

Martial Unity 1541

Chapter 1541: Preoccupations

1541 Preoccupations

"Enough about me, what have all of you been up to?" Rui asked, curious.

"I've been spending most of my time training and undertaking missions," Fiona replied cheerily.

"Martial Union?"

"Not at all," She shook her head. "I've been working for my own family. Undertaking operations surrounding our family businesses and matters. I stopped fulfilling open commissions from the Martial Union after I broke through to the Squire Realm."

"Ah, that must be in preparation for undertaking more responsibility within your family," Rui mused.

"Indeed," She nodded. "Our family has entanglements and obligations to many other prestigious families in the Martial community of the Kandrian Empire and other organizations, in addition..."

Her expression grew complicated. "The Dullahan Family has openly sided with Prince Raijun Ver Kandria, joining the Raijun Faction and becoming one of the donors and patrons of the Raijun Foundation. So I have been undertaking missions commissioned by His Highness' administration as well."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Prince Raijun....I believe that's the Martial Apprentice prince, right?"

She nodded, heaving a sigh.

Clearly, she wasn't the biggest fan of this development.

Rui considered the matter thoughtfully. His knowledge was extremely shallow, but he was aware of the basics. Prince Raijun was a Martial Apprentice who had managed to become an internal member of the Martial Union, joining its corps. The same position that Rui had been offered but had ultimately rejected.

"I see..." Rui's eyes narrowed in thought.

If he was reading it right, Prince Raijun was basically the Martial Union's ticket to the Throne War. No matter how powerful an organization was, they were wholly unable to compete for the throne unless it was through a royal descendant of royal blood competing for the throne as a candidate for emperor or empress.

From what little Rui knew and deduced, Prince Raijun was most likely the front through which the Martial Union was partaking in the Kandrian Throne War. He shook his head slightly, he needed to stop getting his head tangled in matters that had nothing to do with him.

"Sounds busy," He commented, turning to Nel and Hever. "What about you two?"

"Fighting!" Nel grinned.

"Refining my Martial Art," He commented. "I'm working on maximizing the potential for my body."

Rui nodded, they were both on a steady path to the Senior Realm. He was quite confident in their ability to reach the Senior Realm eventually.

"What about you, Fiona?" He turned towards her.

"I've been hired as an explorer by the Ministry of Ecology and Environment," She replied, sipping her coffee.

"Oh...?" Rui raised an eyebrow with interest. "Interesting. I've worked with the Ministry of Ecology and Environment many times, but that was through the Martial Union serving as a broker, as usual. I think I was offered a job long ago."

Rui recalled the job offer he got after he successfully killed the earthen basilisk in one of his hunting missions.

"This is different from those. I was actually offered a job too and I accepted in a heartbeat," She remarked. "The Ministry deploys me to various places and locations either to explore and scale or document them, or find and investigate certain phenomena, either anomalous or dangerous, and sometimes has me deal with risks and threats."

"That suits you," Rui smiled knowingly. "You were always a highly curious one. It makes sense that you would eventually become an explorer. Have you ever been deployed to the Beast Domain?"

"Just once," She remarked. "It's a highly dangerous place so normally only experienced high-grade Martial Artists get deployed there. I'm building up my experience and Martial Art steadily so I can explore the wonders of the Beast Domain someday."

Her eyes lit up with passion when she spoke about it.

"I'm glad you seem to enjoy it," Rui nodded. "You all seem to have been doing good all these years."

He felt glad that he was able to reconnect with old friends. This was one of the reasons he had looked forward to returning to the Kandrian Empire.

"Now that you have taken the opportunity to familiarize yourselves with our statuses..." Fiona's eyes flashed with curiosity. "You must tell us what happened to you in the past eight years!"

It wasn't just her eyes, everybody immediately grew more interested at that. Even Milliana, who was normally detached, stared at Rui with an intensity.

Each of them was curious about what had happened to Rui leading to him becoming the youngest Martial Senior in history.

How could they not be?

Rui heaved an amused sigh, before he began narrating the story once more. It took him a while with an edited and redacted version of the story, but he managed to give them the short of it.

They listened attentively from start to finish.

"...Once I confirmed that the news of his death was real, I came back home," Rui remarked.

"My...what an incredible story," Fae murmured. "Truly astounding. I thought you had broken through recently, but to think that you had broken through four years ago. That's almost too absurd to believe."

Rui didn't even blame them. "You can ask Kane, he'll confirm."

"Speaking of which..." Fiona interjected. "Why isn't he here?"

"He would definitely not miss Rui's return," Dalen murmured thoughtfully.

"He's...busy," Rui shook his head. "I told him about the reunion but he said he would have to pass."

Rui would have done the same if he was in his position. He was about to make the biggest decision of his life, he almost certainly wasn't in the mood for hanging out with friends. Besides, he had been meeting all of them for two years now, so this wasn't particularly a special or novel thing like it was to Rui.

The seven of them discussed about a variety of matters, trying to make for the many years since they hadn't seen Rui, informing him of a variety of local and regional events within the Kandrian Empire in the past few years that Rui had missed.

Chapter 1542: Academy

1542 Academy

Rui enjoyed reconnecting with his old friends after a long period of separation. His friends freely shared the past eight years of their lives with while indulging in the finer details of his adventures.

Since Rui had specifically chosen to go to centers of Martial Art that helped Martial Artists train and grow stronger, he had plenty of tales that were of interest to Martial Artists like themselves.

"I must visit the Umiana Trench someday..." Fae murmured when Rui recounted the story.

As a striking-oriented Martial Artist centered around palm strikes, she was quite interested in avenues of training centered around striking. The Umiana Trench was a good place where Martial Artists like herself could train their fundamentals and foundations.

"The Floating Sect sounds like it would be a ton of fun." Nel's eyes flashed with battle lust. "I must check it out myself someday."

Rui smiled wryly. Someone like Nel would fit right in a place like the Floating Sect.

"What was the Great Forest of Hypnonarak like?" Fiona asked with curiosity.

"It was definitely unlike any other forest I've ever been to," Rui remarked, thinking back to the various tribulations that he had gone through while exploring the forest. "I've heard that it was essentially an artificial pocket from the Beast Domain since the Hypnomaster created it using the species of flora from the Beast Domain."

"Interesting," She murmured.

