he rushed away, desperately trying to avoid the hail of attacks that he was being bombarded with.

He was nowhere near as aggressive as he was last time, just like Senior Xanarn, he had been forced to avoid even bothering with offense if he had any hopes of surviving.

However, unlike Senior Xanarn, he didn't have any compunctions of protecting the Floating Sect with his life. Of course, he was willing to defend the Floating Sect if it was in danger as he was doing so at the moment, but he did not care to sacrifice his life for the sect.

He was one of the Martial Seniors who was on the sect for more selfish reasons compared to someone like Senior Xanarn.

His fight was more destructive to the sect than Senior Xanarn's fight was. He didn't even mind if he ended up killing the Squire-level guardians as a result.

Senior Sarak was in the middle between them, however, he couldn't help but feel as though he had ended up becoming the most useless of the three despite being the strongest. It was frustrating because he desperately wanted to join his comrades and relieve them of their predicaments, but alas he wasn't able to.

He wasn't fast, so he wasn't able to juke his opponents and join his fellow Senior guardians.

He wasn't power or offense-oriented, so he wasn't able to force his way through and get to his comrades.

All he could do was stand there like a pillar, feeling stupid and useless.

He felt an immense amount of self-loathing, but his strength was centered around counter-offense, with a heavy slant towards defense more than anything else. Every time he tried to juke his opponents and move towards his allies and comrades, he would fail.

He wasn't too concerned about his own well-being.

Of the three of them, he had been the only one who was stronger than his all of opponents last time, and that hadn't changed.

All eleven Kaddar Martial Artists went all out.

They had an advantage, and they knew they had an advantage. Senior Sarak's opponents knew that they couldn't take him down, so they made use of every ounce of their energy to keep him where he was.

It was easy too.

All they needed to do was attack and force him to use the one technique in his Martial Art that he had, which he was best able to do while stationary.

The stage had been set and the plan executed by the Kaddar Martial Seniors was going on track.

Senior Xanarn coughed some more blood as his expression tightened.

The addition of a poison-oriented Martial Senior turned out to work wonders for the Kaddar Martial Seniors.

Not only did the presence of the extra Martial Senior make things much harder for Senior Xanarn naturally, but also, the Martial Artist being centered around poison was the best way to make her feel that extra Martial Senior when battling.

Rui's expression grew increasingly more tense as the battle proceeded, just as her condition did.

None of the original three Martial Seniors she fought had actually inflicted much damage at all. They merely focused on burning all their power to ensure that their poisonous friend would be able to bypass her defenses really well.

Rui did his best to analyze the kinds of poisons being employed, but he wasn't able to. Still, she did have a few broad kinds of poisons.

She seemed to have an anti-coagulant drug that made each wound bleed and take a bigger toll on Senior Xanarn.

This was particularly bad for Senior Xanarn, and it burned her healing factor because of the lost blood in addition to wounds. It meant that Senior Xanarn may very well not survive until the end.

Even if she did, she was going to be in a horrible condition.

('That isn't all,') Rui's eyes narrowed. ('She's also attacking Senior Xanarn's senses.')

He could see that she was having a harder time registering her opponent's attacks. Her ears were also bleeding and had taken on a strange hue.

She was far from doing well.

And she only got worse.

Her breathing grew very ragged.

Her wounds grew more severe.

Her blood loss grew untenable.

She was in circumstances that were beyond dire.

Yet she fought fiercely. Even in her circumstances, she refused to allow her condition to get in the way of her duty of protecting the Floating Sect. She still minded her environment and made sure that she didn't take the battle near the chambers, or near the entrance to the shelter in an effort to ensure none of the members of the sect were put at risk even as she was literally dying.

Rui couldn't help but feel immense admiration for her.

It was easy to talk, but it wasn't easy walking the talk right down to the T. She truly was committed to protecting those she vowed to protect, even if it came at the cost of her own health and life.

In comparison, Rui's Martial drive was a lot more self-centered. He largely was driven by personal ambition, as well as a desire to protect his family. But aside from that, he wasn't selfless.

It was in moments like these that he truly felt humbled.

He did not think he was wrong to have self-centered ambitions like Project Water, not at all. But he did admire people who dedicated themselves to others. He did not mind lending them his power if and when he could.

Especially when he was attracted to them.

His body tensed as he and Kane prepared themselves to act.

The Martial Hearts had been blazing for more than an hour and had now begun diminishing by the minute.

Any time now, Rui, Kane, and Ieyasu could jump out and turn the tables!

The question was whether they would make it in time.

"Argh!" Senior Xanarn collapsed, drenched in blood.

Her balance was unstable, she seemed to be struggling to breathe.

Her bronze skin has taken on a sickly skin tone.

And yet... She did not give up.

She struggled back onto her feet, quivering as she took her stance.

Yet the battle was all but over.

She knew it.

Her four enemies knew it.

Rui and Kane knew it.

And yet...

The moment came sooner than Rui expected.

It happened abruptly.

The skin of the four Martial Seniors returned to normal.

They were all extremely tired and strained, fighting Senior Xanarn on Ajanta Island was truly a herculean task.

Their Martial Hearts had already run out of juice, but that was fine, they no longer needed it against Senior Xanarn in her current condition. Even a Martial Squire could probably kill her in her current condition.

That was why they were relieved.

Overjoyed.

The Floating Sect's defensive prospects were operating on razor-thin margins. The collapse of a single Martial Senior was the end. They were already at the final line.

Senior Xanarn activated another sound-based technique, but it was merely the final resistance of a dying prey, they ignored the fluctuations of her sound-based technique as they prepared to kill her.

It was over.

They were certain.

And it was because they were certain that they were surprised when the poison-oriented Martial Senior's eye exploded.

SPLAT

"...Eh?"

The three of them grew alarmed at the sudden wound.

Even Senior Xanarn opened her eyes in shock at the sudden occurrence.

DRIP DRIP DRIP

Blood began pouring out of her eye like a river.

Pure unadulterated horror sprung onto their faces as they noticed it wasn't just blood.

Cerebral fluid could clearly be seen mixed into it.

