

Martial Unity 1301

Chapter 1301: Protagonists

The air on Ajanta Island grew heavy.

Heavier than it already was.

A strange sense of turmoil put everybody on edge.

The reason for it had been obvious.

Everybody had heard tales of the Martial Squire who killed a Martial Senior. Everybody had heard tales of the Martial Squire said to be chosen alongside the strongest and second-strongest guardians to fight off the Martial Seniors of the Kaddar Region. Everybody had heard tales of the Martial Squire that defeated Senior Xanarn alongside the second-ranked guardian.

Yet no one had seen him in more than a year.

Many of the new guardians that had emerged from the new influx of Martial Squires to the Floating Sect had never seen him. They did not know what weight these rumors held. It was easy to dismiss them as exaggerations.

A Martial Squire killing a Martial Senior? What kind of nonsense was that?

What really shocked many guardians was when Nake, the second strongest guardian swore on his life that this mysterious Martial Squire was stronger than him, and not by a small margin.

Such was the legend of Squire Falken in the Floating Sect.

And now, that legend had returned.

All of the guardians listened in rapt attention as guardian Rel-Ivon gushed about her meeting with the famed Martial Squire.

"I'm serious! Senior Sarak himself came all the way to greet Squire Falken!" She insisted.

The other guardians narrowed their eyes. "...A Martial Senior personally traveled to greet a Martial Squire?"

"Not only that..." Squire Rel-Ivon continued with an excited expression. "I have only seen Senior Sarak that respectful with Guardian Ieyasu."

She paused for a moment, as she gathered her words. "I can see why too...They look nothing alike, but they did have one thing in common."

She clenched her fists. "...An unfathomable depth of power. One that could easily be mistaken for a higher Realm if one was not careful."

Her words were grave.

Their severity could not be denied.

The guardians stiffened at those words. They wanted to refute them, however, she was, unfortunately, a credible source as a high-grade Martial Squire. Her words could not be dismissed easily. All of the guardians wondered what was going to happen now that this famed figure had returned to the Floating Sect.

Coincidentally, it had been announced that Senior Xanarn had finally exited her year-long isolated deep training session, making her first public appearance in a year. Many couldn't help but wonder whether the timing was not a coincidence. Many were convinced it was not.

It became evident that Squire Falken was so important that even Senior Xanarn exited her isolated training session to greet the Martial Squire.

The very next day, a shocking bracket on the scheduled fights had been revealed.

[Guardian Tokugawa Ieyasu versus Challenger Falken]

The entire sect stirred in the wake of this fight.

Many had suspected this would happen, eventually.

No one had expected that this would happen less than twenty-four hours after Squire Falken's return to the Floating Sect.

For the first time in the history of the Floating Sect, all one thousand guardians gathered together in the colosseum.

For the first time in the history of the sect, all three Martial Seniors also stood in witness.

For the first time in its history, a duel would be arbitrated by Senior Sarak himself, and not a standard arbiter.

Even the most braindead fool could tell that what was to ensue was nothing short of historic.

That was when the air shifted.

Every guardian froze.

Squire Rel-Ivon glanced down at her arm.

Her hair stood on edge.

Her skin tingled.

"Guardian Ieyasu..." Senior Sarak did his best to contain the excitement in his voice when he announced the man in.

STEP

STEP

STEP

The guardians watched as he entered the colosseum with widened eyes.

They had seen him many times.

And yet, it was as though they were seeing him for the first time.

Energy brimmed where they were accustomed to seeing bored lethargy.

Sharpened intensity where there was dull emptiness.

A blade honed to its very edge.

Honed for this very day.

For this battle.

This moment.

He would not be denied.

Instinctively, they knew that if anybody dared to stand in his way, it would be the last mistake they made.

"Challenger Falken..." Senior Sarak was unable to reign in his anticipation.

STEP

STEP

STEP

The guardians watched with shock as a profoundly sharp sense of peril washed over them.

At that moment, a profound realization dawned on everybody.

The rumors did not exaggerate.

No.

They understated.

Every movement he made.

Every inch of his body.

The intensity of his eyes.

They conveyed an otherworldly depth.

It was as though a deity in human form had graced them with his presence.

As the two powerful Martial Squires arrived before each other, their presence overlapped. A weight that had long broken through the shackles of the Squire Realm emanated from the center of the colosseum.

At that moment, everyone felt insignificant.

They were spectators... but not just of the duel.

But of their lives. The lives of two protagonists. Protagonists of the world. Everybody else was a spectator.

They were envious of the two of them.

And yet...

The two of them didn't care.

Their eyes were fixed on each other.

The world may have ceased to exist at that moment, and neither would notice. Not even such a calamity was worthy of their attention at that moment.

Ieyasu recognized the newborn sharpness in Rui's eyes.

It was the same sharpness he saw in his own when he looked in the mirror.

"You have arrived." A whisper escaped his mouth.

Only Rui understood that he wasn't referring to the match.

He was referring to the cusp of a higher Realm of power. Just the tiniest step away from the Martial Heart.

All it took was one step.

Yet that one step was greater than the sum of all others that came before it.

A greater hurdle.

"Maddening, isn't it?" Ieyasu's soft voice quivered, uncharacteristic of him. "To be so close, and yet so far from a higher Realm."

"...More than I imagined." Rui's voice betrayed the intensity of his anguish.

"Then, you understand." Ieyasu's voice grew severe. "If your death is the price to pay... then it is a price that I will gladly extract from you."

Chapter 1302: Discovery

Rui simply stared at him with sharp eyes.

He did understand. To a certain extent, he felt the same way.

He was not going to hold back.

He couldn't. Not if he wanted to break through to a higher Realm of power.

The Martial Heart was a power that could only be accessed if he was pushed beyond the limit of what his conventional power could accomplish. This meant that holding back was antithetical to the very nature of the activation of the Martial Heart.

That was why not only was Rui not going to hold back physically, but he had already psychologically conditioned himself to not hold back mentally even in the slightest.

That meant no mercy.

No compassion.

No empathy.

If his opponent's death was a consequence of that, then he wouldn't feel any guilt over it either.

Rui had always maintained the philosophy that if one knowingly chose to partake in something where their life was at stake, as a Martial Artist, which was an occupation where lives were always at stake, and was willing to undertake those risks voluntarily after fully understanding them, then they had consented to the possibility of having their lives taken.

Not only did Tokugawa Ieyasu consent to this, but he had been the one to initiate it when he originally challenged Rui. Even though Rui was challenging him now since he wasn't a guardian and was a challenger all over again, they both knew that Rui had not made the first move.

Neither of them had even the slightest compunctions of taking each other's lives as a consequence of pursuing their Martial Heart.

Rui even had a plan as to how he was going to do it. It was quite simple.

Form a predictive model as soon as possible.

Win.

That was all.

"Take your stances." Senior Sarak instructed.

Both Rui and Tokugawa took simple neutral stances.

Their weight was well-balanced, catering to offense, defense, and maneuvering simultaneously.

It should have been the most ordinary of sights.

A trivial occurrence.