A variety of topics came and went, among which were not only related to their personal lives in the past eight years but also their Martial Art.

Each of them was grateful for the Hungry Pain technique that Rui had given to them a long time ago. He had initially given it only to Kane and Milliana, who then gave it to everybody else in their friend group when the time was right.

"It helped a lot with my stamina," Milliana nodded.

"It also made our Martial Bodies a grade stronger than what was expected right off the bat," Dalen pointed out. "We have you to thank for that."

The others nodded, adding their own experiences with the Hungry Pain technique as Martial Squires. Yet, eventually, even the numerous topics that they had to talk about came to an end. It wasn't too long before their little rendezvous came to an end and they departed their own ways. Most of them were too busy with their own schedules to spend too much time away from them.

Yet, instead of heading back home, he decided to take a little detour.

A detour to a place that had played a huge role in his life and path as a Martial Artist, one that he hadn't visited in a long time.

"Is it just me...or has this place grown bigger?" Rui smiled as he beheld the fortress walls of the Hajin branch of the Martial Academy.

A wave of nostalgia overcame him as he beheld the Martial Academy. His memory of the Martial Academy was quite deep because this location in particular was actually a part of his Mind Palace. That's why he could detect even the slightest of changes over the years.

He could tell that they had expanded their area once more despite being in the middle of one of the largest towns.

As one of the sixteen largest and most impactful sources of new Martial Artists, the importance of the town of Hajin could not be understated. If it weren't for these invaluable institutions, Martial Art may very well regress due to a greater death toll than the Apprentice breakthrough number.

He was just one of countless Martial Artists who were deeply indebted to the Martial Academies.

He went straight through the reception for visitors.

"I am Squire Quarrier," He showed his outdated license to a staff member. "An alumni of the Academy, I'd like to request permission to visit the premises."

"...I'm afraid you're going to need authorization if you haven't booked an appointment," She replied apologetically. "I could file a request although it's unlikely and would take some time nonetheless."

"Please be sure to contact me when that pans out," Rui nodded, before turning around and walking away.

"Excuse me!" She called out to him with a surprised tone, stopping him just as he was exiting the building. "You've just received authorization...from the headmaster himself!"

Rui smiled wryly.

It wasn't too long before he was inside the premises with a visitor card tagged to his chest. Despite having been away for easily more than a decade, his familiarity with the place exceeded those of current students.

The campus was divided into two sections, the inner and outer ring. The latter was for non-Martial Artist students while the former only houses Martial Artists. Students would go through the Foundation and Exploration Stages in the outer ring that were designed to allow them to explore Martial Art, until they broke through to the Apprentice Realm, heading inside to the inner section to join the other Martial Apprentices.

Rui recognized the hopeful and determined looks that the kids in the outer ring had. The desire to become Martial Artists drove these kids to strengthen their foundations enough for them to explore everything that Martial Art had to offer.

Yet it was the inner ring that he was interested in. The first place he went to was the combat training section of the inner ring.

"Ah...there she is," Rui's eyes lit up as his senses picked up on the person that he had been looking for. "It's been a long time, Squire Kyrie."

She turned, gazing at him as her normally calm brown eyes widened with surprise. "Rui..."

Her attention turned towards him as she paused her inspection and oversight on the Martial Apprentices sparring. "You're alive..."

Rui's hands rose in resignation. "Alive and well. Did you think I was dead?"

"I heard from Max and Mana that you died," She remarked.

"Disappeared," Rui corrected.

"In the world of Martial Art, those may as well be the same thing. Do you know the sheer number of Martial Artists who are ruled as dead due to the fact that they never returned?" Her calm voice was stern.

Chapter 1543: Invitation

1543 Invitation

"To think that you would come back after all these years..." Her detached voice contained a hint of emotion as her hand reached for his shoulder patting him. "Welcome back."

"It's good to be back," Rui smiled. "Thank you for looking after Mana and Max..."

"It was a pleasure, not to mention a duty," She replied. "They were earnest and driven. After you disappeared, their resolve had only grown stronger and sturdier, allowing them to graduate and become Martial Squires at quite a remarkable pace."

"Yeah...I've witnessed their growth after returning home," Rui smiled. "They're fine Martial Artists if a little green."

Squire Kyrie studied him, narrowing her eyes as her senses tried to evaluate Rui's current level of power. She was well out of her prime, but she was still a veteran high-grade Martial Squire with decades of experience.

"This..." Her eyes widened with shock as she managed to get a read on Rui's masked power. "This is impossible."

Rui smiled wryly. He had gotten that reaction many times in the few days that he had returned to the Kandrian Empire.

On one hand, he didn't like excessive attention, which is why he didn't flare his power about, announcing to the world he was a Martial Senior. On the other hand, it felt really good when people he respected and cared for recognized and appreciated the fruits of his effort.

"But how...?" She murmured. "How are you already in the Senior Realm?"

He shook his head. "I went through some extreme experiences, allowing me to break through to the Senior Realm this early."

"..." She simply stared at him speechlessly.

Suddenly, another figure barged into the combat facility. "Oh Kyrie, let's go get something to eat afte..."

The man turned to Rui, squinting. "...Quarrier?"

"Squire Dylan," Rui smiled, delighted to meet the old offensive training mentor. "It's been a while."

It didn't take too long for Squire Dylan to come to the same realization after they exchanged basic pleasantries and immediate topics.

"Hold on...wait a minute...something ain't right," He squinted his eyes.

His hands went to Rui's face. Pulling and tugging at it in different directions, squeezing it like it was clay.

"...What are you doing?"

"I'm using my secret grade-ten sensory technique to evaluate power."

Rui's expression morphed into skepticism.

"Holy shit! You're a high-grade Martial Senior!" He gaped, standing back.

Rui was actually more surprised that he managed to nail it. Was he really serious about the grade-ten technique part?

"I always knew that you were truly special, unlike any other Martial Artist that I had ever come across but this..." She murmured. "I did not ever expect this."

"My man....!" Squire Dylan slapped Rui on the shoulder, grinning. "You've been doing really well, eh? Good for you!"

He turned to Kyrie. "What say you and I get dinner together to celebrate him becoming a Martial Senior?"

"Rejected," She calmly replied. "There's no point in celebrating a breakthrough if the person in question isn't there."