A brain injury.

For half a moment, they were frozen.

Not even the vaunted reflexes of the Senior Realm availed them as their brains struggled to process the spontaneous events that seemed to defy causality.

"HEALING POTION!" General Derftar screamed as his senses immediately swept through the area.

That was when he saw them.

Right before him with a heavily hidden presence.

BOOM!!!

Rui launched the heaviest blow he had ever thrown in his entire life!

General Dereftar gritted his teeth as did his very best to block the attack, the sheer momentum of the attack was such that he was blown away by it.

He glanced back up with a shocked expression, looking at his attacker. A young man with silver hair and eyes, with a bruised and wounded body seemingly.

His bewilderment was palpable.

What just happened?

Just moments ago, they were about to kill a Senior guardian of the Floating Sect.

Just moments ago, they were about to win the war against the Floating Sect.

And now, he could hear that the heartbeat of his comrade had stopped due to an inexplicable attack that blasted her through the eye and into her brain.

What happened?

Was it the two Martial Squires that he saw at the moment? But how did they do that? What was happening?

Yet, his mind switched gears in less than a millisecond.

He was a warrior. A Martial Artist. It was not easy for anybody to shake the mentality of one like himself.

The three of them eyed Rui and Kane with daggers.

A maelstrom of bloodlust boiled the very air about them as their minds sharpened.

Any other Martial Squires would have frozen in terror.

"Hmph." Rui snorted, his expression crumpled with rage as he unleashed profoundly deep bloodlust.

Deeper than ever.

It washed over them.

Their hair stood on end as chills crawled up their skin.

Their jaws dropped as they came to a shocking conclusion.

"You..." The man stammered. "Martial Senior...!"

The Senior-level aura could not be mistaken!

Rui had pushed himself to the absolute limit, having constructed the most powerful Mind Mask that he ever had in his entire life.

"You're damn right I am." He exhaled deeply, feeling his body lighten astronomically as he felt a surge of temporary energy.

WHOOSH!

Rui moved so fast that he almost blurred in the eyes of his opponents!

Yet, he wasn't fighting incompetent fools. General Dereftar's eyes narrowed as his expression grew graver.

POW!

He blocked Rui's attack.

Yet Rui simply grinned.

SPLAT!

The man felt a stab in his back out of nowhere!

Kane drove his knife as deep as he could.

"Dereftar!" One of his comrades shouted as he launched a powerful attack that moved so far that Rui wasn't able to avoid it!

BAM!

The attack was so powerful that it blasted a hole across Rui!

For a moment, Rui had forgotten that he was dealing with Martial Seniors.

Yes, their Martial Hearts were gone.

Yes, they were extraordinarily exhausted and stressed and far away from their peak performance, enough for Rui and Kane to cope the way they did against Senior Xanarn.

But they were Martial Seniors nonetheless.

They could blast past his defenses like he was made up of paper.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!!

Rui ran away as he struggled to avoid them despite Void Step!

Both their sheer speed and power were truly astonishing. Rui could feel that his body offered as much resistance to his attacks as cardboard did to bullets!

Yet, it didn't matter.

FWOOOP!

The wounds healed instantaneously.

The three Martial Seniors froze on the spot in shock!

"What..." Senior Xanarn murmured in shock.

Was he immortal?!

They grew more grave as they launched more attacks at him, pushing their already exhausted bodies to the absolute limit.

And yet, he simply ran forward, evading half, while the other half peppered holes across his body, and yet...

They disappeared.

"RARGH!" Rui yelled as he launched a supremely powerful tier-five Transverse Resonance attack while following it up with an immensely powerful Flowing Canon!

BOOM!!!

He pushed them back, overcoming all their defenses and pushing them back with his two most powerful attacks!

At that moment, they had a flatteringly terrifying impression of him.

An abysmally swift, powerful, seemingly immortal monster!

Chapter 1153: Destiny

Perhaps this would have been worth pursuing in their peaks, but they had already pushed themselves beyond their limits.

"Retreat!" General Dereftar coughed blood as he gritted his teeth. "The operation is a failure!"

Rui watched as they rushed away from him, hoping to get as far away from the demon as possible!

They could only grit their teeth and cut their losses. Internally, each of them was cursing. It was humiliating to run away when they were in such a dominating position.

They were Martial Seniors. They were national treasures of a warrior each.

Yet, they failed.

Miserably.

That alone was humiliating, and yet it wasn't even the full extent of their embarrassment.

Not only had they failed, but they had failed despite having a four-on-one advantage!

An inexplicable Martial Senior came out of literally nowhere!

It was mind-boggling.

The intelligence of the Kaddar Treaty Organization was as clear as the brightest daylight. There were only three Martial Seniors in the Floating Sect.

There had been only three Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect.

And there would almost certainly be only three Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect.

And yet, there was a fourth.

His aura was that of a Martial Senior.

His Martial prowess was easily on par with Martial Seniors in their base forms. He was paired up with an assistant Martial Squire who was incredibly powerful for his Realm. And he was frankly overwhelming all three of them almost alone.

"Why didn't he use his Martial Heart?" General Dereftar wondered as he thought back to when Rui appeared.

He had appeared wounded and bruised.

('He must have already burned his Martial Heart out prior given his appearance...') The man's eyes narrowed. ('Maybe one of their guardians broke through and exhausted their Martial Heart and was not able to use it this battle. It would also explain why he didn't show up earlier. He could not contribute if his Martial Heart was exhausted.')

That made a lot of sense to him in many ways.

Yet he wasn't happy.

Not at all.

It meant that not only had they failed despite their sheer advantage.

But also, they lost a Martial Senior!

General Dereftar's heart burned as he thought of the death of Senior Ferin, the poison user. They were from the same nation, and they had just suffered a tremendously heavy blow due to his death.

But that wasn't everything.

The fact that the Floating Sect gained a new Martial Senior, but also an incredibly capable one meant that the difficulty of taking down the Floating Sect was significantly higher!

They would need to bring several more Martial Seniors to have the probability of success that they did have in this fight.