And yet every single guardian watching could only stiffen.

An absurd amount of invulnerable peril could be felt from them.

A stone in the hands of a master was said to be more dangerous than a sword in the hands of a novice

The simplest of stances used even by non-Martial Artists were nothing short of armed fortresses in the hands of those who had mastered them to the limit and beyond.

Their minds honed even further as they focused on each other.

Everything else ceased to exist.

They themselves ceased to exist.

They existed only in the reflections of each other's eyes.

A single word escaped Senior Sarak's mouth.

"...Begin!"

The guardians widened their eyes.

One moment they were there.

And then they weren't.

They blurred in the eyes of the guardians, flashing forward toward each other with incredible agility.

BOOM!!

The first clash of the battle had been levied.

A ripple of shock washed over the spectators.

A ripple of power spread through the land and sky.

RUMBLE

Merely a single strike had been exchanged, yet the floating island seemed to groan under the weight of their power.

Yet the battle continued.

It had to.

POW POW POW!

Tokugawa took the initiative as three incredibly powerful and swift attacks clashed against Rui's guard. A powerful and swift fist flew forward, threatening to crash into Rui's abdomen.

WHOOSH!

Rui ducked, cleanly avoiding the attack as he threw a low sweeping kick at the man's legs

Yet Ieyasu was unfaltered.

He leaped forward, narrowly avoiding the sweeping kick as he simultaneously launched a flying knee kick to the crouching Rui.

WHOOSH!

Rui leaped back in a summersault, sharply avoiding the flying knee kick while launching a kick with the upward motion of his legs. A swift kick to the chin could threaten a knockout, yet Ieyasu surgically avoided it as he leaped back.

STEP

They both paused for a moment, landing several meters from each other.

Several thoughts furiously flashed through their mind.

They had a basic understanding of the other's Martial Art. Rui was aware that Ieyasu copied Martial Art by acquiring a deep amount of information on their opponent and reconstructing a superior one from the same building blocks. Ieyasu was aware that Rui constructed the most optimal counter to a Martial Art after deeply analyzing his opponent.

That was the extent of their knowledge.

Yet that was enough.

Neither of them knew how their Martial Art would interact with the other. Both Martial Art was quite esoteric and deviant from the norm, it wasn't entirely obvious what would happen when they clashed.

A number of possibilities flashed through both their minds. Regardless, there was one thing that was clear.

The faster one would win.

Unbeknownst to everyone else, a race had begun.

Whoever won the race would gain an undeniable advantage in the fight. If Ieyasu managed to copy Rui before Rui managed to adapt to him, then there would be a brief window where he would be dominant over Rui. If Rui adapted faster than he copied, then he would undoubtedly gain an edge in the battle himself.

It was a logical conclusion.

Yet something was off.

Rui couldn't quite put his finger on it. For some reason, his pattern recognition was being delayed. He had hoped to make some progress from the initial exchanges, but he had been unable to.

It could have been merely bad luck.

Yet his instincts warned him that something was off.

Both sides leaped into action, determined to be the winners. Rui's mind honed itself as he intensified his search for patterns. The quicker he found them, the sooner the predictive model, the likelier his victory.

He rushed forward as he launched a Flowing Canon with the full power of his gathered momentum.

A titanic blow surged forward toward Ieyasu, threatening to crush him.

And yet;

WHOOSH!

He crouched, narrowly avoiding the attack, before launching a powerful double-fist upward blow.

A maneuver he hadn't used yet.

Rui's unease escalated.

Rui narrowed his eyes, searching for patterns as he used Flux Earther to negate the blow before launching a swift high kick to the man's jaw.

A blow that threatened to knock him.

WHOOSH!

Ieyasu spun, avoiding the kick narrowly as an immensely powerful roundhouse kick flew at Rui.

BAM!

The attack crashed into Rui, yet he was unmoved. Flux Earther had negated the impact.

An immensely swift kick retaliated flying straight towards Ieyasu.

The most optimal choice was to dodge.

Yet...

BAM!

The attack crashed into his guard, flinging him away roughly.

A sub-optimal choice.

An edge had been conceded. It should have been a joyous gift to Rui. Yet anyone who looked at Rui's eyes could see his confusion.

A realization had dawned on him.

He frowned, staring at Ieyasu with open confusion.

Horror even.

'You... don't have any patterns?' Rui stared at him in shock.

Chapter 1303: Devoid

Every move he made was brand-new, and divergent from every move he made before.

There were no patterns.

He had no inclinations.

No preferences.

No inclinations.

No biases.

He was a blank slate.

This was what his instincts had warned him about. Yet it was only after he began going all out with the pattern recognition system that he realized what was wrong.

The man's combat style was devoid of patterns.

Rui didn't understand.

The patterns in a person's movements were part of who they were. It was the essence of one's being manifested in combat.

They were inevitable. The sources of one's strengths and weaknesses.

He gazed into Ieyasu's eyes.

They were hollow.

Empty.

Two endless abysses of nothingness.

'No...' Rui's eyes narrowed.

That wasn't quite right.

He saw himself. Reflected in the man's pitch-black eyes.

WHOOSH!

Rui's attention was pulled back into the battle as Ieyasu surged forward with renewed momentum.

What followed was even more surprising.

His fist flew forward as he employed Flowing Canon, empowered with the full might of Outer Convergence, Wind Breathing, and Thundering Lance.

Every shift.

Every twitch.

Its timing and placement.

Even his expressions, demeanor, and breathing.

They were identical to the original.

Rui's eyes widened in shock as he witnessed a mirror image of his most powerful close-range attack.

He knew that this would happen.

It was inevitable.

Yet actually experiencing it was something different.

His reaction was momentarily delayed.

BOOM!!

Rui grimaced as the powerful attack crashed into a hastily conjured guard, flinging him away.

He narrowed his eyes, quickly honing his mind.

Yet Ieyasu was not done.

The man activated Wind Breathing and Parallel Walk as he surged forward toward Rui with remarkable velocity.

POW POW POW!

He hammered Rui with Vital Pressure, looking to optimize the damage that he inflicted on Rui.

Rui managed to guard against the attacks with Flux Earther, yet the biggest blow he suffered was psychological.

It was unnerving.

One could easily mistake Ieyasu for Rui if one was not paying attention to the battle. That was the degree of resemblance that Ieyasu had managed to generate. Rui's expression grew severe as he lashed out forward, throwing a powerful Flowing Canon kick to the man's head.

A knockout blow.

And yet...

WHOOSH

It crashed into an empty image.

A feint.

Phantom Step.

BAM!

Rui barely managed to block a powerful side kick, negating the impact with Flux Earther.

The guardians gaped in amazement as the battle evolved.

It was no longer Ieyasu versus Rui.

It was Rui versus Rui.

If Rui had maintained his original hair and eyes, then it would have been impossible for them to tell which one was which. The battle evolved into something else entirely as the two forces furiously clashed at each other.

BAM BAM BAM!

Ieyasu blocked a furious combo of attacks with a solid guard, negating their impact with Flux Earther.

The very sight of that gripped Rui's heart, squeezing at it.