"Damn,"

"I admire your perseverance," Rui laughed. "It's been thirteen years, and you still haven't given up. Honestly, I'm surprised you haven't broke through to the Senior Realm with that kind of drive."

"Oh?" Squire Dylan's eyes lit up with an epiphany. "I think I've got it. The way to win her heart!"

Rui laughed as Squire Kyrie sighed in resignation.

Just then, a staff member approached Rui. "Senior Quarrier, the headmaster has invited you to meet him."

"That's nice to hear. I have been looking forward to meeting him after all these years," Rui remarked.

Headmaster Aronian had always shown an unusual interest in Rui. He met up with Rui more frequently than he did the others, inviting him more frequently than the others. Rui had never understood why, especially when he wasn't even the strongest Martial Apprentice back then.

Only now did Rui have a better understanding of why. He had already experienced the remarkable insight into other people that Martial Masters had. They could learn a remarkable amount of information just with a simple glance.

Every Martial Master Rui had run into displayed a usual interest in Rui like they could see something in him that nobody else could. It was only relatively recently that he learned that this most likely had not only to with his remarkable mind but also his VOID algorithm that had inadvertently been his Martial Mind prototype all this time.

"Go, you shouldn't keep the headmaster waiting," Kyrie told him, smiling.

"Besides, as long as you're sticking around, you can always visit again," He waved Rui away.

Rui bade them farewell as he headed on to the Headmaster's office. It wasn't too long before he found himself standing before the large set of doors leading to it. The doors opened before he could even knock on the leading to an incredibly large office filled with all sorts of books and documents.

Rui's eyes fell on the figure sitting behind the large table at the other end of the office.

"...You have truly grown." His elderly voice was calm and composed, instilling peace and harmony in those it graced. "Just as I'd foreseen in the distant past."

He looked exactly as Rui last remembered him. He had a long flowing white beard that he stroked. His eyes reflected his age, coupled with a twinkle of interest.

"You knew that I'd grow?" Rui immediately asked, without even bothering to indulge in formalities or pleasantries. "To this degree?"

"And more...What I hadn't expected was how early it would unfold," He remarked with an aged smile. "You are truly extraordinary, Rui Quarrier. You are a testament that stands tall to everything we do to empower the growth of the younger generations. You are a testament to the world that Martial Art has grown even stronger. Your very existence is one of hope to us of Martial Art."

"I wouldn't have gotten here if not for the vital aid to my growth that the Martial Academy provided, Headmaster," Rui brought his fist to his hand, bowing with respect in accordance to Martial norms. "I'm grateful for everything that you've done thus far."

Chapter 1544: Be Warned

1544 Be Warned

Headmaster Aronian smiled. "There's no need to be so stiff, young Rui. This old man has known you ever since you were a child, and now you've grown to become a fine young man and a brilliant Martial Artist. Come, have a seat. We have much to speak about."

"Yes sir," Rui obliged, taking a seat opposite to the elderly Martial Master.

"As curious as I am to hear stories and tales from your eight-

year voyage for power that you have recently returned from, I'm afraid that we will have to save that for another day," He remarked, growing more serious in his demeanor. "As I said, we have much to speak about."

Rui raised an eyebrow. "Is something the matter, Headmaster?"

"Well, for starters. As you might have already expected, your return to the Kandrian Empire has already spread like fire through the upper echelons of the Empire. Many well-informed circles of power, wealth, and influence have already received the news of your return, and more importantly, your return as a powerful Martial Senior," Headmaster Aronian informed him. "Naturally, such impactful events do not go unnoticed, and certainly do not go untouched."

Rui's eyes narrowed sharply. "...Untouched? What are you implying, sir?"

The elderly Martial Master stared at him deeply for a moment, before continuing. "What I'm saying is that your return as a powerful Martial Senior, you yourself are an event of great import. An event of great opportunity. A powerful Martial Senior is a powerful resource, especially during these uneasy times."

Rui picked up on the subtext of his words. "...The Kandrian Throne War."

Headmaster Aronian heaved a sigh. "It all began five years ago, when Emperor Rael Di Kandria fell into a coma that spanned nearly half a year. The princes and princesses sprung into action, ready to cease the throne by force. A civil war nearly broke out. The only reason it didn't was because the emperor woke up just in time to reconsolidate his power and authority. However, his already deteriorating condition had deteriorated even more. The incident had reduced him to be bedridden and required constant medical supervision. His condition has deteriorated even more since then, although the details are well-hidden and obscured."

The headmaster paused, heaving a sigh. "Regardless, he had been afflicted by the Eternal Dream disease. An inexplicable condition that eventually causes a person to sleep forever. It can be slowed down and even stalled with particularly potent esoteric resources and the highest quality of medical care, but it cannot be treated or cured. It is a terminal condition. This news could not be kept secret any longer after his six month coma, and it triggered the cold war that has begun between the princes and princesses."

"I see..." Rui narrowed his eyes. "I hadn't known any of this before."

"You just returned to the empire recently, so it is understandable," Headmaster Aronian gently reassured him. "Regardless, the main point is that the princes and princesses began gathering political capital for the eventual day that the emperor would pass away. The moment he does, the cold war will

transition to an active war. Whosoever has gathered the most capital and power, be it economic, political, or militaristic, will win the war, be recognized as the crown heir to the throne by the executive branch of the government and will be crowned the Third Emperor or Empress of the Kandrian Empire."

"...And Martial Artists are naturally among the most highly sought capital in this war for the throne, I'd expect." Rui remarked.

"Precisely," Headmaster Aronian remarked. "Especially powerful Martial Artists with a lot of prominence. Such as..."

He gave Rui a telling look. "...the youngest Martial Senior in history, high-grade in combat power."

Rui heaved a sigh. "I knew I wouldn't be able to avoid this."

It was too much to hope. How could he expect to be able to return to the Kandrian Empire, shattering the record for the youngest Martial Senior and then hope to be ignored by everybody and go about a peaceful normal life?

"Frankly, I don't care about the Kandrian Throne War in an of itself," Rui replied. "I don't have any strong political or economic ideologies that I would like to lobby for. As long as it doesn't negatively affect my family, and doesn't get in the way of my personal ambition, I really don't care."

