

Martial Unity 1551

Chapter 1551: Conviction

"It happened a year before we got married," Farion explained. "I..."

He heaved a sigh.

The air grew heavy as Alice walked over putting a hand on his shoulder.

"I had gotten addicted Noremin," Farion admitted. Rui's eyes widened, stunned. He recognized that name. That was the name of one of the three narcotic plants that the Great Forest of Hypnonarak had in large quantities. The drug was said to put the user in a dreamlike bliss, making them lose sight of reality.

"The situation had gotten bad..." He heaved a deep sigh. "I had almost reached the point of no return. I would not have gotten back if not for Alice, that's for sure."

He gazed deeply at her with an expression of affection and love. "But also, it would not have gone well without the Beggar's Sect."

Rui skimmed through his memories as he recalled the whole reason that the Beggar's Sect wanted him to cripple the Carnil Mafia's drug trafficking operations. Their operations were to use the time that Rui suppressed the Carnil Mafia's drug operations to detox and rehabilitate drug addicts. It appeared that Farion had benefited from their goals to prevent the lower-class folks of a region from being completely destroyed by the drug. "They told me that they could help me and that I could join them to ensure something like this never happens again," Farion explained. "I'd need to undergo nine months of training in covert information transmission and their protocols, and I would be remunerated. I could help ensure that such a thing never happens to the people of this region or the orphanage. I...accepted, along with Alice."

Rui was starting to understand why the two of them joined the sect.

"And...it paid off," Farion smiled at Rui uncharacteristically. "Four months ago, you destroyed their operation permanently. Since then, the drug supply has ceased entirely. I observe the state of folks of the lower class document my observations and send them to the sect, and I have observed that things

have shifted for the better thanks to you. The Beggar's Sect kept its promise, and as far as I'm concerned, they have earned my trust. That is why both of us continue to work for them. They were even considerate enough to not require the two of us to spy on our loved ones, otherwise, we wouldn't have joined. Our jobs are limited to the outer districts of the Town of Hajin and its outskirts."

There was silence. Rui didn't even know how to react to this information. However, the tale wasn't nearly as dark as he had been expecting. It appeared that the Beggar's Sect was not all talk. They truly were for, of, and by the common man and woman.

"I see..." Rui managed to finally remark. "So that's why..."

"I hope you don't feel...betrayed," Alice remarked. "We're still your family. And we would never ever do anything that would harm or hurt you in any way. The Beggar's Sect cuts a clear line between our duties and personal lives to ensure that we never have to choose between them."

"How difficult is the job?" Rui asked carefully. "The training was extremely difficult. I have never been pushed to my absolute limits to that degree in my entire life. It was extremely difficult, learning how to observe, how to distill my observations to the barest essence of important and meaningful information, and how to memorize that distilled information quickly. I was also trained on how to efficiently and effectively organize information. Information this. Information that. It was truly difficult," The two of them went pale at the memory of their training. "But thanks to that, we can conduct intelligence surveys without doing anything outwardly suspicious or eye-drawing, while going about the same tasks that I did before. Their methods and training were truly effective."

"I see..." Rui noted. "And how much are you paid?" "Twenty-eight coppers a week," Alice remarked. Rui narrowed his eyes. That was such a low amount that he would never ever notice it if such an amount disappeared from his account every day. "I know what you're thinking," Farion understood his concerns. "You think we are being underpaid. You're wrong. Like I said. I don't actually do any extra physical manual labor. I still drive rickshaws around the outer districts of the Town of Hajin throughout the day like I did before. I've just gathered a lot of information simultaneously with no extra physical effort. The report part is also easy. It's just the training that was maniacally hard."

"I see..." Rui softly replied as he considered their words.

He was pretty sure that the Beggar's Sect remunerated its members based on the value of the information they brought in. Someone like Maiun, the senior partner he had met earlier, was part of the

upper echelons at a large and powerful law guild and was naturally going to be remunerated more handsomely.

Although Farion and Alice were each being paid twenty-eight coppers a week, the total expenses of the Beggar's Sect were probably enormous considering that they probably had more than a billion members like them so much so that even the enormous funds that they received from selling information will be largely siphoned into remunerating its payrolls.

Besides, considering the low cost of living that the two of them had, twenty-eight coppers a week was enough to make their living more comfortable.

"There are also additional benefits like forewarnings of dangers," Farion remarked. "Especially the larger kinds that affect a general region or town. With that, we can live feeling a little more safe."

Rui understood that sentiment. He knew from his interactions with the Beggar's Sect that they definitely cared for their agents. This was extremely unusual for an organization as powerful as the Beggar's Sect. Whoever ran this sect was not an ordinary power-hungry individual, that was for sure.