His expression grew severe as he grew determined to ascertain the limits of Ieyasu's copying. His index fingers pointed out as he launched several Lightning Taps.

This was a technique that Rui had developed with the presence of a special esoteric substance that could generate electric currents.

It was not something that could not be copied with movements.

Or so he thought.

Yet Ieyasu impassively replicated the motions.

TAP TAP TAP!

Rui froze as several momentary spikes of paralysis flashed through his body.

'How...?' Rui stared at him with shock.

He didn't understand how the man had managed to replicate a technique that made use of substances that he didn't even have. There was absolutely no chance that the man had the necessary esoterics, yet he had managed to fully replicate even Lightning Tap.

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui felt like he was standing in front of a mirror.

The two of them moved in unison.

They maneuvered in unison.

They struck in unison.

They defended in unison.

Almost everything was identical.

Almost.

Two Flowing Canons crashed into each other.

BOOM!!

Rui grimaced as he leaped back with a reeling fist.

His expression grew severe.

A realization had dawned on not just him, but everyone.

Ieyasu surged forward throwing a powerful set of combos. Rui pushed his body to the limit as he retaliated.

BAM BAM BAM!

The one difference between them became evident.

Ieyasu was stronger.

They appeared to be equals, yet he appeared to grow stronger as he copied Rui.

No one understood why, but it didn't particularly matter.

"Rgh!" Rui leaped back again, opening up the distance between them.

Yet Ieyasu did not intend to give him a break. He immediately surged forward, appearing before Rui.

Yet another powerful Flowing Canon crashed into Rui.

WHOOSH!

The attack launched Rui flying far away. Farther than anyone thought possible.

Yet Ieyasu's eyes narrowed as Rui grinned.

He had used a partial Flux Earther to use Ieyasu's momentum to launch himself away, opening a massive amount of distance between them. Ieyasu rushed forward, hoping to get him in time.

But it was too late.

The very skies quivered as Rui inhaled deeply, preparing his most powerful attack.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

The Pathfinder technique kicked into action as Rui launched his most powerful attack. A Tier five Transverse Resonance rushed forward Ieyasu under the guidance of the ODA System.

Yet Rui's eyes widened as Ieyasu replicated every movement side by side, launching his own Transverse Resonance.

The two attacks met midway between Rui and Ieyasu.

BOOM!!!

A titanic explosion with immense power washed over the entire colosseum, shaking the entire structure.

Not even Rui's most powerful attack was safe from Ieyasu's Martial Art.

And yet, an expression of peace and calmness appeared on Rui's face.

"I see... I understand now." Rui spoke to him as his eyes narrowed.

'You... can read my mind, can't you?' Rui stared directly at Ieyasu.

Ieyasu froze, before the smallest of smirks appeared on his face.

"You are the first Martial Artist to have ever realized that..." His voice plummeted to a whisper audible only to his opponent. "...Rui Quarrier."

Chapter 1304: If you can

Rui narrowed his eyes as he heard the man respond to his thought while revealing his name.

It was a shocking conclusion.

One no one could have possibly ever realized.

One surely no one would ever come to know. There were many who had tried, yet they had all failed to grasp the true core of his Martial Art.

Ieyasu had intended for it to remain that way.

Yet, seeing Rui easily discover his greatest secret made him feel trivial. The arrogance that had long developed within him, centered around this secret, began unraveling.

He had run into the one Martial Artist who was capable of learning the truth with just the sheer brilliance of his mind.

Rui stared at him impassively.

The ODA System was a technique that was largely mental. It was not something that could be replicated simultaneously with Rui's first use of it in the battle just by copying his mind.

If he simply copied Transverse Resonance, he would not have been able to aim, simultaneously with Rui, at his attack and cancel it out.

That meant that he had to have access to Rui's aim, which existed within his head. He need only reverse the aim since he was on the other end of it. That inevitably meant that he was a Martial Artist who could read minds. That was most likely the source through which he copied people's movements so well.

"Yet just because you know the truth, doesn't mean you can do anything about it." Ieyasu whispered as he rushed forward with greater speed and power than before. "You are not my equal."

The air grew taut with peril as he drew closer.

Rui closed his eyes.

An opponent with a physicality that seemed to grow stronger the more he copied his opponent, which he did through mind reading.

Rui now fully understood why he was so invincible. Trying to defeat him was almost impossible for those within the same Realm as him.

Almost.

Ieyasu rushed forward, launching a powerful Flowing Canon straight at Rui's head.

A knockout blow.

BOOM!!!

Rui grimaced as he barely managed to block it in time. Yet not even the combination of Flux Earther, Inner Divergence, and Adamant Reforging was enough to dispel the impact of Rui's attack.

The attack launched him far away, crashing across the battle arena.

Yet Ieyasu ruthlessly rushed forward, racing to finish Rui off.

BAM BAM BAM!

He pounded Rui with a barrage of powerful blows.

Each attack rattled Rui harder than the previous one.

Each motion he made was quicker than the previous one.

Ieyasu grew more and more comfortable in the visage of Rui.

Becoming Rui.

One could stare at him, and yet, one merely saw Rui.

A stronger Rui.

A faster Rui.

A superior Rui.

The atmosphere of the battle shifted.

Everybody watched with grave expressions.

They clenched their fists.

Many of them had been beaten down by Ieyasu in a similar manner. He had become an unending source of trauma to most of them. Some had even become crippled as Martial Artists after facing him.

They had held a faint hope.

That maybe...

Just maybe... the mighty Squire Falken would be able to overcome him.

Yet it appeared reality was to crush their hopes once more.

The outcome seemed to become clearer with every maneuver.

The air grew chillier.

Darker.

They could feel it in their bones.

The end was nigh.

'Rui...' Tears started to fill Kane's eyes.

THUD

Rui fell down to one knee.

A powerful kick flew towards him, threatening to knock him out.

It was game over.

And yet.

WHOOSH!

Not a single person could contain their shock as Ieyasu found himself kicking empty air.

Rui had disappeared.

BOOM!!!

A mighty impact shook the colosseum, crashing into Ieyasu's back as it flung him away. Every single witness froze in shock as the sight of Rui flinging Ieyasu away shattered every expectation of what was to unfold.

His eyes drew all others'. They were gravitic. Not a single person was able to look away.

They were silver.

And yet...

They were not.

A limitless void emerged from deep within them.

He stared at Ieyasu, opening his mouth.

Three words escaped them.

"Not your equal...?" He started walking forward. 'You... are not capable of reflecting me.'

Ieyasu narrowed his eyes at that declaration.

He didn't bother retorting.

He didn't understand what had just happened.

Yet he didn't have time to understand.

Rui had already arrived.

BOOM!

He evaded a powerful high kick from Rui as he stared into the man's eyes, peering into his mind.

Deeper.

Further.

He stressed his Mind Eye technique to the absolute limit as he pushed himself to read Rui's mind to the absolute limit.

His eyes widened as he came across a palace.

A titanic palace spanned many kilometers in radius, encompassing many things.

It included places from all over Gaia.