"Your aversion is more than understandable," Headmaster Aronian reassured. "I myself have been personally approached by each of Their Highnesses, looking to gain my allegiance and patronage. I had half a mind to reject all of them and stay neutral."

Rui stared at him with interest. "And...?"

"I do not wish to divulge which faction I have decided to support," Headmaster Aronian shook his head. "One of the reasons that I wished to speak to you was to firstly inform you that you are a highly desirable gem to the various princes and princesses. I wanted to caution you to be prepared to be approached by each of Their Highnesses, either by their most esteemed subordinates, core patrons, or perhaps them personally. It is better to be prepared for this than to be caught off-guard."

Rui nodded. "I appreciate the tip. I'll definitely be prepared for that. Although I said that I don't care for the Kandrian Throne War if it didn't affect my family, the fact of the matter is that it could affect my family."

Rui recalled what he had heard about one of the competing princesses; Princess Raemina and her alleged communistic dictatorship political doctrine. As someone who was born during the Cold War back on Earth, he did not have a good impression of communism, or dictatorships, but especially not both those things together.

If she was crowned Empress, it would undoubtedly affect trade and commerce across the entire nation, impacting trade hubs like the Town of Hajin where many of the men and women of the Quarrier Orphanage had part-time jobs and earned money from.

That alone was enough to concern Rui enough that he couldn't ignore the war.

Chapter 1545: Technique Impacts

1545 Technique Impacts

"As long as you're aware and prepared," Headmaster Aronian nodded. "That is one matter I wanted I merely wished to bring up. On a broader note, be prepared to be approached by many powerful people, organizations, and forces even on matters unrelated to the Kandrian Throne War. There are organizations that will seek your patronage, offer sponsorships, and other agreements and transactions with you."

"I got a few of those when I was a Martial Apprentice too, shortly after becoming the finalist of the Martial Contest," Rui remarked, recalling distant memories.

He had also received such offers after becoming the seventy-

second Virodhabhasa Champion.

"What you will receive from here on out will be much greater than that," Headmaster Aronian replied. "Martial Seniors have reached a level of power where the forces that can afford to regularly commission them usually seek to gain some form of direct long-term employment, bypassing the Martial Union. Carefully consider all the pros and cons of doing so when they approach you."

Rui nodded. "I'll keep that in mind."

"I'm sure you'll be prudent," Headmaster Aronian remarked. "Moving on to more important topics that are pertinent to you. There is much to discuss about the Hungry Pain technique that you offered as a contribution four, nearly five now, years ago."

Rui raised an eyebrow with interest. He was curious to hear what the Martial Union had to say on the matter.

"You claimed that the technique aided in the creation of a Martial Body that was an entire grade stronger than the norm," He remarked. "We have since verified the effects of the technique on the Martial Squires you claimed had used it, and verified that there were indeed anomalous deviations in the estimates of the physical parameters of the subjects similar to that of your own. While this alone wasn't enough proof of the effects of the technique, it was enough to commence a set of trials to establish the effects of the technique."

"Several experiments were conducted regarding the effects of the Hungry Pain on the Martial Body, each with hundreds of test subjects, and we eventually came to the conclusion that not only were your claims substantive, you had also slightly underestimated the impacts," Headmaster Aronian explained, smiling.

Rui furrowed his eyebrows. "...Well, my affinity for Mind is much greater than it is for Body. I wouldn't be surprised if someone like Nel benefited from the technique than I did."

"He did," Headmaster Aronian chuckled. "His Martial Body started off at grade three when the norm, of course, is grade one. The mean improvement was a bit above fifty percent."

Rui smiled. "I believe mine was about thirty percent."

"Correct," Headmaster Aronian. "As you can expect, this sparked a huge uproar in the Martial Union. We have never in history made such massive improvements in our Squire evolution breakthrough procedure. And more importantly, we have certainly such improvements with a zero addition to the cost of production."

Rui smiled, proud of what his work had done for Martial Art as a whole.

"With the addition of the Hungry Pain technique to standard preparation for the Squire evolution breakthrough process, the youngest generation of our Martial Squires is, pound for pound, the strongest generation of Martial Artists in history," Headmaster Aronian smiled. "Thanks to you, the Kandrian Empire definitively has the most powerful Squire evolution breakthrough process anywhere in the continent, including the other thirteen powerhouse Sage-level and Transcendent-level nations and organizations across the continent. The Panamic Martial Federation had even made an official inquiry into the notable qualitative boost in the Kandrian Martial Union's youngest Squire generation. We, of course, refused to share the method, it would be foolish to do so without securing massive concessions at bare minimum."

"It turned into a bigger deal than I had expected," Rui murmured with interest. "Then again, I guess I shouldn't be surprised."

"I don't think you'll be able to keep it secret for too long," Rui remarked. "Martial Apprentices receive the technique before turning into Martial Squires, there is bound to be a leak soon, if it hasn't happened already."

"That is accurate," Headmaster Aronian nodded. "That is why we have decided to withhold from actually divulging the technique to Martial Apprentices."

Rui frowned, confused. "Then how...?"

"We altered the technique, replacing the self-hypnosis of the technique with active hypnosis from a mentalist Martial Artist," Headmaster Aronian. "The Martial Apprentice remains in a trance where we then hypnotize him or her to not recall the effects of the training. By the time they're read for the breakthrough procedure, they have no recollection of the Hungry Pain technique."

Rui's eyes widened with surprise. "That is a rather extreme measure to take."

"It is necessary if we are to hide the technique from the spies of the various powerhouses across the continent, not to mention powerful intelligence organizations like the Beggar's Sect and Shadow Guild across the continent," Headmaster Aronian reassured. "We have taken the highest level of information security measures to ensure that it will never be leaked."

"...What about the Kandrian Empire?" Rui wondered. "Unlike all those other organizations, the Kandrian Empire houses the Martial Union."

"We have signed a highly advantageous contract with the executive government and the Royal Army where we supply them with the service of the newly-enhanced Squire evolution breakthrough procedure in exchange for an extravagant amount of gold per Squire breakthrough we perform for them." Headmaster Aronian replied.

Rui smiled wryly, it appeared that the Martial Union had truly been doing well with the technique that he had given them. "Well, I'm glad to hear that the Martial Union appreciated the technique. It had been rather easy to develop when I decided to, so it didn't really click that it would become something so significant, back then."