"As long as I am there. There aren't too things that can harm you. Rest assured that even if a tornado came our way, I will still be able to protect all of you," Rui reassured them.

Chapter 1552: Succession Paradigms

The tensions in the room declined a little as Rui accepted their decisions and convictions to stick by them. He tried to pry more information out of them regarding the Beggar's Sect, but they firmly declined.

"We also don't know anything at all," Farion remarked. "No strategically valuable or important information whatsoever. Not even mundane stuff, we truly know nothing. However, even if we did, we wouldn't tell you, Rui. We can't betray their trust."

Rui nodded. "I understand, I apologize for asking untoward questions."

"No need to be so stiff," Alice smiled, hugging him. "You're our precious little brother, after all."

The air cleared as the mood took a turn for the better. The three of them got back to their boisterous discussions, this time with a little more earnestness.

"I'm proud of you for having taken down the Carnil Mafia's operations in the Gereign Region," Farion stared Rui in the eyes. "You have no idea how many people you saved. Truly."

"I'm glad to hear that," Rui smiled. "Had I known that it was affecting people in places close to the orphanage, I would have done it much sooner."

Of course, that would have been nearly impossible. Especially when considering how narrowly he almost failed even after tapping into the potential of mental techniques and his affinity with them.

Regardless, it was eventually time for the actual transaction. Rui quickly handled the brief paperwork, handing in the debit statement that would allow the Beggar's Sect to receive his payment for the information.

In turn, Alice handed him a densely wrapped heavy package of documents. "This is the package of information you requested."

"Hmph. Looks like you're up to no good again," Farion grumbled.

"Heh, you know me," Rui smirked. "Regardless, I'll be sure to put this to good use."

"Be sure to do that then. Get going now, it's getting late."

By the time Rui returned, he found that the Martial Union had sent its own intelligence package, when he returned, having automatically deducted the Martial Credits from his account.

With this, he had access to two sources of information about the same topic. He was much more able to account for the biased reporting this way. He quickly got to work, reading through the Martial Union report first and then the Beggar's Sect report second.

Both reports were quite detailed, although he found the Beggar's Sect's information to be a lot more comprehensive. Reading through both of them and storing the information in his Mind Palace allowed him to gain a broader overview of the political state of the Kandrian Empire.

"I see..." Rui murmured. "So this is how it is..."

The Kandrian Emperor had many progeny since his crowning with many concubines. These concubines were usually in important positions of power or from important nations and organizations. By having them bear his child he could create a familial unit that would consolidate his power across the Kandrian Empire.

Many of the concubines were important figures with high statuses in other nations. Accepting them as a concubine was simply a way to deepen his bonds with the nation. Doing this over and over again had resulted in more than a hundred offspring!

The ruler of the Kandrian Empire had the authority to appoint and dismiss people to important positions of power within the executive government, the judiciary, and the Royal Army, which was a separate entity directly under the command of the Emperor or Empress.

Thus any of the competing princes and princesses that gained the most recognition from these three branches of the government would be able to ascend the throne and be crowned ruler of the Kandrian Empire.

Appealing to as many of the branches of the government required economic, Martial, and political capital. After all, those with more power had more to offer to the broader government, earning more support in return. The candidates that were able to accrue as much capital as they could would have a much better chance of gaining the most widespread recognition, allowing that person to ascend to the throne.

That was the Kandrian Throne War in a precise nutshell.

'This is a circumstance where, for once, the government is more significant than the other power blocs of the Empire,' Rui heaved a sigh. 'This is due to the nature of the ruler.'

The ruler of the Kandrian Empire had two broad categories of power. The first was their nigh-absolute authority over legislation and the second was their nigh-absolute authority over the government. It could be said that these two powers defined the authority of the ruler. Possessing these two powers was what made the ruler the ruler.

Thus, whichever prince or princess could gain as much of those two powers would be the closest to the throne.

The first power of legislation over the law was solely by virtue of law, thus the princes and princesses could not attain it. but the second power, power over the government, was something that could be obtained.

Everybody had agendas and interests, both personal and professional in nature. This included the members of the government. A prince or princess with more economic, political, and Martial power would be able to fulfill those agendas better than those without. In doing so, they would gain more support from the government. Gaining more power over the government would bring them closer to the throne.

That was why the government was the powerful force in this war. They were the objective. Other power blocs like the Martial Union, the various corporations across many industries and sectors, the civilian population, and the Martial community were less important.