General Dereftar didn't know how he was going to look into the eyes of the emperor and tell him the extent of the humiliating defeat that they had suffered.

"Hehe... They ran with their tails tucked between their legs!" Kane smirked.

They had managed to kill one Martial Senior. That alone was momentous.

"Great job Rui. You really did a number on them." He turned towards Rui with a wide grin.

He froze.

His eyes widened in horror at what he saw.

DRIP DRIP DRIP!

Blood.

Everywhere.

Rui inexplicably began bleeding from his eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, and from hundreds of different places across his entire body.

He bled so much that even the gravely injured Senior Xanarn seemed healthy compared to him!

"Damn...!" Rui vomited blood as he fell to his knees.

"RUI!" Kane yelled in shock and sorrow as he rushed to him.

"Just thirty-four seconds... Pathetic..." He murmured before losing consciousness.

Kane desperately tried feeding him a healing potion.

Yet, it didn't work very well, much to his shock.

He was able to stop the bleeding, but the wounds did not heal.

Unbeknownst to him, Rui had used two Metabody techniques at once. Something that he had never done before.

He used Void Forestep at the start of the fight.

Then he used Weaving Blood immediately after.

That was the reason, that for at least half a minute, Rui was able to push back three Martial Seniors, albeit exhausted and stressed as they were.

Unfortunately, power did not come free of cost.

Using one's Martial Body was extremely stressful on the body. It literally altered the spec configuration by force. The Godspeed technique was irrefutably unhealthy because it got rid of healthy and essential body mass for a boost in power, the negative consequences of which would be felt after the technique wore off.

The same was true for Weaving Blood.

It literally triggered mass cell death across the body.

Now, what would happen if both techniques were used together?

Rui had plotted many graphs and models based on empirical data he collected on them as well as his own theoretical extrapolations, having arrived at many answers.

Now he knew.

If he used Void Forestep and Weaving Blood together, he would be invincible for thirty-four seconds.

And he would die immediately after.

If not for Kane's Fulminata allowing him to react swiftly and administer potions on the spot, Rui would have undoubtedly bled to death.

Hell, his condition was so bad that he would die before he even bled to death.

The damage done to his body was so deep, so fundamental, that not even a high-quality healing potion could heal his wounds.

The loss in body mass, the mass cell death that the Reaper's poison has caused, was too great. The potion struggled to prevent his body from plummeting towards death.

However, Rui had a small smile on his face even as he lost consciousness. He had succeeded in protecting Senior Xanarn.

Furthermore, he had gone and done far more than just that. Even as he lost consciousness, he knew the ramifications of his most recent accomplishments would not be mild, he knew that some of the things that he had accomplished were nothing short of historic.

Yet it was not something that moved him, it wasn't the first time.

Or the second.

Or even the third.

By the time the dust settled, Kane couldn't help but wonder how far his destiny stretched.

Chapter 1154: Report

The impacts of the second Senior-level conflict between the Kaddar Treaty Organization were vast. Far more vast than anyone partaking had expected.

"What did you say?" A deep masculine voice boomed across a large throne room adorned with ostentatious decorations.

The throne room was adorned with many seats, each more extravagant than the last the further towards the opposite end of the entrance they went.

The king of the Graheria Empire sat on the giant gold and silver throne at the very end.

General Dereftar gritted his teeth and endured the reproachful eyes of the many royal dignitaries who presided over the meeting.

"General Dereftar," The king addressed the Martial Senior. "I asked you a question. How did Senior Ferin perish?"

"...A fourth Martial Senior of the Floating Sect killed her before we realized it." The man clenched his fist as he squeezed the words out of his mouth.

"I'm afraid I don't understand," The king replied simply. "How did the three of you fail to notice an attack from the enemy until after it killed Senior Ferin? How did Senior Ferin fail to miss such a lethal attack?"

Yet the general knew that the king's mood was anything but simple.

Or perhaps it was simple.

Simply furious, that was.

"It was... a sound-based attack, your majesty," The general straightforwardly.

"And...?" The king was not impressed by that statement, it meant nothing to someone who wasn't deeply familiar with the intricacies of Martial Art techniques.

"Sound-oriented Martial Art techniques are difficult to detect after execution," The man explained. "We usually rely on sensing the inception of the technique rather than the sound itself. For us to have not noticed it means that the Martial Senior could not have launched it within half a kilometer of Senior Ferin, otherwise our senses would have alerted us to it."

"That means that the Martial Artist that killed Ferin had to be a truly gifted marksman, correct?"

"Yes, your majesty," General Dereftar nodded gravely. "Certainly something that only a Martial Senior could do. To hit a bullseye from that far without the Martial Heart..."

He hesitated.

"What is it?" The king asked, narrowing his eyes.

"I would normally chalk it up to a long-range Martial Art, however, that man was also extremely powerful at close-range, and had absurd endurance and healing. I suppose it's possible that he was an all-rounder, but all-rounders aren't supposed to be that powerful in each individual field, so I can only speculate that the fourth Martial Senior is extremely capable, just like his peers.

"So not only did you all fail in your operation..." Pure fury could be heard in the king's voice. "But a Martial Senior of our kingdom was killed, resulting in the loss of one of our precious few national treasures. On top of that, the Floating Sect now has an extra Martial Senior out of nowhere. Is that right?"

General Dereftar winced inwardly, the reproach from the king was crystal clear.

"Answer the question." The king sternly demanded.

"That is correct, Your Majesty."

The king inhaled and exhaled deeply, allowing the truth to finally settle in.

It took him every ounce of self-control to burst out screaming in anger and frustration in a manner that was simply unbecoming of the ruler of the Graheria Kingdom.

What he was forced to deal with was one of the worst outcomes possible. The probability of such a thing happening had been estimated to be extremely low.

The thing that drove him mad was the one who had assured him that such a thing was impossible was the same man who was now telling him that that very impossible thing had somehow unfolded.

He truly wanted to get up from his throne, walk down there, and chew him out face to face, yet he abstained.

He could not go too far. Martial Seniors were too precious to the kingdom for him to even risk going too far with his aggressive criticism. He did not want to risk losing another Martial Senior due to having left him feeling disenfranchised.