He had created the Hungry Pain technique within a single day. Compared to the other techniques that he had created, the effort that he had put into it was rather trivial. Still, the fact that the Martial Union came to appreciate the technique to such a degree was good news, because it meant that his remuneration would be that high.

Chapter 1546: Evaluation

1546 Evaluation

"Naturally, the Martial Union is deeply delighted with the contribution that you have made," Headmaster Aronian smiled. "The Martial Union had always rewarded contributors in accordance with the value of the contributions made, and we intend to do the same in your case. Rest assured that you will be rewarded accordingly. The Martial Union is particularly anxious to not let go of a talent like you."

The more Headmaster Aronian had spoken about the technique, the more Rui realized just how impactful his contribution had been. It wasn't too big a deal for him, but it was a treasure for the Martial Union.

An immediate fifty-percent boost in power for all future Martial Squires and above, free of cost, was a dream come true for Martial forces. Ordinarily, the only way to improve the effects of the Squire evolution breakthrough was to increase the expenses of the process by enormous degrees.

Orders of magnitude, even. There were diminishing returns as the prices of more potent esoteric substances were greatly inflated past their actual value due to scarcity. Rui's solution may as well have conjured up power out of thin air since the costs were peanuts compared to the actual power that it gave.

With that in mind, he could see why the Martial Union went insane for the Hungry Pain technique.

This made him more excited to hear the remuneration of the Martial Union. While he was doing pretty well these days, the Martial Union was a powerhouse in the Martial Art industry, with resources for growth and training that only an extremely minute proportion of Martial Art organizations could match.

Earning their favor was highly beneficial for young Martial Artists like himself who didn't have tons of accumulation.

"Now then, young Rui, let us go into the details of what this means for you." Headmaster Aronian grew a bit more serious. "Are you familiar with how the Martial Union evaluates the value of techniques?"

Rui nodded as he recalled what Senior Ceeran had told him long ago when he submitted the Pathfinder technique to the Martial Union. "I believe the Martial Union evaluates the value of technique by technique potency, difficulty, and dissemination viability."

Technique potency measured how powerful a technique was, as in a technique's impact on combat. This was in and of itself a variable with many sub-parameters such as the technique's mechanical efficiency of raw energy supplied versus the produced outcome, as well as consideration of how tactically and strategically significant the produced outcome was in combat.

"In this regard, the Hungry Pain technique is extremely impressive. Allowing a Martial Body to be fifty percent stronger than it would otherwise be is a remarkably significant improvement to the Martial Body," Headmaster Aronian remarked. "Fifty percent may not sound like for active techniques, but passive techniques are treated with different standards to active techniques, especially passive techniques relating to the Squire evolution breakthrough. No other passive Squire evolution technique we have ever seen comes even close to a mean boost of fifty percent in the resultant Martial Body. Thus, the Hungry Pain technique excels in this regard."

Rui nodded, simply listening.

"In regards to difficulty, this too is an area where the Hungry Pain technique excels. It is a modification of a mental technique with low difficulty originally. The only real difficulty is the pain and the hunger that the Martial Apprentice must endure, but given the boost in power that it results in, it is easily worth it. Especially when compared to the suffering of the Squire evolution breakthrough procedure," Headmaster Aronian explained.

The lower the difficulty of the technique, the more people could master it, increasing the value of the technique.

After all, what was the point of an extraordinary grade-ten technique that was so difficult that literally nobody could master it?

The impact of such a technique was zero because it did not improve Martial Art or Martial Artists in any way. It did not change anything.

This had been an issue with the Pathfinder technique that he had contributed to the Martial Union which had reduced its value. The Hungry Pain technique had no such problems, literally every single Martial Apprentice could master it without a problem.

"Dissemination viability is also similar," Headmaster Aronian explained. "There are no barriers, or hurdles that prevent a large number of Martial Artists from mastering it. It doesn't require niche affinities and is a very broad and general principle. Thus, the Hungry Pain techniques scores extremely well on all three parameters that you have mentioned. However, there are parameters in addition to these three that you don't seem to be informed on," Headmaster Aronian remarked, earning a confused look from Rui.

"I heard this nearly ten years ago," Rui remarked, recalling the distant interaction.

"It is a more recent amendment to our evaluation protocols," Headmaster Aronian informed Rui. "We have now also evaluate techniques based on Realm viability. This variable measures how well a technique from a certain Martial Artist can be applied to Martial Artists of other Realms. A technique that is limited only to the Senior Realm such that it cannot be used by weaker Realms and is useless in greater Realms is something that limits the value of the technique than if it could be used across all Realms. This previously used to be swept under the rug of dissemination viability, but we have decided that it is important enough to gain its own category."

Rui nodded, that made sense. Powerful techniques that could be applied to all Realms were significantly superior to powerful techniques that were limited to one Realm.

"This area is perhaps the one place where the Hungry Pain does not score nearly as well. It cannot be applied to existing Martial Artists above the Squire Realm, although future Martial Artists above the Squire Realm will have already mastered it," Headmaster Aronian. "This means that it is viable for all Realms, but not immediately and never for those who have broken through to the Squire Realm without it. While they can still master it, the proportional benefits are lower since there is none of the extreme synergies between the Martial Body's energy consumption and the seemingly endless supply from the Hungry Pain technique."

Chapter 1547: Presentation

1547 Presentation

"That makes sense," Rui nodded. "A technique that would instantly or rapidly improve the Martial Bodies of all Martial Sages, Masters, Seniors, and Squires is much superior to a technique that will only do so for future Squires, Seniors, Masters, and Sages."

"Of course, that does not mean that the latter is not extremely valuable. It certainly is," Headmaster Aronian reassured. "The Martial Union is an organization with a lot of patience. Thus even the long-term benefits of the Hungry Pain technique are extraordinarily valuable to us, rest assured."

Rui smiled. "You don't need to pacify me, Headmaster. I am fully aware of the importance of pragmatism. While perhaps centuries in the future there will be a Martial Sage born who will be fifty

percent stronger thanks to my technique, I am aware that the Martial Union cannot possibly reward me with remuneration that is worth half of a Martial Sage for that distant outcome."