As well as other strange places.

Alien places.

Places from another world.

'You...' His eyes widened as a shocking realization dawned on to him.

All kinds of images, sounds, smells, numbers, and other strange symbols were stored across the strange structure. They surged towards the center of the palace, converging in a single place.

At the center of the palace sat Rui, meditating. A vortex of more information than Ieyasu could ever imagine surged into the figure that consumed all of it voraciously.

Like a void.

He opened his eyes, staring at Ieyasu.

"Read all of this if you can."

BAM!

An attack in the real world crashed into him, flinging him away. As Rui surged forward, throwing a barrage of powerful attacks.

BAM BAM BAM!

Ieyasu's expression grew grave as he defended himself with Flux Earther. His eyes narrowed as he threw a swift kick, hoping to knock Rui out in an instant.

And yet...

WHOOSH!

BAM BAM BAM!

The two of them clashed identically.

A beautiful symmetry unfolded.

Every soul witnessing the battle wished from the bottom of their hearts that the battle would continue forever.

Endlessly, for all of eternity.

And yet...

The balance shifted quicker than anybody could have ever imagined.

SPLAT!

Chapter 1305: Kill Myself

Rui had never encountered a battle where nearly the entirety of the VOID algorithm was countered by something so antithetical to it.

The pattern recognition system was countered by a lack of patterns.

The Metabody system was kept at bay for fear of being copied and improved.

The two most powerful elements were simultaneously sealed.

Not even Meera or the abyssfeeder had invalidated the core of his Martial Art so well.

Rui gained a brief respite by increasing the complexity of thought through the Mind Palace, confounding Ieyasu.

And yet...

SPLAT!

A single attack killed his momentum.

The atmosphere plummeted.

The jubilation.

The energy.

The high.

Ieyasu cut through all of it in a single strike.

Rui grimaced as he fell back, feeling a gash on his chest created by the sheer friction of an elbow swipe.

He glanced back at Ieyasu, narrowing his eyes.

The guardians watched with abysmal shock as Ieyasu instantly crushed a reversing trend.

They shivered as an enormous amount of peril and bloodlust radiated from the core of his being.

He stared at Rui with dark abysses for eyes.

"I'm you."

His eyes intensified.

"I'm a you that you will never become."

His body shook with power, adopting a stance.

"A you that you will be too dead to become."

WHOOSH!

Rui's eyes widened, barely managing to throw together a guard.

BOOM!!!

A powerful blow crashed into him at a speed that Rui could barely perceive. He grimaced as it launched him to the other side of the colosseum.

'He's absurdly faster and stronger than before!'

At the start, their performance parameters were equal. Yet no one had missed Ieyasu's continuous escalation in output.

No one had been able to gauge the reason for it.

No except Rui.

BAM BAM BAM!

Rui grimaced as he defended himself from an incredibly swift and heavy barrage of blows, leaping backward. 'Patterns increase your predictability but...they also increase your output.'

Choosing the best course of action out of the many possible options generally led to patterns, yet it was still stronger than if sub-optimal choices were made. Ieyasu was currently replicating the patterns that Rui had cultivated and refined through combat and his mind his entire life. The more he did that, the more he was able to bring out of himself.

Ieyasu rushed forward with a blistering speed, reduced to nothing but the haziest of blurs even in the eyes of the most powerful guardians.

WHOOSH!

He crossed the distance between them in an instant, throwing a blindingly fast blow aimed at Rui's head.

A blow meant to end a fight.

WHOOSH!

Rui barely avoided the strike as he leaped backward. Yet Ieyasu had long read his mind, refusing to let the distance open up by even the slightest bit of an inch.

WHOOSH!

Avoided by the sharpest of edges. Yet avoided nonetheless as Rui crouched in evasion before rushing backward. He avoided having too many dominant conscious thoughts. Which was difficult for him, since his mind normally furiously raced with thought.

Yet old habits died hard. Especially when they carried over to another life after having already died once.

'How do I adapt and evolve a man that copies everything he sees?'

Until he answered that question, he would not be able to win this fight.

After all, in this fight, Ieyasu was Rui. A statement that not even Rui could deny after seeing how identically the man copied him.

He was Rui.

'He is...me?'

His eyes widened.

The simplest of thoughts entered his mind.

'Then I just have to crush myself.'

Nobody missed the switch.

Not the Martial Seniors.

Not the guardians.

Not Kane.

Certainly not Ieyasu.

'You...' His eyes narrowed.

"Hehe. Hahaha."

Chills crawled up the skin as innocent euphoric laughter contrasted with the intensity of the battle that unfolded before them.

A disturbing sight.

'If killing myself is the price of victory. Then so be it.'

If one looked into his eyes, one would see a glint of madness.

Yet if one looked deeper, something much darker could be seen.

An endless void.

Those eyes fixed on Ieyasu as he ruthlessly began picking apart his own Martial Art.

Every flaw.

Every inadequacy.

Every imperfection.

These patterns represented who he was. The culmination of the essence of his being manifested in war.

Yet he didn't care.

He tore them apart with cruelty.

The very act of doing so hurt him deeply.

Deeper than he ever imagined.

The void inside him threatened to consume his own Martial Path like it had done many others.

Yet he pushed forward.

He rushed forward.

For the first time in his life, he would be forming a predictive model of himself in real time.

It was something that could only work if Ieyasu fully copied Rui.

And now that he had, this course of action now became a real possibility.

'I can do it. I will do it. I will crush you and myself if that is the price to be paid!'

This was the realization that Rui had made a while ago. He couldn't use the pattern recognition system against someone who had no patterns. Yet the moment he copied Rui's movement decision-making, he was no longer an empty abyss. He was a reflection.

A reflection of Rui himself.

Then it was himself that he needed to become the counter to.

He had already confirmed that Ieyasu couldn't copy the core of his Martial Art. The VOID algorithm, among other things, was contained in the massive information database and processor that was the Mind Palace.

An abysmal amount of information flashed through the Mind Palace in ways that Ieyasu was unable to comprehend. Yet it did not strictly matter as long as he could continue copying Rui's movements.

His ability to read his mind allowed him to foresee his attacks in addition to borrowing his strength.

A Martial Art that not only replicated power but elevated it with his own innate physicality, while giving him the ability to read their minds.

A Martial Art that many would easily regard as the pinnacle.

BAM BAM BAM!

Ieyasu's expression sharpened as he exerted himself to blast Rui with powerful blows. Rui leaped away, looking to gain a moment of respite.

Yet it was not to be.

BOOM!

He blasted Rui with a powerful tier-five Transverse Resonance, inflicting massive wounds on Rui's body.

"I won't allow you to kill yourself."

One could feel the cruelty in his words.

"Your death... is reserved for my Martial Heart."

The battle soared in intensity as both Martial Artists fought for more than just the outcome of the battle.

Chapter 1306: Arrived

Not a single person could maintain their composure.

Not the Martial Seniors.

Certainly not the guardians.

A smile nothing short of maniacal encompassed Rui's face.

A myriad of emotions radiated from him heating up the atmosphere.

And yet.