This was the problem with Martial Artists.

They weren't just weapons, they were also people. If they were disenfranchised, they would simply leave.

Of course, Genera Dereftar would not leave so easily, because he was a loyal member of the military. Loyalty was something that was well-trained in the military. He had risen through the ranks as a Martial Artist and had been treated quite well by the nation.

"General Dereftar." The king addressed him.

"Yes, your majesty?"

"Do you take responsibility for what happened?"

"I do, Your Majesty."

Regardless of what happened, they had ended up failing miserably. Someone needed to take responsibility. Even if General Dereftar was as much of a victim as everyone else, he needed to become a bit of a scapegoat.

Of course, he would not suffer materially in any way, however, the Graheria Kingdom would not forget the stain on his record.

Regardless, the failure of the mission would send ripples across the Kaddar Treaty Organization.

"How many Martial Seniors would it take to overcome Floating Sect's defenses? And feel free to be more cautious this time," The king glared at him.

"...Given the prowess of the fourth Martial Senior in his base form... I would say he too at least requires three martial Seniors."

The king's expression darkened. "Does that not mean that a total of twelve Martial Seniors are required from the Kaddar Region's end to match the might of the Floating Sect?"

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Yet again, the king's formidable self-control was tested. He wanted to strangle the general with his own two hands but managed to refrain. Not only was it unbecoming of him as a king, but as a human, there was no way he could possibly strangle any Martial Artist, let alone a Martial Senior!

All he could do was his very best when it came to dealing with the consequences of this fiasco and mitigating the losses.

('Even then...') He clenched his fists. ('The war...')

Chapter 1155: Outcome

The impact of this loss was not small. This was not a normal war. Ordinarily, the loss of one combatant was not enough to seal the deal.

However, the Kaddar Treaty Organization was not in the best of circumstances. It had to squeeze and bleed thoroughly just to get as many Martial Seniors as it did get to defeat the Martial Seniors of the Floating Sect.

However, not only did the number of Martial Seniors in the floating Sect increase by thirty-three percent, but the Kaddar Treaty Organization had lost one of its own precious Martial Seniors in battle.

A devastating outcome, and one that proved to be too much for the Kaddar Treaty Organization to overcome.

Their decision to cease their war effort was not a light one, and certainly not a painless one.

How could it be?

The Kaddar Treaty Organization was comprised of the nations of the Kaddar Region, especially the ones that had suffered the most from the presence of Ajanta Island. It was only in this generation of leaders that they had managed to truly come together, find a solution, and ultimately commit to that decision to remove the scourge that was Ajanta Island.

And now, that decision had come crashing down.

They could not afford to even maintain the attack anymore. In order to have a fair battle, they would need a whopping twelve Martial Seniors when they only had ten Martial Seniors on standby.

They could not afford to tear away even more Martial Seniors from their current duties. Many of those duties were truly crucial and important, even when compared to the war.

That was why the Kaddar Treaty Organization ceased all war efforts immediately.

They had lost the Kaddar-Ajanta War.

Yet, despite never having officially exited a state of war against the Floating Sect, the entirety of the Kaddar Region and beyond had come to learn about the Kaddar Treaty Organization's defeat in shock.

Not a single person had expected the Kaddar Region to lose.

After all, the biggest reason that the Kaddar Region had never been able to subdue the Floating Sect was that they could not wage war against the sect without potentially destabilizing or breaking the island as collateral damage.

The Kaddar region as a whole, was far larger than Ajanta Island. Although it was true that a large portion of its capabilities could not be applied against the Floating Sect due to its altitude in the sky, it was also true that the Kaddar Region had enough capital and wealth to dwarf the sect astronomically.

That was why almost no one expected the Floating Sect to be able to effectively resist the Kaddar Treaty Organization. The disparity in size was too great for anybody to imagine the sect succeeding in resistance.

That was why when the death of Senior Ferin was announced, everybody was shocked!

The Kaddar Treaty Organization had made a big song and dance about deploying Martial Seniors to fight the Floating Sect because they had been very confident that they would have been able to win.

However, that confidence was closer to arrogance, and the Kaddar Treaty Organization suffered a heavy blow due to their arrogance!

That meant that the Floating Sect was genuinely superior to the Kaddar Treaty Organization, did it not?

After all, the Kaddar Treaty Organization was unable to overcome the sect in any Realm of battle. The war of the Squire Realm was too costly to win, and the Senior Realm was simply one that the Floating Sect was objectively superior at!

What shocked everyone was that the Kaddar Treaty Organization even let go of the no-entry perimeter that they had set around the Floating Sect.

That meant that Martial Squires could enter the Floating Sect as they pleased!

This revelation singlehandedly caused a movement across the Kaddar Region!

Many uncommitted Martial Squires looking to grow stronger had immediately packed the bare minimum of their necessary belongings and set out towards the Floating Sect.

This war had been the greatest publicity stunt for the sect, it served to advertise the sheer might of the Floating Sect, and more importantly, it highlighted the power of the Martial Squires within the sect.

It gave immense confidence to all Martial Squires that the Floating Sect would be able to make them stronger.

The Floating Sect had already been renowned as a location that made Martial Artists, Martial Squires at least, stronger. That was the reason that there was little to no way in which they would not benefit from the Floating Sect in some way or the other.

Even from the land, tiny dots forming streaks heading towards the island could be seen.

This could not be undone.

The Floating Sect had lost many guardians over the past year, a solid chunk of its entire guardian population. Those spots would soon be filled up with eager and powerful Martial Squires not just from the Kaddar Region but also from beyond the Kaddar Region.

After all, Rui had originally learned about the place from Guildmaster Bradt who provided him with information on avenues for Martial Squires to grow stronger. It already had a reputation for being a place where Martial Squires could grow stronger, and now that reputation would be strengthened greatly. Many Martial Squires would come from even further beyond to join it.

This meant that the overall quality of guardians of the Floating Sect would greatly improve.

It meant that the Kaddar Treaty Organization would never ever be able to challenge the Floating Sect in the Squire Realm ever again, and it already was decisively inferior when it came to the Senior Realm.