'Not less important per se...they're just not the objective. They're means to an end,' Rui realized. Whichever candidate earned the full support of the entirety of the Martial Union would essentially win the war. The reason for this was that earning the full support of the entire organization meant that they would be able to earn more support from the government than anybody else. That was the sheer magnitude of the power that the Martial Union had.

Chapter 1553: Known Candidates

1553 Known Candidates

The princes and princesses ran around the entire country, earning support and followers so that they could use that power to earn more support from the government. It was a mechanism that allowed the government the highest authority during succession.

The Bill of Royal Axioms, a document that specified laws that not even the emperor could change, did not allow an emperor to appoint a successor. Instead, the right to appoint an emperor had implicitly fallen into the hands of the government. The ceremony to officiate the emperor was, by law, in control of the government. Thus the government was given the implicit power to decide the emperor.

'That's another reason why the princes and princesses are racing to appeal to the government,' Rui mused. 'This was probably done on purpose by the founding emperor, he probably foresaw the rise of powerful corporations and organizations of Martial Artists that could potentially take the succession into their own hands.'

But by concretely ensuring that such a thing could never happen through the Bill of Royal Axioms, he ensured that the government's stronghold over the nation did not ever get overthrown during chaotic times like succession.

That reflected the founding emperor's philosophy. He was clearly a man who believed in governmental authority and heavy governmental intervention over the state.

Rui heaved a sigh, shaking his head.

He was disappointed.

While the various princes and princesses fought for support and influence amongst the corporate and Martial forces of the nation to leverage that power to gain as much recognition from within the government, the people of the Kandrian Empire seemed to be forgotten in the conversation.

Rui believed that any form of government where the people's interests were not the absolute criteria was a fundamentally flawed government. The current paradigm seemed to make the people of the Empire the least important bloc.

That was not something Rui was fond of.

Still, he didn't have any power to change it.

"I can only do what I can," He shook his head.

He turned his attention to something he could potentially impact, even if by a little; the competing princes or princesses.

According to both intelligence reports, some many princes and princesses were competing. However, out of all of them, only seven of them had any meaningful probability of ascending the throne.

Two of them he had already learned about. Princess Raemina and Prince Raijun. The former actually held a position within the Kandrian Empire as the current minister of finance, giving her a lot of sway within the government, which is why she had a solid chance of winning the Throne War.

She believed that the privatization of property ought to be demolished, any and all wealth earned ought to be gathered, by force, and be redistributed by ability and need. It was textbook communist philosophy in an attempt to create a utopia where everyone would allegedly have everything.

Yet Rui was a firm believer that such a thing was closer to hell than a utopia and would slowly degrade the nation until it crumbled as it had done to the Soviet Union. Yet her pretty words and already high authority within the Ministry of Finance gave her a good shot.

Rui shook his head, heaving a sigh.

Prince Raijun was a more curious case to Rui. When Fae had told him about the prince, Rui had gotten the impression that he was being backed by it in its Martial Union in its entirety. Rui had wondered why he hadn't essentially won the war with such astronomical support.

The truth was more nuanced. Both the Martial Union and the Beggar's Sect agreed on this. Prince Raijun had not earned the support of the entirety of the Martial Union. Many Martial factions and Sects had refused to support him.

The Martial Union was far from monolithic. Martial Artists may have come together within one organization, but being Martial Artists meant being full of individuality. This meant that all Martial organizations would inherently be polythitic.

'The issue is that he's a Martial Apprentice,' Rui realized.

Martial Apprentices had virtually no speaking power at the highest echelons of the Kandrian Empire. While Prince Raijun was a Martial Apprentice, that was not enough to win the support of the entirety of the Martial Union.

For one, he was quite old, about forty years old. Progression to the higher Realm was much more dependent on individuality and drive than raw talent alone. Many Martial Artists concluded that he was probably lacking in the former than the latter, and that drove them away from him.

None of them wanted to put their trust in a Martial Artist without drive and individuality. They certainly did not want to put the fate of the nation on his shoulders.

'If he were at least a Martial Squire...' Rui heaved a sigh.

He might have been able to earn the support of the entirety of the Martial Union. However, as it stood now, he only earned anywhere between thirty to forty percent of the support from the Martial Union.

The Beggar's Sect that it was closer to forty, while the Martial Union said it was lesser. That was an interesting difference of opinion between the two organizations.

However, despite only earning the support of thirty to forty percent of the Martial Union, he was still very much one of the strongest candidates. A solid chunk of the most powerful force in the nation was still a lot of power.

The remaining five princes were those that Rui had heard of in passing throughout his life but were still quite new to him.