Ieyasu only grew colder.

His eyes narrowed.

His expression frosted.

He dedicated the entirety of his mind and body to one thing and one thing only.

Overcoming Rui Quarrier with everything had.

Not a single word was exchanged.

They didn't need to.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!!

Ieyasu's eyes fixated on Rui as he hunted him down with Transverse Resonance attacks.

Rui sprinted at top speed, propelled by Gale Force Breathing, Outer Convergence, and Parallel Walk. He flashed around the colosseum with Phantom Step, all while doing his best to obscure his thoughts in a giant mess of information within the Mind Palace, increasing the difficulty of reading his mind.

And yet.

BOOM!

An attack crashed into him, blasting away.

Yet he didn't so much as flinch.

His eyes were fixed on Ieyasu.

His mind flashed as he furiously processed every iota of information he could get his hands on.

A predictive model slowly came to life.

Its completion was inevitable.

Yet Ieyasu had other intentions in mind.

POW POW POW!

Waves of attacks crashed into Rui. The full might of Outer Convergence, Reverberating Lance, and Vital Pressure empowered with his own innate superior output crashed into Rui's Adamant Reforging and Flux Earther.

RUMBLE!

The very land beneath them shook as Ieyasu mercilessly pounded Rui's guard with every ounce of power he had.

BOOM!

A powerful kick launched him flying across the colosseum and into its walls.

Yet before Rui could even breathe...

WHOOSH!

Ieyasu had arrived.

For a moment, their eyes met.

A dark mirror reflected an image of the void that stood before it.

WHOOSH!

Rui barely managed to avoid a powerful kick as he leaped away.

Yet his eyes never once shifted away from Ieyasu.

BOOM BOOM BOOM!!

Ieyasu unleashed an avalanche of blindingly fast heavy blows. His body creaked in the effort that he exerted, yet his eyes only sharpened with even more determination.

He was to crush Rui before Rui crushed himself.

That was the only thing that mattered at the moment.

Every other consideration was secondary.

If he held back, he was unworthy of the power of a higher Realm.

An innumerable number of strikes continued to blast Rui even as he flashed away from Ieyasu at top speed. The sheer number of attacks that he had endured with his body wasn't low.

Every attack did more than just meaningful damage. They shook his body with a powerful impact that significantly damaged his body.

Yet Rui's eyes were unshakable, unshakably fixed on Ieyasu.

His mind was unperturbed.

He didn't care.

Yet his body begged to differ.

He was bleeding all over.

He was deeply bruised all over.

The Martial Body was resilient, not indestructible. Both of them knew that a critical point in their race was arriving.

The decisive moment. One that would make or break the battle.

BOOM!

Yet, it arrived sooner than either had expected.

Rui gasped for air as Ieyasu cleanly landed a powerful blow to the solar plexus, collapsing to the ground. An incredibly powerful kick crashed into Rui, launching him across the colosseum.

BOOM!

He crashed into the colosseum walls, almost destroying them entirely.

His body screamed in pain.

WHOOSH!

Ieyasu arrived before him glancing at him while his attack surged forward with tremendous momentum.

His eyes were closed.

BOOM!!!

RUMBLE!

The entire colosseum shook.

Not a single person was able to draw their eyes away from what followed.

A single figure was launched to the other side of the colosseum by the powerful impact.

It was Ieyasu.

He glanced back at Rui with eyes of shock.

Rui's kick still lingered in the air.

His head was tilted, having avoided Ieyasu's attack. He stared at Ieyasu with impassive eyes.

Six words escaped his mouth.

"So close... And yet so far."

He had arrived.

RUMBLE!

Rui stepped forward with such force that the entire colosseum may as well have shifted back as a result. He blasted forward, pushing his wounded ability to the limit as he rushed forward with incredible velocity.

His fist surged forward as the most powerful Flowing Canon of the battle emerged.

Yet Ieyasu had read his mind.

WHOOSH!

He avoided the blow, swerving to the right at the right moment with sheer reflex.

Or so he thought.

BAM!

A kick had already arrived at the new location of his face. Ieyasu barely managed to read his mind in time, hastily blocking the attack with Flux Earther.

Yet an attack had already arrived at the opening created by a mind-heavy technique like Flux Earther.

WHOOSH!

He barely evaded the swift kick, turning to Rui as he read his next move.

And yet...

BOOM!

A powerful blow had already struck him. The attack cleanly crashed into Ieyasu, launching backward.

The second clean hit that Rui had ever landed on Ieyasu.

It should have been a meaningless accomplishment before the many clean hits that Ieyasu had landed on him.

The difference in their conditions was transparent.

This should have changed nothing.

This was not a webnovel.

Reality was cruel.

Fights did not magically undergo a turn of tables at the very final moment for the protagonist.

Every single person knew this.

And yet...

When they looked at silver eyes, they only saw limitless darkness. An artificial luster could not hide the growing void.

An all-consuming abyss that consumed any and everything before it.

"I told you, didn't I?" Rui murmured, taking his classic stance. "Your reflections are shallow. They cannot reflect the depth of the void you see before you."

Ieyasu stared at him, mimicking Rui's stance to the last millimeter. "A void that consumes itself is not enough to overcome me."

The very world around them quivered under the weight of their raw emotion.

Their eyes sharpened, lashing forward with abandon.

The battle escalated to even greater heights as their fists clashed!

Chapter 1307: Die

Everybody could feel it.

They could feel it in the depths of their bones.

In the depths of their soul.

Fate had converged on this day.

Somehow they could tell.

The outcome of this battle would ripple far beyond this island.

Somehow. Somewhere. Somewhy.

They knew

The outcome of the battle would impact the entire world.

Rui flashed forward throwing the umpteenth Flowing Canon of the battle, aiming to crush Ieyasu in a single blow!

And yet.

WHOOSH!

Ieyasu resolutely swerved away from it, preparing his own attack.

Rui had predicted this.

That was why a swift kick had already arrived at his dodged position.

And yet...

CLASP!

Rui's eyes widened as Ieyasu caught Rui's kick with casual ease, staring deep into Rui's eyes.

Not a single word was uttered.

Yet Rui understood everything he said.

Inadequate.

BOOM!

Ieyasu smashed Rui into the ground, flinging him away.

Rui stared at him 'Something has changed.'

Ieyasu chased after him with greater vigor than before.

Every cell in his body pushed forward.

The sum totality of what he had to offer bore itself against Rui.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!

A blindingly swift exchange of blows ensued. The two of them elevated to a higher level of Martial Art untouched by any Martial Squire before them.

Every attack.

Every defense.

Every maneuver.

Every motion gained unprecedented clarity and flow.

Not a single wasted motion.

Not a single wasted thought.

Ieyasu sharpened his Mind Read technique to the absolute limit, hyper-focusing it. Rui's conscious mind was larger and deeper than anything he had ever seen in his entire life.

It hurt every cell in his body to admit, but he was incapable of reading it.

He was not qualified to.

That was why he focused on one and only one thing.

Rui's movement decisions.

Everything else could go.

His thoughts.

His memories.