"I am pleased that you haven't taken offense," Headmaster Aronian replied, relieved. "Nonetheless, we will be remunerating and rewarding you handsomely. However, before we do, there is one thing that needs to be addressed."

Rui raised an eyebrow, waiting.

"The information that you provided to Commissioner Reze nearly five years ago details the training regime quite thoroughly and precisely, but you haven't explained the theoretical and scientific mechanics and principles of the technique. That would not be a problem if not for the fact that the Hungry Pain technique has utterly confounded our department of research and development. Many thorough observational and sensory experiments have been conducted to discern the principles of the technique, but they haven't been able to decipher the technique," Headmaster Aronian explained. "We have even had Martial Masters employ their senses into the body, but haven't been able to detect anything that could explain what is happening."

Rui smirked wryly at that.

The Hungry Pain technique operated at a cellular but especially molecular level. Cells were broken down into elementary organic compounds and could serve to rejuvenate the body. The process was extraordinarily accelerated and magnified such that all dying cells were efficiently converted into usable organic compounds.

However, it was merely a magnification and acceleration of an otherwise normal molecular phenomenon. Because the field of biochemistry and organic chemistry of the Panama Continent was highly undeveloped due to their extreme reliance on the magic of esoteric substances, thus they were simply unable to grasp the core mechanics of the Hungry Pain technique.

It was an unpredicted predicament. He hadn't included an explanation of the science beyond the non-scientific explanation of 'the body recycles power' because he was in a hurry when he prepared the technique booklet for Commissioner Reze. The training was more important than the theory.

"I can provide a brief but detailed write-up," Rui shrugged nonchalantly. "This is a non-issue."

Headmaster Aronian shook his head. "The Martial Union requests you to make a formal presentation in a science conference that representatives and Martial Artists of various divisions, departments, and branches that have expressed deep interest in the technique will attend."

"..." Rui was a little speechless.

It was true that the Hungry Pain was highly valued, but was there really a reason to make such a big deal about the theoretical framework? A detailed write-up worked just as well as a scientific presentation, did it not?

Then his inner scientist recalled the various scientific conferences that he had attended and presented research papers in.

It appeared that the Panama Continent was similar to Earth in that regard.

Regardless, this was a matter of concern for the Martial Union. Rui knew that he would probably gain a fraction of his rewards if the Martial Union was not satisfied with their understanding of this powerful but inscrutable technique.

"Fine," Rui heaved a sigh. "But I don't care to get bogged down too many matters that normally accompany such scientific conferences and presentations."

"It is curious that you are aware of such matters, considering your youth and lack of a scientific background," Headmaster Aronian stroked his beard with an intrigued expression.

Rui shrugged. "Regardless, I have to provide a scientific presentation, and that's it right? No other complications?"

"Indeed," Headmaster Aronian nodded. "The Martial Union maintains high standards for transparency when it comes to Martial Art. It is the safest and the best way to proceed with a secured and well-understood foundation. We will rapidly finish the final evaluations of your rewards and remuneration and give them to you."

Rui could understand that, but it only added to his burden, having to go through a tedious presentation because of it. Nonetheless, he was willing, if only because it would get him his remuneration sooner.

Still, it was interesting that he found himself doing this yet again even though he was a Martial Artist. What kind of presentation did they even expect from a Martial Senior like himself in the first place?

"The conference will contain important figures from not just the various formal divisions, departments, and branches, but also informal groups such as Martial Sects of the Kandrian Empire," Headmaster Aronian informed him. "The Martial Body is a matter that is deeply important to each of the Martial Sects, and anything that affects it to such a degree is of both a great interest and a great concern to them. Rest assured that you will find important higher-ups from each of the major sects. They have people across the entirety of the Martial Union, so it will be easy for them to secure a spot in your conference presentation. Be aware of that."

"Alright..." Rui heaved a sigh.

His entanglement with other forces seemed to grow more complicated ever since he returned. Not that he expected to be ignored, that was not happening, but he had hoped it wouldn't be too much.

He was wrong.

From the Kandrian Throne War to the exaggerated fallout from the Hungry Pain technique, Rui had already found himself in the midst of a lot of forces that had a deep interest in him.

Chapter 1548: Information

1548 Information

"Our administration has yet to finalize all the nitty-gritty details. It is not easy to find a time and place that works for all the Masters and other higher-up figures that wish to attend this conference," Master Aronian gently informed Rui. "They will inform you of the details and offer you a formal invitation when it is time."

Rui nodded. "If I'm to give a formal presentation, then I'll need some time to prepare."

Master Aronian nodded. "Rest assured that your needs will be fully accounted for."

Rui heaved a sigh. He had plenty to think about.

First, he needed to consider the consequences of conveying the theoretical framework to such a large panel of distinguished Masters and experts. He had not forgotten that his scientific knowledge was anomalous in this world.

It was not supposed to exist. He had brought over knowledge from a much more advanced civilization with a much deeper understanding of the mechanics of reality.

What would happen if he were to present this knowledge to a panel of experts who ought to be aware of the limits of theoretical science?

Additionally, because their biochemistry was essentially non-

existent, they weren't really even qualified to hear his explanation. On top of that, his explanations would be rooted in Earth's terminology, this too was problematic.

He needed to find the right sweet spot for how much information he ought to divulge that will raise as few questions as possible.

For now, he needed to go back and flesh out a plan.

"Ah, one more thing," Headmaster Aronian interjected as he pulled a drawer, pulling a card from within it. "Your old license is outdated, we have prepared your new one."

He placed the card on the table, pushing it towards Rui.

[Rui Quarrier

Martial Senior]

The card's designs and colors were different before, emboldening and highlighting the Martial Senior part.

"Thanks..." Rui smiled, accepting it. "It feels ceremonious."

"It is," The Martial Master reassured him. "That brings about an end to the topics that I wanted to discuss with you. I hope you'll keep everything I've said in mind and act accordingly."

"I don't intend to forget. Thank you for everything, Headmaster," Rui smiled.

"Hah, it's nothing worth mentioning, young Rui."

It wasn't long before Rui found himself leaving the Academy, heading back home from the Town of Hajin, deep in thought. He had much to consider from his meeting with Headmaster Aronian.

Not just about the part where he was requested to give a presentation regarding the Hungry Pain technique, but also the Kandrian Throne War and the upper echelons of the Kandrian Empire looking to reel him into their sphere of influence.