Princess Rajak was one he had heard of as well. He recalled Executive Ferm telling him about Prince Rajak being supported by the Carnil Mafia and the Underworld as a whole. That explained why he was one of the seven princes and princesses with a solid shot at victory.

The Underworld was incredibly powerful with immense economic capital and Martial power with even a Martial Sage supporting and legitimizing it. With such raw support, he could easily tangle with the likes of Princess Raemina and Apprentice Prince Raijun.

Chapter 1554: Seven

1554 Seven

The one that came next on the list was Princess Rana.

According to both reports Princess Rana was supported by the coastal sector of the nation. The Kandrian Empire bordered the Great Nam Ocean for thousands of kilometers, shaped like a strip. This meant that the coastal sector of the Kandrian Empire was extremely developed and large. It accounted for a meaningful chunk of the entirety of the national GDP.

Princess Ranea had earned the support of the Kandrian Seafare Association, the Ministry of Maritime Affairs, and various sub-

sectors all relating to the ocean and coast in one way or another, be it transport, manufacturing, supplies, or information.

This gave her the capital to stand against even the Minister Princess who had the most authority among all the princes and princesses, as well against even the Martial Prince who had gained immense Martial capital from the Martial Union, and against the Underworld Prince with the support of the Underworld.

Another one of the list was Princess Rafia. She was, to put it briefly, the Corporate Princess. She had earned the support of the Kandrian Merchant Guild and the most support out of the top one hundred corporations and companies within the Kandrian Empire. Her greatest strength was her sheer monetary capital which was arguably the highest out of all the princes and princesses.

Prince Randal was a colonel in the military. Out of all the candidates, he earned the greatest share of support from the Royal Army. The only issue that hampered him from taking complete control of the army was that his rank was too low. The military was an institution where hierarchy was absolute, it was difficult for a lot of higher-ups to accept that they would be commanded by someone who was of a lower rank.

This hampered him from gaining absolute control over the army.

Of the remaining four, one that drew his attention the most was Prince Raul. Prince Raul did not have any corporate backing, nor any heavy Martial capital. He didn't have any authority within the government.

Yet; he had massive support amongst the people.

Prince Raul was known as the People's Emperor in many places. He created a non-profit known as the Kandrian Ruffians. A beloved group that traveled across the Kandrian Empire engaging in all sorts of small-scale and large-scale projects to help the citizens of the nation.

The funding came purely from the humble and modest donations of the people. The manpower came purely from good-hearted able-bodied men and women who were inspired by his people-first ideology and worked hard to realize them, even if they weren't always remunerated for their efforts.

Had the Kandrian Empire been a democratic Republic, he would have been an absolute lock for the ruler if it came down to an election.

But, alas, this was not the case.

The Martial Union's description of Prince Raul was clinical and rational. Many considered him to be the weakest out of all the seven prime candidates because he was sorely lacking economically, politically, and Martially.

The Beggar's Sect, on the other hand, spoke wonders of the man. If what they said was true, then Prince Raul was an angel in human form. Born with a heart large enough to wrap around the entire world, he

was a man of godly benevolence and righteousness. He glowed with a luster that only those pure of heart possessed!

'Come on now,' Rui scoffed when he read the report. 'I get that you support him, but really?'

They didn't even need to specify that they supported him, and they didn't do so either. But Rui knew from his time with the Beggar's Sect that Prince Raul definitely appealed to them the most.

Perhaps that was why he was considered to be among the top seven. It was because he had information on his side. Rui would not be surprised if the man did not even know he was being supported by the Beggar's Sect!

According to both reports, he had the least political acumen out of all the princes and princesses. While he possessed a fierce drive for that persevered and inspired his followers to persevere through all challenges that beset them, he did not possess finesse, he did not possess the calculating nature to understand how to leverage what he had to win the elections.

He was arguably the most unique and the one that Rui was already fond of. According to both reports, he had been the one to contribute to fighting back the most against the recent Noremin, Clackamol, and Dresatone narcotic drug epidemic.

Rui's eyes widened. These were the three narcotic plants that overwhelmingly populated the Great Forest of Hyponarak.

'I see...so while I was fighting the Carnil Mafia in the Great Forest of Hyponarak, he was fighting the Carnil Mafia in the Kandrian Empire,' Rui's opinion of the man had grown even more.

In fact, he was almost certain that the Kandrian Ruffians run by the man were responsible for helping to rehabilitate Farion when he had become addicted to Noremin. The Beggar's Sect had probably approached him from within the organization.

That made Rui like him even more.

Regardless, Rui had gained a good overview of the dynamics of the seven prime candidates for the throne.