That absurdly gigantic palace at the center of his conscious mind.

They didn't matter.

His Mind Read technique sharpened, fixating on one and only one thing.

His movements.

WHOOSH!

He clearly avoided Rui's attack with much greater ease than before. He rushed forward, matching Rui blow for blow. The two of them exerted every ounce of power that they had, squeezing their bodies for every ounce of potential they had.

Every guardian reacted with pure shock.

They were inches away from each other.

And yet...

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Not a single blow landed on them!

They were so close.

Yet so far.

An endless ocean of attacks flew at both of them and yet, not a single one touched them.

Their eyes were fixed on each other.

Very few realized the truth of their battle.

It was not a battle of fists.

It was a battle of depth.

Ieyasu read Rui's mind.

And Rui read Ieyasu's mind by reading his own.

Neither side was able to gain an edge on the other.

'No, that's not quite right.' Senior Sarak was the only one who saw the truth.

FLICK

Ieyasu's eyes widened as Rui's nicked his cheek.

Yet, Rui was not done.

FLICK

FLICK

FLICK

FLICK

It was tiny. Invisible to nearly everybody watching.

Thinner than a hair's strand.

And yet, Rui had begun gaining an edge in battle. He surged forward even as his body screamed in pain, snowballing his momentum.

POW!

A clean strike landed on Ieyasu's face, shattering his nose.

Rui's eyes intensified.

A dam had broken.

BAM BAM BAM BAM BAM!!!

He unleashed everything he had to offer as he blasted Ieyasu with every ounce of power he had to offer!

Ieyasu grimaced as he was firmly pushed back.

Not a single person could maintain their composure.

None of them understood.

Why had the balance shifted in favor of Rui when he was in a worse condition?

Not even the Martial Seniors were able to fathom the cause for this imbalance.

Only Rui and Ieyasu understood the truth.

Rui's patterns were built around the VOID algorithm. They were built to accommodate and empower the VOID algorithm from the very start, from his very origin as a Martial Artist more than a decade ago.

His patterns could only live up to their full potential when used with the VOID algorithm.

They could only show their full might along with the VOID algorithm.

That was why they failed Ieyasu against Rui. No matter how accurate his imitations of Rui's movements and techniques, they both knew he was incapable of imitating the VOID algorithm at the core of Rui's titanic Mind Palace.

It gave Rui an overwhelming advantage. An advantage that was just slightly superior to Ieyasu's advantages of superior output and a better health condition.

Just the tiniest edge.

And yet, it was superior.

BOOM!

Rui launched Ieyasu across the colosseum chasing after him with unerring initiative.

He pushed himself to the absolute limit.

He had to.

He did not enjoy a massive advantage where he could exert anything less than his absolute maximum effort.

If he slacked up even a little bit, he would lose all of the snowballed momentum that he had built by leveraging the tiny advantage he had managed to secure over Ieyasu's strengths.

His mind honed sharper than it ever had ever before.

The sum totality of his being honed sharp.

It focused on one thing and one thing only.

The mirror before him.

Instinctively, he knew. The mirror before him was perhaps the only thing left that could awaken his Heart.

BOOM!

Ieyasu fell to his knees as the most powerful Flowing Canon of the entire fight flew towards his head.

A finishing blow.

It should have been the end.

And yet...

SPLAT!

...

Every single soul watched with primal shock.

"...Eh?"

It took Rui a moment to process what just happened.

DRIP DRIP DRIP

Blood dripped from a hole in his abdomen.

A hole that had Ieyasu's hand buried deep in it.

In a single motion, a piercing attack had impaled Rui faster than Rui had been able to react.

But the Flowing Void Style did not have such an attack.

Rui's eyes widened in shock as the truth dawned on him.

A whisper escaped Ieyasu's mouth. "You were right... I could not reflect the depths of your void. And yet..."

His eyes peered deep into Rui's.

The world around them chilled under the frosty darkness that Ieyasu radiated.

"...I don't need to. I just need to win." He whispered as his next attack surged forward.

The sum totality of the thousands of Martial Art that Ieyasu had ever copied weighed down on Rui even as his body grew colder.

"Die."

Chapter 1308: Execution

BOOM!

Ieyasu's attack launched him away at blinding speeds, crashing into the other side of the colosseum with a titanic impact.

BOOM!!!

Yet he wasn't done.

Not just yet.

He mercilessly dashed forward, racing to the other side while his next attack surged forward through the dust, towards Rui's figure.

Every person who bore witness could not help but grit their teeth.

Their fists clenched.

Many did not understand what had happened.

Yet one thing was clear.

A glint of triumph shined in the darkness of his eyes, a darkness that reflected the image of Rui.

Tokugawa Ieyasu had reclaimed the battle.

And now he sought to claim one more thing.

The air turned grave.

The skies darkened.

The world grew silent as it bore witness.

His palm jab drove forward towards Rui's heart.

A death blow.

SPLAT!

A splash of blood unfazed him.

His hand dug deeper and deeper, piercing his heart.

It struck true

And yet it wasn't the only thing that did.

At that moment, another attack had already surged forward, uncaring for the severity of the situation.

BAM!!!

Every spectating soul widened their eyes in shock as Rui landed a powerful blow on Ieyasu.

A powerful blow...

But at what cost?

He had already been mortally injured, and now his gut and heart were impaled.

He was doomed to collapse.

Any moment now.

The air grew taut as they waited for the fated outcome.

And yet, once more, Rui defied expectations, stepping forward defiantly.

Not a single person could contain their shock when they saw what had become of him.

How could they?

It was almost magical.

Every wound on his body had already disappeared.

Every scratch.

Every bruise.

Every cut.

Gone.

It was an incomprehensible sight.

Only Senior Xanarn and Kane understood what had happened. They had borne witness to the battle he had fought more than a year ago against the Martial Seniors of the Kaddar Region. They had watched as Rui healed with an almost magical healing ability, allowing him to negate the immense damage that the Martial Seniors had inflicted on him.

Ieyasu's eyes intensified at the sight. He hadn't gotten a good look at the technique, but he didn't need to.

It was unnecessary.

There was only one thing left to do; win.

So what if Rui could heal?

'My eyes reflect the might of a thousand Martial Artists! ' His eyes narrowed.

They grew darker.

Colder.

A single whisper escaped his mouth.

"You may have overcome yourself but...can you overcome the Floating Sect?"

The ominous question sent chills crawling down the skin of the guardians as they realized what was about to happen.

The sum totality of everything that the Floating Sect had to offer.

That was what Rui had to overcome.

No sane Martial Squire would dare to even try.

Rui didn't say a word.

And yet, they could only watch with utter shock as he took his simple neutral stance.

A single word escaped his mouth.

"Come."

Their eyes sharpened.

For a moment, nothing happened.

And the very next...

RUMBLE!

The very land beneath them shook as the two raced forward with abandon.

A single thought emanated through the sum totality of their being.

A single desire resonated across their existence.

Victory.

At all costs.

POW POW POW!