The Floating Sect even had the audacity to send out parties to encourage more Martial Squires to come, completely unafraid of receiving retribution from the Kaddar Treaty Organization.

A new dawn had begun shining on the Floating Sect.

Yet, the circumstances of the Floating Sect were more dire than anyone had ever expected it to be, given their victory.

Chapter 1156: Coma

"Ugh..." Rui groaned, opening his eyes slowly.

A white ceiling immediately greeted his blurred vision. Other sensations began returning to his body by the second.

Pain.

"Ugh..." He grimaced as he felt it.

It felt as though every cell on his body was on fire. His muscles ached, his bones screamed, and his flesh was burning.

('Note... Never ever do that again.') He sighed.

He had not expected that the backlash would be so overwhelming, he did expect to be crippled momentarily, but a preliminary scan of his body with his senses revealed that his condition was far more dire than he had expected.

He had actually nearly died.

He had already told Kane to carry a high-grade potion with him and to be ready to administer it to Rui at any moment. After all, this was not something that he could afford to play around. Kane had acquired the best healing potion that the sect had to offer, under the authority of the three Martial Seniors.

However, it appeared that not even that potion was enough to overcome the sheer severity of the condition that he had inflicted upon himself.

In exchange, however, he got to wield power that could only be stopped by a full-fledged Martial Senior wielding the power of the Martial Heart. Nothing else could stop him for that half minute.

He was so strong that he could easily fight multiple Martial Seniors without their Martial Heart and even dominate them for that timespan.

He could imagine what the three Martial Seniors that he fought off thought about him. There was no doubt that they thought he was a Martial Senior, and a particularly powerful one at that, on par as a threat with the other three.

('...That was the plan, after all.')

The reason Rui had opted to exploit the element of surprise to kill Senior Ferin and then use the Mind Mask as a way to masquerade as a Martial Senior was to convince them that the Floating Sect had a fourth Martial Senior.

Furthermore, he had stressed the ODA System to the absolute limit to nail Senior Ferin's eyeball with the most powerful tier-five Transverse Resonance attack he could launch.

Not even a Martial Senior could block such an attack with their eyeball.

He had hidden the sonic fluctuations of the activation of the Transverse Resonance technique behind the sonic fluctuations of Senior Xanarn's technique. That was also one reason that literally not a single one of them had seen it coming.

All of it required Rui to time the attack just perfectly to disguise the activation of his technique from afar under the influence of Void Step.

Yet, he had managed to nail it.

The result?

The instantaneous death of a Martial Senior in a dominating fashion that nobody could ever fathom a Martial Squire was capable of made them not even consider that he was a Martial Squire.

It did not even enter their minds as a possibility.

He grinned, he had already estimated a series of potential outcomes based on this. He didn't have enough data to predict the exact result, but none of the possibilities were bad for the Floating Sect.

"Guardians Falken," He heard a nurse addressing him as she approached. "You're awake, that's highly optimistic. How do you feel?"

"Was my condition that bad?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

She smiled. "The possibility of an indefinite coma was on the table. You have been asleep for three days. However, now that you have woken up, there are no more risks. Your recovery will take a bit of time, but you will be fine."

"Sheesh," Rui muttered.

He couldn't help but feel nostalgic all the way back to his days in the Martial Academy. He had been hospitalized a lot before he obtained his Martial Body.

"Please do not push yourself," She insisted. "You need rest, more than anything."

Rui could only imagine how bad his condition was for the nurse to say that.

Using two Metabody techniques at once was now something that he reserved as a forbidden technique.

That made him chuckle.

To think that he would actually have a 'forbidden technique', like this was some kind of action fantasy webnovel.

He shook his head, putting aside such silly thoughts.

"What... happened?" Rui asked her.

If three days had passed, then there was no doubt that a lot had happened. He wanted to know everything immediately.

"I have notified the Senior guardians of your awakening," She replied. "They will brief of you of everything that has come to pass."

Rui raised an eyebrow, nodding. He felt that there was something ominous about that, but shook off the feeling.

Soon enough, Senior Sarak walked into the room with a melancholic smile on his face. "I'm glad you're okay. We were truly afraid that the worst would come to pass."

"I'm tougher than I look," Rui jokingly said as he shrugged.

"Oh, believe me, young man, I know," He said with a serious tone. "I may be a Martial Senior, but I would rather make an enemy of a Martial Master than you."

That was high praise.

"I'm sure you're curious to know what has happened," He sighed.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows.

That was not the attitude of someone who had gotten everything he hoped to achieve.

"What happened?" Rui asked with more severity this time.

The air grew tense as Senior Sarak met Rui's strong stare with melancholic eyes.

"What happened?" Rui repeated himself.

Senior Sarak exhaled deeply. "Xanarn has fallen into an indefinite coma. The doctors have informed me that it is unlikely she will ever wake up."

Rui's eyes widened at the revelation. His fingers quivered as he tried to compose himself. It would not do him any favors to get worked up in his condition.

"What happened?" Rui asked for a third time

"Her actual injuries were not as bad as yours..." He elaborated. "But it's the poison. It has entered her brain and is crippling its ability to stay conscious. She is in a highly delicate state where she could suffer brain death. I'm told it is unlikely that she will wake up."

"I thought the Floating Sect had excellent medical facilities due to how self-dependent it was," Rui gritted his teeth.

"We do... We actually have among the best." He sighed. "But it's not enough. A solution does not exist within the sect, we need to one from the outside."

Chapter 1157: Confused

The air grew solemn.

Rui needed to process what he had heard.

Senior Xanarn was in a coma.

For a brief moment, he almost did not know exactly how he ought to feel.

They hadn't known each other for too very long, nine months at most. They had had on-and-off hookups every once in a while.

He enjoyed her company. She was a quirky person with a surprisingly childish sense of humor for someone of her age and experience. Still, for some reason, he found it endearing.

He looked forward to the times that he spent with her, especially when they had fun together at night.

Their relationship provided him with warm physical intimacy that soothed his soul in a way that was different from anything he had ever experienced in both lifetimes.