"No peace even when I return home after eight years," He shook his head. It was a shame, but this was the state of matters. He was dealt his cards, now he needed to make the best of them.

The good part was that this was not an acute crisis, more so tricky problems. At the very least, he was quite confident that nothing would happen to his family this time around.

In the event that he chose to be neutral in regards to the Kandrian Throne War, the consequences were losing out on opportunities and the opportunity to impact the cold war.

That was something that he might actually want, especially if there were other princes who had some psycho political doctrines that would make life much worse than it currently was.

Had he been a Squire, he could just forget about it. Squires were far too weak to be able to impact anything. But a high-grade Martial Senior was just entering the boundary where his presence might make a meaningful difference, especially given his identity as the youngest Martial Senior in history.

'First thing's first, I need to learn more about the Kandrian Throne War,' Rui heaved a sigh. It was incredibly foolish to make a decision without being fully aware about the very fact of the matter that he was going to make a decision on. He hadn't bothered thus far, but now that it had been clarified that he would be entangled, and perhaps wouldn't want to avoid being entangled, he needed to learn more.

'I could purchase the information from the Martial Union or the Beggar's Sect,' Rui mused.

The Martial Union had a large and powerful intelligence department and network through which they gained immense information. It was this very department that allowed them to estimate mission difficulty and other details, it also served as a source of income by having that information sold to the highest bidder.

'But...it would be foolish to trust either of them completely,' Rui's eyes narrowed.

Neither the Martial Union nor the Beggar's Sect were objective about the matter, each organization had their own vested interests in this particular matter. Thus, Rui could not trust either of them of providing him truly objective information.

The Beggar's Sect had already sabotaged one of the princesses while the Martial Union had one of its own candidates in the race. The former would certainly portray some princesses in a worse light while the latter would be more gentle regarding their own candidate.

'That's why I'll get both,' Rui smirked.

Getting both would allow him to see through the truth much better than if he relied on only one of them to gain an understanding of the political turmoil of the Kandrian Empire. He gently declined from the sky, reaching the ground as he took out the little badge that Sian had given him, putting it on his chest.

He didn't care that this was basically the same as announcing to the Beggar's Sect that he was Rui Quarrier. He was ninety-

five percent that they had already figured it out. Though he did have some plans on how to keep it a secret nonetheless.

"Ah, young man, we may have what you seek," A guard outside in a large and expansive complex of called out to him.

Rui wasn't even surprised this time. He turned around, looking at the giant name plastered on the gates outside the corporate complex.

[Lambargeau Xavier Legal Services]

Chapter 1549: Purchase

1549 Purchase

'...A law firm this time,' Rui heaved a sigh. 'I'm not even surprised.'

The Beggar's Sect had already infiltrated a consortium. Infiltrating a powerful law guild in the town of Hajin wasn't too much of a stretch either.

Still, it was quite a marvel how an organization of ordinary folks essentially ended up taking over powerful organizations by literally infesting its employee workforce with their fellow members.

This was a kind of takeover that you simply couldn't fight back against. Rui knew that the members of the Beggar's Sect were extremely well infiltrated into humanity, not because they were elite spies or agents, but because they truly were normal people who truly were integrated into normal society.

What could a corporation even do to stop them?

There was essentially no way to detect them, and it wasn't as though a corporation could stop employed employees and workers. Yet the moment they did, it was already over. It was only a matter of time before those employees would climb up into positions of power, and before too long, the Beggar's Sect would have seized complete control over the corporation.

As a Martial Artist who had no intentions of ever creating a corporation, he didn't really care about this.

Rui followed the clerk in, heading through the well-endowed complex. Lavish gardens, fountains, and even statues were scattered across the complex. "This is rather extravagant."

The clerk smiled. "The Town of Hajin is quite extravagant, Senior Quarrier, thus, so are we. Anything that isn't extravagant draws attention due to being dissimilar to its neighbors and environment."

Rui nodded silently. He had a point.

"Please come this way, sir." The man led him through a series of corridors before arriving at a lavish office with transparent glass doors at the end of the building.

Rui glanced at the words inscribed on the glass door.

[Senior Partner

Maiun Kayla]

He opened the door, gesturing to Rui to enter. Inside the office was an elderly woman formally dressed in a feminine suit that crisply fit her slender body.

"Senior Quarrier," She smiled lightly, standing up and walking over to him as he entered. "It's a pleasure to finally meet you. I must say, I have heard much about you from our other branches. You have gained a reputation for leaving behind storms everywhere you go."

Rui shrugged. "I'm just doing the job, Missus Kayla."

"And I heard you do them well, have a seat." She gestured. "Would you like a drink?"

"I'm good."

"Well then, what can we do for you, Senior Quarrier?" She leaned back in her seat, smiling at Rui.

"I want information on the Kandrian Throne War," Rui replied.

Her smile slowly disappeared as her eyes grew serious. "That's highly sensitive and high-value intelligence. Its value far exceeds even the price of the previous information package you purchased last time."

Rui was not surprised. As rich as Chairman Deacon was, not even he could hold a candle to the sheer mind-boggling wealth of the Royal Treasury of the Kandrian Empire. The seals on any sensitive strategic intelligence on the royal family were probably unshakable for any Martial Senior, and probably any Martial Master as well.

Rui shook his head. "I'm not looking for highly strategic information that can alter the course of the conflict between the royals. I'm looking for more general information on them. I actually know little to nothing about them, and I have recently learned that I have reason to know more about them."

He glanced at her.

Her expression didn't so much as twitch.

'Tsk, she has too much control over her body,' Rui was hoping to see if he could root out any information from her non-verbal communication and micro-expressions, but it appeared that she had gone through similar training that he did during the diplomat training for Vilun Island.

"That's much more accessible and far lower in value," She replied. "However, you'll need to be more specific about what information you seek to purchase."

"Policy positions, political ideology, character, monetary capital, Martial capital, credibility, and reliability," Rui fired off several factors that he cared about and needed. "That shouldn't be too exaggerated in its price."

"That is indeed much more affordable," She replied. "I'll have the contract ready soon enough."

It wasn't long before the two of them signed two documents.