A powerful barrage of swift blows struck at Rui's guard, each swifter than the previous one, flinging him backward. Ieyasu lashed out forward, and a sharp swift palm jab flew towards his throat, aiming to sever it.

WHOOSH!

It crashed into an empty image.

A feint.

Rui had leaped back, watching him with the fixation of a serpent. His eyes were fixed on Ieyasu. The void within the consumed everything it beheld.

An unpleasant sensation.

Ieyasu narrowed his eyes as he immediately followed through, launching a barrage of color arm maneuvers with sharp palms.

An offensive Martial Art that carved their opponent up like a butcher.

"Th-That's my Martial Art!" A guardian in the spectator stands exclaimed with shock and amazement.
"It's smoother and cleaner than mine!"

Not a single one of them was surprised. A grave expression underlying a hint of despair flashed in their eyes.

This battle affected them, and yet they were helpless.

THWACK! POW!

Rui calmly deconstructed the colorful movements with a single swing, landing a swift blow on Ieyasu. Ieyasu narrowed his eyes. His arms blurred, hoping to chop Rui up with the lethal copied Martial Art.

And yet...

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui casually evaded every blow with knowing eyes.

The void had already consumed this Martial Art.

Hardly five minutes had passed, and yet it was already dead.

"No..." The Martial Artist watched with a look of horror as Rui tore apart not just his Martial Art, but a superior manifestation.

An overwhelming sense of despair washed over him.

One had effortlessly copied and elevated his Martial Art, while the other effortlessly read and evolved to destroy it.

He could do nothing about it.

He was helpless, and yet the battle continued.

Neither of the two of them cared.

It was an insignificant outcome.

BAM!

Rui's eyes widened as a fundamental shift in Ieyasu's patterns allowed a strike to cleanly blast him away. This time his stance resembled a Muay Thai stance, emphasizing his elbows and knees.

He rushed forward as Rui raced backward, hoping to maintain the open distance. Close-quarters combat with such a style was detrimental.

FIEW FIEW FIEW!

Rui narrowed his eyes as Ieyasu's elbows tore through the air, releasing waves of vacuum flying straight towards him.

WHOOSH!

"I never thought my Martial Art could have such power at that range!" Another guardian exclaimed with amazement.

Yet his emotions did not defy the pattern.

POW!

Rui imbalanced Ieyasu with a swift roundhouse kick, completely disemboweling the style minutes later. Amazement turned into despair as yet another guardian felt their heart crushing at the hands of both the monsters warring in the battle arena.

Every guardian watched with grave despair.

What was to come had already been established. They prepared their hearts one by one.

Ieyasu had only become as strong as he was after entering the sect more than six years ago. He had mostly fought guardians after that time period. That meant that an overwhelming majority of the copied Martial Art in his arsenal belonged to them.

It was a mass execution.

Ieyasu was the prosecutor.

Rui was the executor.

Together, they butchered Martial Art after Martial Art.

They had become monsters in the eyes of the breaking guardians.

A duo of despair.

Harbingers of destruction.

The reapers of Martial Art.

Yet there was nothing that could be done.

The battle would continue.

They could only watch.

The battle grew darker as the melody of a mirror and a void rung through the colosseum.

Chapter 1309: BADUMP

Ieyasu's eyes intensified gravely.

This was beyond his expectations.

Through the first two stages of the fight, he had inflicted immense damage on Rui across his entire body.

Then he impaled his gut, blasted him away with an attack, and then impaled his heart.

And yet, all of that had disappeared into thin air.

As if it hadn't been there in the first place.

Of course, he knew that this was not truly the case. He sensed a slump in Rui's other performance parameters as a result.

The price of the technique.

And yet, it was worth the price.

In the first place, they both knew that his greatest asset was not his physical prowess.

It was his mind.

As long as his body was healthy and functional, then he would be able to wield the power of thought to the best that he could.

BAM BAM BAM!

A barrage of powerful blows crashed into Ieyasu, flinging him away. A deep darkness within Rui's eyes fixated on him.

Yet another Martial Art had been adapted and evolved.

Rui raced after him. A mighty Flowing Canon surged forward.

And yet;

BOOM!

Rui barely managed to guard against a powerful attack from a new Martial Art, grimacing as it flung him away.

Ieyasu raced forward with a surge of furious determination.

He had already discovered that the transition to a new Martial Art after Rui adapted to the previous caught Rui off-guard, creating an opening that he could exploit. It only worked if Rui adapted to the previous one, growing a little comfortable with all his predictions before Ieyasu made a deep fundamental shift in his mind, in his being, throwing Rui off with a new copy.

It was only in these transitions that he could regain dominance in the battle.

And yet.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Without fail, Rui's responses would grow cleaner.

Smoother.

Like a gentle ebbing stream of pure water from a spring.

How many times could this happen?

He didn't have endless Martial Art.

Sooner or later, he would run out.

He knew this.

He knew Rui knew this. He could sense his awareness with his Mind Eye technique.

One thing became clearer as the fight ensued.

No Martial Art was his equal.

Everything fell.

To the VOID in his eyes.

His expression grew severe.

His muscles burned as he exerted himself to the limit.

His bones creaked as he pushed himself to the absolute limit.

He brought out pattern after pattern that he had etched into his mind from countless different Martial Artists.

He brought out technique after technique.

Martial Art after Martial Art.

He unleashed everything he had to offer.

Everything he had ever seen in the sum totality of his time as a Martial Artist.

All of it.

And yet.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui cleanly weaved through the man's attacks, preparing a powerful combo.

Yet Ieyasu read his mind.

POW POW POW!

The attacks crashed into his guard harmlessly. Ieyasu instead surged forward with a powerful blow.

Yet Rui simply ignored it.

BOOM!

Ieyasu fell backward, grimacing as he glanced at his opponent.

The wound was already gone.

Ieyasu, on the other hand, had already endured a ton of prior damage atop this new wound.

He landed on his feet, hoping for a moment of respite.

Yet his Mind Eye technique already knew Rui would not allow that.

WHOOSH!

He evaded a powerful kick from Rui, swerving to the side.

And yet...

BAM!

A strike had already arrived at him before he himself did, knocking him off balance.

An opening had been created.

One that Rui did not let up.

BAM BAM BAM!!!

He pummeled Ieyasu with incredibly swift and powerful blows. His fists knew exactly where to go, navigating the man's guards and maneuvers and landing cleanly on his vitals.

"Rgh!" The man coughed blood as he leaped back.

Yet he was sluggish.

A beat too slow.

BOOM!

A powerful kick had already surged forward, crashing into the man, and launching him away.

Ieyasu barely caught his breath, yet a chill crawled up his skin as he read Rui's mind.

Rui had already arrived, refusing to give him even a moment of respite.

A wave of emotion stirred through the crowd.

A realization slowly dawned on the various spectators. Not even the despair of having their Martial Art torn apart was enough to obfuscate an emerging truth.

Rui was winning.

No one could feel this more clearly than his opponent.

Ieyasu panted heavily as he struggled to catch his breath.

His body bled, peppered with wounds.

A myriad of wounds covered every inch of his flesh.

His muscles burned.