Yet when confronted with these circumstances, he almost didn't know how to feel.

It had hurt him when Senior Sarak had told him what had happened.

And yet, there was also a cloud of uncertainty.

It was as though his heart did not know how sad he ought to have felt.

Should he have felt as much grief as if she were just an ordinary friend? Or perhaps a close friend? Or a best friend like Kane? Or... perhaps a lover?

He didn't know.

He didn't like that he didn't know. Yet he didn't know what to do about that. What did people do in such circumstances?

He put the matter aside for a moment as he turned his attention back to Senior Sarak, narrowing his eyes. "A solution from the outside...? Are there any possibilities or recommendations from the medical department?"

"I am told that there are potions and esoteric medical treatments out there that can help, but they are exceedingly difficult to procure," He sighed. "In ordinary circumstances, I would have set out myself in order to acquire them to wake Xanarn up but..."

"You can't go in these circumstances," Rui completed his sentence.

Senior Sarak nodded. "That reminds me, you haven't heard about what has unfolded regarding the kaddar-Ajanta War, have you?"

"Not at all," Rui replied. "The nurse informed me that you would brief me."

"Allow me to explain what has happened in the past three days," Senior Sarak continued. "The battle ended soon after you drove away the three Martial Seniors. The members partaking in other parts of the fight also swiftly retreated when they learned about the death of one of their peers."

Rui nodded, which had fallen well within his predictions.

The reason he had foretold that was because he had already gotten deep insight into the psychology of the Kaddar Treaty Organization.

To it, victory was only the second most desired outcome. The number one most desired outcome was the survival of all their Martial Seniors.

Rui had come to that realization long ago when he carefully analyzed the number of Martial Seniors that the Kaddar Treaty Organization versus the amount of time it took for them to finally grow a spine and deploy Martial Seniors

That was also why they sent three or even four Martial Seniors for every Senior guardian to fight the Floating Sect. They did not want to lose a national treasure. None of the individual nations wanted to be the one to bear that cost.

After all, even if the Kaddar Treaty Organization won at the cost of a Martial Senior, it would mean that the nation that lost the Martial Senior essentially sacrificed a national treasure for the sake of all other nations in the Kaddar Region.

No nation was willing to make that trade, obviously.

That was why when the Kaddar Martial Seniors learned of the death of their peer, they didn't spend too much time on the island. They had probably received strict instructions on what to do if one of their peers died, and one of those steps involved retreating immediately.

After all, if they lost a Martial Senior despite their numerical superiority, what's to stop them from losing another now that they are numerically weaker and even more vulnerable?

That was the thought process that occupied the minds of the nations that deployed the Martial Seniors.

One of the reasons they stayed for a bit against Rui was because they were on the very edge of having killed Senior Xanarn and they didn't want to squander that opportunity.

"I'm guessing Senior Leonil was gravely injured but Ieyasu managed to intervene and the two of them were able to survive till the very end," Rui continued.

Senior Sarak nodded. "That is exactly what happened. Once the battle ended, Leonil and I mostly focused on the sect, hoping to make more in-depth preparations for the next wave of Martial Seniors, but something happened that made that plan irrelevant."

"The Kaddar Treaty Organization must have withdrawn from the war, if we're especially lucky they might even recognize the Floating Sect's claim over Ajanta Island as legitimate, although that is unlikely," Rui speculated.

An expression of surprise flashed across Senior Sarak's face. "You already know... So you mean to say you truly meant what you said back then?"

"Hm?"

"You know, when you said you would win the Floating Sect the war," Senior Sarak explained, his expression growing more incredulous. "Did you... Did you predict that this would happen?"

Rui smiled. "Maybe, maybe not. It doesn't matter at the end of the day. What else happened?"

The man stared at Rui for a few seconds, before sighing. "The Kaddar Treaty Organization did not officially announce the end of the war, however, they withdrew the prohibition of entry into Ajanta Island. Furthermore, based on our sources, the Martial Seniors we fought that had been on standby for the next assault have been dismissed and deployed elsewhere by their respective nations."

Rui nodded. "They don't want to publically admit that they lost to us. I imagine that in the past forty-eight hours, a huge influx of Martial Squires has greeted the Floating Sect."

"Indeed," Senior Sarak nodded with an elated smile. "It has been wonderful to see waves of enthusiastic Martial Squires join our sect."

Chapter 1158: Choice

Rui could tell that Senior Sarak truly loved the Floating Sect. He had given the Floating Sect his heart and soul and possessed a genuine passion for the organization that he led.

He could also tell that this was distinct from Senior Xanarn's drive surrounding the Floating Sect. She protected the Floating Sect because she had committed herself to protecting the sect as a guardian.

Her drive to protect the Floating Sect was not as driven by sheer love for the sect as it was driven by the standard of protecting what she had vowed to protect, no matter what.

Rui listened to the man go on and on about how new eager and enthusiastic Martial Squires had finally entered the Floating Sect impressed by the sheer Martial might that the sect had displayed in the long war against the Kaddar Treaty Organization.

He could tell that just watching the newly inducted guardians occupy their chambers and begin training was something that he man lived to see every day.

"The future of the sect is bright... Or it would have been had Senior Xanarn has been around to see it," The man sighed. "Regardless, this wouldn't have been possible without you."

"Hm?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"I am not a fool, young man." Senior Sarak gave him a knowing smile. "The act of killing a Martial Senior, that Senior-level aura that you displayed, pushing back the three Martial Seniors that you had been fighting. All of that led them to believe that the Floating Sect had gained an additional Martial Senior. I'm sure that played a role in our victory in this war. The Floating Sect owes you an unpayable debt."

Rui shook his head. "I was just doing my duty as a guardian of the Sect."

The man smiled. "We are blessed to have a Martial Squire like yourself. Although you certainly have a long road ahead of you due to how young you are, I am certain that you will become a Martial Seniors one day. I look forward to that day, your training here will surely aid you in the process."

Rui did not believe that he was as far away from the Senior Realm as Senior Sarak projected, but he put that detail aside for now.

"About my training here..." Rui began. "I intend to leave the sect."