"The document will burn if it's not opened in a specific manner that only we know as a measure to prevent you from leaking proof of a transaction with the Beggar's Sect," She informed him. "We will send you a bill for the information commission that you may either through undertaking operations and missions or through gold, if you please."

"Do you accept Martial Credits?" Rui wondered.

"Of course we do," She replied. "The Martial Union's internal currency is reliable and weighty."

Rui nodded. "Alright then, pleasure doing business, as always."

He headed to the Martial Union's branch in the Town of Hajin.

"ID?"

"Rui Quarrier," Rui replied at the security check-in, showing the guard his newly minted Martial license.

Suddenly, it was like he had dropped a bomb.

The people around him went silent, turning towards him with scrutinizing him.

"Black hair..."

"Also, black eyes..."

"It's him...!"

"Oh..." Rui murmured as he realized what he had done.

"IT'S RUI QUARRIER!" One Martial Apprentice gaped.

"So he's the youngest Martial Senior in history!"

"Excuse me, can I please get an autograph?!"

"Wai-!" Rui tried protesting, but it was too late.

Rui was suddenly swarmed with person after person as they approached him to get a good look at the youngest national celebrity within the Martial community!

"Huh?" The crowd suddenly did a collective double take as Rui simply disappeared midair.

"Where did he go?!"

"Find him!"

Rui shook his head disapprovingly as he floated midair, using Lesser Phantomind Void to misdirect their senses entirely. "Tsk, I forgot. Normal people who aren't that deep into Martial Art don't know but..."

But he was standing in the Martial Union. Everybody in here knew who he was ever since news of the youngest Senior in history returning to the Kandrian Empire spread within the nation.

Chapter 1550: Shocking Revelation

1550 Shocking Revelation

He sneaked away, heading to the section of the Intelligence Department within the branch, approaching a staff member at the counter.

"Ah, how may I help you sir?"

"I'd like to make a certain purchase," Rui replied, slipping a sheet of paper listing the intelligence that he had purchased.

Her eyes widened when she read the itemized list of information. "W-We'll process your commission and get back to you."

Rui simply nodded, activating Lesser Phantomind Void as he left the place, heading back home.

Eventually, he found himself back home at the Quarrier Orphanage, heaving a deep sigh.

Now it was simply time to wait for the two intelligence entities to gather the information packages that he had commissioned and send him the bill.

He wasn't worried about being short on funds. Although he had used up all the funds that he got from Esosale Suppliers.

He still hadn't touched all the income he earned by serving as a diplomat for the Martial Union for a year and a half in Vilun Island and for successfully resolving the diplomatic dead-end with the G'ak'arkan Tribe.

That had actually earned him quite the handsome reward that he hadn't really touched, in addition to the revenue from many missions from when he was a Martial Squire. Considering he wasn't asking for sensitive strategic information, he was hoping that he could resolve this with the income he had.

"Rui?" Alice knocked on his door.

"Hm?" Rui walked over, opening the door.

"Why don't you come to our house for tea?" She smiled. "Farion and I have wanted to talk to you about some matters, you see."

Rui tilted his head, shrugging. "Sure. Matters? Is there anything you need help with. Because you just need to say the word and I'll help with all I can."

Rui was quite eager to offer his help to the Quarrier Orphanage. With his current level of power, there was nothing they could reasonably face that he couldn't resolve by himself.

"It's nothing that serious. We just want to speak with you, it's been so many years since we spoke to you ourselves to our heart's content," She stood up on her toes, pecking him on the cheek before going away. "Don't forget, ok? This is really important."

"Ok..." Rui frowned, confused. "Sure thing."

It wasn't long before he found himself sitting at their little house next to the Orphanage, as Alice served all three of them a hot cup of tea. Their daughter, Ruina, played with dolls by the fireplace.

It was a warm and cozy place, one that truly brought peace to the heart.

"I'm happy that the two of you got together," Rui remarked. "I didn't expect it, considering your personalities are the opposite, but I'm happy that you're happy together, and gave me the honor of being your daughter's godfather."

"Hmph, now that you're her godfather, you better not be going away too far or too long."

Rui smiled wryly, turning to Ruina, sitting down beside her.

"Hehehe!" Ruina giggled as Rui played with her.

Alice smiled at the sight. "You were always the golden boy of the orphanage. I missed you so much when you were gone. In a way, naming her after you was to preserve your memory, the memory of adorable little brother who had done so much for us."

Her smile grew bittersweet for a moment before returning to its cheery self. "But now that you're back, we're going to make the best of our time together!"

The three of them spoke for quite some time about various personal topics until Ruina eventually groggy. Alice put her to bed, returning back to the the little living room.

"So then..." Rui spoke up. "What exactly is going on with you two?"

He glanced at the two of them. He knew that something was up, they were uncharacteristic at the moment. "It's fine, you can tell me anything."

Alice stared at him for a moment with an unusually blank expression before procuring a sealed envelope, and handing it to Rui.

Rui took the envelop, glancing back at the two of them with a puzzled expression, before opening it.

What he saw inside shook him.

It was an itemized bill for the intelligence commission that he had made to the Beggar's Sect earlier that day!

Along with it, was a blank form for a transaction bill statement from the Martial Union. He would be able to specify the amount of Martial Credits that the specified receiver would be able to redeem for gold.

His eyes widened as he realized what this meant. He slowly turned back to the two of them, shocked.

"The two of you..." He whispered. "You're part of the Beggar's Sect?"

Neither of them said anything in response, silently meeting his gaze. A torrent of emotions washed over Rui, he didn't even know what to feel about this revelation.

He only uttered a single word.

"...Why?"

Farion heaved a sigh. "We did what we thought was best for us and the orphanage, Rui. We're not like you. We're not super strong. We don't have the power to level a forest with a single motion of an arm. We're just ordinary humans. We're powerless...This is the only way we can fight back against the forces of the world."

Rui closed his eyes, breathing deeply as he tried his best to maintain his calm and composure. He did not want to intimidate them with the aura of his Martial Senior. A strong Mind Mask wrapped around his mind, reducing his presence to that of an ordinary human.

"How did this happen?" He asked a single question, looking them in the eyes without any reproach.

When he thought about it rationally, there was no reason to lose his cool. His feeling of being betrayed was irrational. He hadn't been around for eight years after having put them in danger. He was in no position to lose his temper or cool. All he wanted to do right now was understand.