His flesh screamed.

His bones creaked.

His joints groaned.

And yet...

"RARGH!" A titanicly powerful blow surged forward, racing towards Rui's head!

And yet.

CLASP!

Rui cleanly shifted, evading it as he caught it, before rapidly pulling it down over his shoulder with his entire body.

BOOM!

"Rgh!" He coughed blood, grimacing.

Yet Rui wasn't done.

His Mind Eye knew that.

Yet knowledge was not action.

BOOM!

Rui launched him away with an immensely powerful kick.

"Urgh...!" Ieyasu coughed more blood.

He staggered unsteadily.

His body faltered, falling down to one knee.

THUD

The skies darkened with certainty.

The land beneath them shook.

The end was nigh.

It was as certain as day.

And yet...

His eyes steeled.

Every ounce of his mind gathered.

Every shred of focus converged.

Every iota of will surged.

Every cell in his body roared together.

The sum totality of his being worked together.

The void in the depths of Rui's eyes threatened to consume the mirror of his own.

A sight that had brought despair to many a Martial Artist, and yet...

It only strengthened his will.

It broke the limits of his mind.

Of his sanity.

And yet, the powerful Flowing Canon surged forward towards him didn't care.

A finishing blow.

Everyone sensed the arrival of the climax.

Everyone sensed the air.

Everyone sensed dusk.

It was the end.

...

.....

BADUMP!

Chapter 1310: Power

Rui's mind had entered a comfortable bliss.

It comforted him.

Eased him.

Soothed him.

And yet, a voracious hunger consumed him.

It drove him.

Spurred him.

Frenzied him.

Two opposing forces acted on his mind.

His being.

An existential tug of war.

Perfectly balanced, as all things should be.

He felt released.

From the world.

From the shackles of the Human nature.

An endless peace surged within him.

Nothing mattered anymore.

Master Uma. Chairman Deacon. The Virodhabhasa Faith.

They ceased to exist.

Nothing mattered to him.

He was at peace.

And yet, a voracious hunger consumed him.

Hunger for victory.

For power.

Ambition.

He didn't understand.

He didn't care to.

he didn't think to.

He simply didn't think.

There was only one thing he cared for. His mind grew fixated on the opponent before him. A mighty weight pushed down on his mind at the very sight of him.

The weight of a thousand Martial Art.

No Martial Art was beyond his reach.

Everything was his.

And yet, he offered them to the void within Rui.

One by one.

The battle raged as the void consumed every single Martial Art that he had to offer.

Until there was nothing else.

Yet Rui was not satisfied.

His eyes intensified.

His hunger intensified.

RUMBLE!

The very world trembled in peril as Rui surged forward, consuming the one thing that the man had left to offer.

His life.

Endless hunger surged forward.

And yet...

WHOOSH!

The attack crashed into empty air.

One moment, Ieyasu was down on a knee.

The next moment, he was gone.

The object of his hunger disappeared.

His body felt a deep sense of peril behind him.

BADUMP!

A powerful Martial Heart blazed into life as the aura of a Martial Senior radiated across the island.

He opened his eyes, beholding Rui

A single word escaped his mouth.

"Die."

The three Martial Seniors broke out of their reverie as they raced forward, their Martial Hearts blazing into action.

Yet they were too far.

Ieyasu's attack surged forward.

And yet...

Rui's eyes blazed with hunger.

Time slowed down as his pupils dilated.

A blazingly-swift Senior-level attack was reduced to a slow lull.

A lull that threatened to end his life.

Yet Rui didn't care.

Life?

Such a thing did not matter.

He refused to run away.

He refused to cower.

Not again.

'Never again.'

A surge of emotion flushed through him.

The frustration of weakness.

The Ambition of Water.

The love of a family.

The hunger of the void.

Yet he couldn't validate any of them.

He was too weak.

Too weak to protect his family.

To fulfill his ambition.

To overcome death even as he stared it in the eyes.

A single desire radiated through the sum totality of his being.

'Power...' His eyes widened. 'Power...!'

His sanity unraveled as his mind chanted the word.

And yet, his Body roared along.

Every cell in his Body quivered as it joined the chant.

The hymn reverberated through the totality of his existence.

'Power...!'

It was his heart that roared for power.

And yet...

It was the Heart that heeded the call.

...

.....

....

BADUMP!

An ocean of power surged from deep within his body.

His heart accelerated into a tachycardia. His blood seemed to nearly incinerate, glowing with power. Glowing red lines emerged from his heart, spreading through the rest of his body.

His cells quivered as his metabolism accelerated.

Unprecedented amounts of adrenaline and endorphins poured into his blood.

His mind and body revved into a frenzy leaping into action!

He felt the root of his being ascend to a higher Realm of power.

Power of a higher Realm surged through his body as he surged forward with the might of a true Martial Senior.

The world welcomed the birth of yet another Martial Senior.

Two Martial Seniors locked eyes for the briefest microsecond.

And then locked fists.

BOOM!!!!

A titanic clash ensued. Power beyond anything the two of them had ever experienced converged in a single impact.

RUMBLE!!

The island violently shook to the very core of its existence.

A shockwave the size of a mountain emerged from the convergence of their attacks.

It destroyed everything.

Everyone.

Or so it should have.

WHOOSH!

The three Martial Seniors managed to activate their breathing techniques in time.

Senior Xanarn generated a titanic wave of sound that canceled out the energy radiated from the epicenter of the blastwave, protecting the island.

Senior Leonil generated a power gust of wind that protected the guardians.

Senior Sarak activated a breathing technique that expelled the two infant Martial Seniors from the island a great distance away.

Yet neither of the two of them noticed.

Nothing else existed besides them.

Endless euphoria washed over them as they experienced the intoxicating power of a high Realm.

A single emotion radiated from the two baby Martial Seniors.

Pure and unadulterated satisfaction.

Yet, they weren't satisfied.

Power was useless if it didn't grant them victory.

Their eyes fixed on their opponents.

The mirror and the void surged once more.

BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM BOOM!!!!

Titanic amounts of power surged forth from both sides.

Rui lashed out at Ieyasu with the full might of Outer Convergence, Reverberating Lance, and Vital Pressure channeled through the most powerful Flowing Canon he had ever launched in the entirety of his life.

And yet...

BOOM!!!!

Ieyasu retaliated with a mirror image of the same attack. The mirror in his eyes reflected the void in Rui's.

The two of them lashed forth without abandon as a familiar sight took place.

Yet, a familiar outcome did not unfold.

BOOM!!!!

Ieyasu held his ground fiercely, refusing to allow Rui to claim even the slightest edge unlike last time!

Rui narrowed his eyes.

The difference became evident.

'His Martial Heart is stronger.'

They both could feel it.

Ieyasu had gained a slight edge.

Yet it was enough to counter the slight edge that had granted Rui victory last time.

The two inhaled deeply.

The gesture created a titanic vacuum that singlehandedly affected the weather of the Kaddar Region.

THWOOM THWOOM!

Two massive tier-five Transverse Resonances surged forth, colliding with each other!

BOOM!!!!!!!