This alarmed Senior Sarak visibly.

In his eyes, Rui had become an asset that was on par with the likes of Tokugawa Ieyasu. Rui was not someone that he could let go if he had any sense in him.

He considered his words carefully for a moment.

"...Is there anything that is not to your liking?" The man asked with care. "We are willing to go out of our way to accommodate your inclinations."

"It's not that," Rui shook his head. "I appreciate the Floating Sect, I truly do. However, I cannot take the steps that I need to take in order to become stronger, here. The Floating Sect can help me fulfill one of the conditions of the breakthrough to the Senior Realm, yes, but it is not enough. Furthermore, I have already spent close to a year here and have already experienced a lot of growth, enough to get me close to the threshold of fulfilling one condition. The more time I spend here, the lesser the growth of the fortitude of my body. Rather than simply sitting idly here. I can grow stronger by growing the individuality of my Martial Art in a manner that extracts all of the potential of my Martial Body so that I may one day discover my Martial Heart."

The man stared at Rui, before slowly nodding. "You have a good understanding of what it takes to become a Martial Senior. Very well then, I bid you good luck and farewell. Of course, given that your wounds have yet to heal, you'll most certainly be spending time here until you have been restored to your peak. After that, please do as you wish."

Rui nodded. "However, that isn't the only reason I wish to leave."

"Hm?" The man raised an eyebrow. "What else is there?"

"Senior Xanarn..." Rui hesitated a bit, before steeling his expression. "I will find a way to heal her. If there is a solution out there, then I will find it, and I will heal her."

The man's eyes widened. "You... care for her that much?"

Rui remained silent. "That is what I wish to know."

Senior Sarak did not understand what that meant. Regardless, he did not dare deny Rui's help. Even if Rui was a young Squire, he knew that he was capable of fulfilling his word.

In the very brief time that he had known Rui personally, the man had proven himself to be beyond anything he had ever expected.

The man possessed a sharp intellect and a depth of insight that Senior Sarak frankly found intimidating, furthermore, and the tender age of twenty-three, he had already reached the upper echelons of the Squire Realm.

Furthermore, he killed a Martial Senior and then pushed back three Martial Seniors so hard that they thought that he was a Martial Senior himself.

Senior Sarak was fifty-two, and yet, he had never seen anything quite like Rui in the thirty-five years that he had been a Martial Artist.

As far as raw untapped potential went, Senior Sarak suspected that not even Ieyasu was his match, although he knew that Ieyasu was stronger.

('To think that our sect would be blessed with two generational talents with monstrous potential...')

"Then in you, we'll place our trust," Senior Sarak replied. "The Floating Sect needs time to heal before we can restart our external operations. Many guardians have perished, and our foundation has become riddled with holes. If you are willing to undertake this burden, then we will entrust you with it. You have proven yourself to be worthy of our trust and faith. Know that you'll always have a home in the Floating Sect."

Chapter 1159: Split

Senior Sarak did not trouble Rui for much longer, leaving to allow Rui to get the rest that he needed and deserved.

Rui on the other hand, had plenty of time to think about what he needed and wanted to.

He thought about his current circumstances.

('Complicated...') He sighed.

He had not forgotten his original predicament that set him on the path in the journey to the west. He needed to become strong enough to eliminate the threats to his family and himself. In order to do that, he needed to at least reach the Senior Realm at a bare minimum. Otherwise, he could forget trying to kill Chairman Deacon.

That was why reaching the Senior Realm well within the time limit of ten years was his sub-goal.

That was why he traveled to places like the Umiana Trench, Thundering Valley, Crexeet Town, and the Floating Sect. These places all made him stronger in some fashion or the other.

However, for the first time since then, he would be traveling for a reason other than Project Water, and gaining more power.

He sighed deeply as thought about Senior Xanarn. He didn't know how much to feel what he was feeling.

He didn't even know how far he was willing to go.

('I guess we'll find out.')

He disliked the strange lack of clarity he felt in his heart when it came to matters surrounding her. It was unlike anything he had ever experienced in his life.

He hated uncertainty, especially when it came to his own self. The comfort of clarity was something that he had grown used to across two lives. Now he was confronted with emotions that he did not know what to make of.

It became the third reason for his journey.

A journey for ambition.

A journey for power.

And now, a journey for self-discovery.

('I wonder if-')

"Rui!"

His thoughts were interrupted.

"Kane," Rui smiled.

"Oh my god, I'm so goddamn happy you woke up!" Kane exclaimed with genuine relief appearing on his face.

"Was my condition that bad?" Rui smiled wryly.

"Bad? BAD? It was HORRIFIC. Your SKIN was falling apart! Don't you EVER do that again!"

Rui sat in place as Kane chewed him out for another five minutes.

"Ok ok..." Rui gestured for him to stop with his hands. "I get it. But the only reason I did that was because I had faith in you."

"Well don't. That shit is too heavy for me," Kane snorted, earning an amused laugh from Rui in response to his candor.

"Huff..." Kane sighed as he calmed down, regaining his composure. "Well, I'm glad we can get back to normal. The war ended so we don't need to be on edge anymore."

"About that..." Rui began.

"Hm?" Kane knitted his eyebrows, staring at Rui with sharp eyes.

Having spent much time with Rui, he had come to recognize Rui's penchant for chaos and trouble.

"I'm planning to leave the Floating Sect," Rui told him.

"What?" Kane frowned. "Why?"

Kane didn't understand.

Rui had told him how Ajanta Island could accelerate the speed at which they fulfilled one of the conditions to break through to the Senior Realm. He had told him how he intended to remain in the sect for as long as was needed to fulfill that condition.

Had he fulfilled that condition?

"The new technique that I am working on requires resources that cannot be found in the Floating Sect."

"...I see," Kane sighed. "It's a shame, but we'll have to leave then."

At that moment, those words gave Rui an insight.

"This time, I believe it is best if I go alone," Rui explained. "I do intend to return to the Floating Sect when I have found what I am looking for. Frankly, you'll simply be wasting time accompanying me. It is better if you grow stronger here on the sect."

