

An hour and twelve minutes had passed since the second round had begun. Rui had grown more and more comfortable in his task of dodging, although it was still very taxing on him, the delays in reaction time, wastage in movements had decreased, albeit not by much. The real problem was no longer how to dodge, but how long he could dodge. His stamina had been well-honed in the past thirteen years. But ultimately, he was thirteen years old. His body was not blessed with great amounts of energy, and there was a limit to how much he could have trained as a pre-pubescent child, and a limit to the impact that the training would have prior to puberty.

"Huff.. Huff.." He wiped sweat from his forehead, he was sweating so much that it was starting to hinder his vision.

"Can you keep going?" His partner asked nonchalantly.

('Tsk, this brat. How on Earth is he not tired? Furthermore, he rarely gets hit, he calls out slimes impeccably. He's accomplishing this through sheer field of vision, agility, reflexes and crazy maneuvering. This kid is a fucking genius.')

"Are you rubbing your stamina in my face?" Rui barely managed to spit out a retort, narrowly avoiding a slime.

"Heh, maybe... Duck!" He warned. Unfortunately, Rui couldn't do so in time, and the slime grazed his shoulder.

"Fuck!" He grimaced. Yet the worst part is that the hit had diverted his attention, preventing him from reacting in time to another slime that was about to hit his head.

He braced himself, waiting for the impact. And he waited, waited, yet it never came.

Opening his eyes only revealed a Martial Squire standing in front of him. The slime nowhere to be seen.

('He.. protected me? But why?') He wondered, dazed.

('Wait, is the exam...?') He knitted his eyebrows. Looking around, he saw a similar sight in all directions. The Martial Artists had intervened with their remarkable physical prowess.

"The second round is now complete, your results will be tallied, and ranked within an hour." Master Aronian's voice echoed through the facility.

('That means, someone just died...') Rui searched the facility before his eyes caught the sight of a young boy's corpse being covered and carried away.

('Sigh, that could have been me.') He thought, before dismissing the thought.

"In the meantime, the assistant invigilators will provide you with stamina, nutritional and healing potions and any other medical aid you may need. The third round will begin only after the results of the second round are published..." Master Aronian continued, rattling off a few more instructions.

"You okay?" Rui's partner walked over to him, giving him a hand.

"Okay enough, thanks." Rui accepted, getting up.

"I'm Kane, by the way, Kane Arrancar."

"Rui Quarrier." Rui replied nonchalantly.

Kane threw him an odd, curious look.

"Something on my face?" Rui raised an eyebrow.

"Well... That's just not the reaction I get when I tell people my name. It's a bit refreshing actually." Kane chuckled wryly.

"You're from a famous family?"

"Yeah, my dad is a Martial Sage. And my family has produced many renowned Martial Sages and Masters in the past."

"Hmm, that sounds cool. No wonder you aced the exam, you're practically born to be a Martial Artist." Rui complimented, only to receive melancholic, helpless sigh in response. He could tell he'd touched a nerve, but he wasn't sure what.

"I think you're pretty good too."

They chatted lightly as they consumed several potions that healed their wounds and bruises while restoring their stamina. Rui had never actually consumed a potion in his life, though he had long learnt of them. Potions were not something that the lower economic classes could afford, especially not an Orphanage trying to fund itself, he'd never had the opportunity to try one. What surprised him the most was that potions were merely stored in liquid form, in order to be effectively consumed, they needed to be inhaled.

('That... makes sense. I guess it's just a little counter-intuitive to me since potions, in fiction, are always drunk. However, it would be impossible for potions that are drunk to be effective immediately, of course. Digestion is a long process. Whereas compounds directly inhaled reach cells extremely quickly because they're diffused into blood that carries them to every cell in the body, allowing them to be effective immediately. Furthermore, potions being drunk would be subjected to a number of chemical reactions that cannot be predicted, controlled and accounted for. It's a poorly constrained means of administration of a complex compound, especially if organic in nature... Interesting, I wonder how these potions work.')

Did they have such high technology that they had synthesized nanobots that could enter the blood through the airway allowing it to perform all kinds of operations on the entirety of the human body on a cellular level?

It was practically impossible, nanotechnology was the absolute pinnacle of material science and engineering. How could a world have mastered such technology when they hadn't even discovered electricity?

('Their scientific progression is low, and their engineering clearly leaves much to be desired, yet they can do things that even cutting-edge tech from Earth can't... This indicates that their technical prowess and understanding of this world isn't high, however what is special is the world itself. The capabilities of their technology comes from the supernatural but powerful resources that can be obtained the powerful flora, fauna and the bizarre nature of this world. This explains the oddities I've noticed throughout my second life. The lighting technology that relies on plants that glow, the communication technology that relies on supernatural creatures and phenomena, the remarkably intricate architecture and engineering that no doubt relies on something similar, and the medical technology the relies on a vast variety of supernatural phenomena and life forms. Most fascinating indeed.')

Kane noticed Rui's engrossed interest in the potions they were delivered.

"Have you never consumed a potion before?" He asked, tilting his head with a surprised expression.

"Yes, this is my first time. It's fascinating."

"How come you've never had a potion before?" He continued, confusion creeping into his expression.

Rui turned his head, throwing him a puzzled glance.

('I thought he was intelligent based on how quickly he decided to team up, but is this kid actually an airhead?')magic

"...Because they cost three silvers?"

"...And?"

Rui looked at him with disbelief.

"... And I can't afford to spend that much money on a product that can only be used once."

"...Oh" Kane responded, feeling embarrassed and even guilty. He was used to drinking several potions of several kinds provided to him every day.

('He wasn't even making fun of me. He just seems to be so rich he has no frame of reference what normal looks like. This kid must come from serious money.') Rui sighed. He decided to ignore it, continuing to banter with the kid. Just then, the assistant invigilators had appeared pushing a tall rolling board with a sheet of paper.

('It's here... the results of the second round!') Rui tensed.