Rui glanced at the knife hung in a scabbard by his belt. "After all, I believe you have experienced some epiphanies."

Kane looked uncomfortable as Rui noticed what he had been meaning to talk to him about.

"You don't disapprove?" Kane put his hand on the hilt of the knife. "I thought you would remind me of my decision to never wield one ever again and tell me to throw it away."

Kane looked uncertain.

At that moment, Rui felt a deep sense of regret hearing those words.

('We are not peers. I am old enough to be his grandfather,')

It did not help that Rui was deeply insightful. It warped their relationship and the influence that Rui had on Kane was great.

At that moment, Rui realized that Kane had become psychologically dependent on him.

"Kane," Rui narrowed his eyes as he spoke with a solemn tone. "Your Martial Path is yours, and yours only. No one, not even the mightiest of Martial Transcendents can tell you where it leads. What you do

with your Martial Art, and where you take it, are matters that are yours to decide, nobody else's. Listen to your heart, that is the only way we can awaken our Hearts."

Kane nodded slowly.

"You don't have to make a decision immediately," Rui told him. "You could, but you don't have to. Just make sure that whatever choice you make when you do make it, is your choice, and nobody else's."

Kane nodded wordlessly again.

"I think it's best if you take this opportunity to remain in the Floating Sect working on your Martial Art rather than follow me around as I work on my Martial Art," Rui informed him. "It's just a temporary split. We can come back stronger."

"Alright," Kane nodded slowly as his eyes wandered around giving what Rui said some deep thought. "So we're going to be splitting up for a while. How long will you take?"

He looked at Rui with anticipation.

"Hard to say," Rui replied with a non-committal tone. "It could be as little as half a year to more than a year. I really cannot make precise estimates."

Chapter 1160: Recover

The issue was that he didn't quite know how long this would take. The goal was too open-ended.

At least when he left the Shionel Confederation, he had a very clear idea of what his timeframe was and the difficulty of the task. Ever since he met Senior Xanarn, he also knew the conditions it took to break through to the Senior Realm, which made him more able to plot out the difficulties in overcoming the hurdles before him.

But when it came to finding a solution to her conditions, that was something he could not estimate the timeframe for. He couldn't even establish any meaningful conditions for him to satisfy.

"That's quite some time..." Kane replied.

"It's not all that much," Rui shook his head. "It'll pass before you know it. Especially when you have all your work cut in front of you.

Rui referred to all of the introspection and experimentation that Kane needed to do before he incorporated daggers into his Martial Art. There was no strict reason to not do it, but generally, people were careful about adding weapons to their Martial Art unless they were absolutely certain that their Martial Paths were relevant enough to it to do so.

The reason for this was varied. It was not easy to create weapons for Martial Artists of higher Realms and grades due to the requirement of materials whose tensile strengths and properties were well above the limits of their Realm.

However, that was not the only reason.

Weapons were too committal. Even the smallest of weapons impacted Martial Art across the board. The presence of weapons changed how one would engage in all aspects of combat too much.

That was why Rui had not yet added a weapon to his Martial Art. If he got a sword, then he could not be anything other than a swordsman. Trying to be a wrestler or a striker while carrying a sword was the dumbest decision anyone could make.

However, in Kane's case, he could see that this decision made sense. Kane was an evasive maneuverer that focused on evading his opponent's attacks and attacking the openings in their movements created by attacks. Given that he focused so many bodily resources on evasion, it was best to use an external element to amplify his offense.

A simple dagger or two made him more lethal as long as he was willing to sacrifice more conventional offense like striking.

This was also an acceptable trade-off as Kane actually hated working on his offense more than anything. Rui couldn't help but recall how much of a fuss he made in the Umiana Trench because it was centered around offense.

If Kane did come to adopt daggers, Rui was sure that he would be able to execute it just fine. It would make him a much more dangerous Martial Artist.

The only thing he would need to be wary of was the fact that individuality surrounding his offense was going to be difficult to come up with.

The two of them spent some more time chatting with each other before Kane left Rui to rest.

Rui spent a few more days in the clinic recovering bit by bit as he brought his body back to peak health. It took some time to make for the cell death and the lost mass in his body that truly ended up putting it on the verge of death.

Such a thing could not be healed easily, even for the Martial Body. Had an ordinary human suffered such a degree of harm and damage without dying, they would have never ever recovered naturally through ordinary treatment. Yet Rui's Martial Body healed itself in less than a week even with its crippled healing. Martial Bodies were foundationally superior in every regard.

Soon after Rui made a full recovery, he actually spent several days simply breaking into his recovered body, ensuring that his physical parameters had not been affected by the horrible condition that he had afflicted himself with.

Thankfully, his recovery was fine. His muscle and bone strength had not declined in any way, and while his body did feel a little stiff compared to normal, his flexibility had not suffered either.

His stamina had returned back to its base degree soon enough as well. His body had regained all the mass it had lost and replenished all the cells that had died, he finally looked the way he was before.

"Huff..." Rui sighed lightly after completing an intensive workout exercising his body. ('Everything is optimal. It's time to leave.')

He had already gathered some light portable belongings and bare basic necessities similar to what he would carry on a long-term mission.

Among the many things he did while he was preparing to leave was visit Senior Xanarn. He had needed special permission from Senior Sarak to be able to visit her just once. She had been placed in a quarantined ICU and Rui needed to undergo a round of sanitization to visit her.

He didn't like what he saw.

Her skin was sickly black, many shades darker than her bronze skin. It was not a human skin tone, closer to the color of tar, a color that no human ever ought to be.

He could smell the poison inside her skin.

Countless syringes connected to tubes plagued her body, it was hard for Rui to even look at them without wincing.

He walked closer to her.

Her breathing was controlled mechanically. So much so that Rui was relatively certain that she would die on the spot if not for the machines that looked nothing short of vital life support.

He exhaled as he held her hand, playing with it. As if that would clarify the tumultuous storm of emotions that he felt about her.

It wasn't long before he left, heading straight towards his chamber to gather all his belongings and step off the island, heading out to find solutions to the many problems that plagued him.