Prince Raul, the People's Prince, the prince who had earned the love of the citizens of the nation.

Prince Randal, the Colonel Prince, the man with a significant chunk of the mighty Kandrian Royal Army standing behind him.

Princess Raemina, the Finance Princess, the Finance Minister with the highest authority within the government.

Princess Ranea, the Coastal Princess, the prince that had won general support of Kandria's sea industry.

Prince Raijun, the Martial Prince, the Martial Apprentice had tapped into the desire of many people to see a Martial Artist rule the Kandrian Empire.

Princess Rafia, the Corporate Princess, the princess that was backed by an ocean of wealth from the corporations of the Kandrian Empire's powerful economy.

Prince Rajak, the Underworld Prince, the prince that had earned the full support of the Kandrian Underworld.

Seven princes and princesses stood far above their siblings. One of the seven of them would one day be crowned the next ruler of the Kandrian Empire.

Chapter 1555: Agendas

1555 Agendas

Of the seven of them, only two of them appeared to have their own political ideologies that they genuinely espoused. Princess Raemina with her communist dictatorship ambitions and Prince Raul with his people-first doctrine.

The rest of them appeared to be shilling for the power blocs that backed them up.

For instance, it didn't appear to Rui that Raijun had a strong drive to pursue Martial power. He had become a Martial Apprentice at a remarkable age but then had never proceeded to reach the next Realm.

To Rui, that suggested that whatever his Martial drive was, the power that he possessed as a Martial Apprentice was enough to fulfill it.

Yet he also had the ambition to rule the nation. The only way he could have a strong drive to rule the nation but still be satisfied with the power of an Apprentice was if the reason he pursued his Martial Path was not the Martial power, but something else.

"He most likely became a Martial Apprentice only to have the status of a Martial Artist," Rui realized. "Once he had the status of a Martial Artist, he would gain more trust from other Martial Artists who distrusted normal humans to represent their interests well."

Yet he didn't realize that just becoming a Martial Apprentice was not enough. Martial Apprentices were children within the world of Martial Art, regardless of what their actual age was, they were treated as children on their Martial Path.

Most likely, he had conceded to all their demands in exchange for their support. His biggest supporters within the Martial Union were the Martial Supremacists. Rui had run into this faction before. Commissioner Derun who had commissioned him to serve as a diplomat to Vilun Island was a part of this faction. She had even invited him to join this faction.

He had ultimately refused. He did not want to live in a nation that ran on the laws of the jungle where the strongest ruled and the weakest cowered and were consumed. Martial Artists running the country usually ended up as a nightmare, as far as was concerned.

Most likely, the Martial Prince would make legislations that were highly favorable to the Martial Union and to Martial Artists in general if he ascended the throne.

The same could be said for most of the others of the seven prime candidates.

Rui shook his head, centering his thoughts. 'I'm approaching this non-systematically. I need to define what my agendas are. There is no point in thinking about what Prince to support until I have full clarity on that. So what is it that I hope to achieve?'

He didn't have too much of a stock in the race. However, he strongly wished for his family's life to not be disrupted. Some of the princes and princesses had ideologies or shilled for power blocs whose interests diverged from the interests of the lowest class of society.

'That's not all...' Rui realized. 'Whoever ascends to the throne can certainly disrupt my family's life with crazy azy legislation. But it can also be disrupted if I earn the enmity of a prince or princess.'

The seven prime candidates for ruler had already accumulated more power than he was capable of fighting back. He was sure that a solid proportion of Martial Seniors, Masters, and Sages had already distributed their support among the seven candidates. This meant that they had the power to make his family's life miserable.

That was why Rui's number one goal was to avoid earning the enmity of any of the princes and princesses. What he was confident about was the fact that they would not overstep their bounds unless they had completely lost all sense.

The Kandrian Throne War was a race to gather support. The entire nation and beyond were watching each of the seven candidates closely. Antagonizing others needlessly was a good way to lose a race of gathering support. It ruined their credibility, trustworthiness, and reliability.

This succession battle was a phase where each of the princes and princesses had no choice but to focus on pleasing others to earn their support, rather than antagonizing them.

Thus, as long as Rui did not antagonize them first, the way he did Deacon, then there was little to no cause to worry about his family being endangered.

'Though I do need to speak with Julian and make sure that he doesn't antagonize any of the princes and princesses,' Rui made a mental note.

With the concern of short-term acute threats out of the way, Rui began thinking about long-term priorities. In the long term, he did not want any prince or princess to pass legislation that would hurt his family.

That automatically put Princess Raemina out of any consideration. He would never allow the Quarrier Orphanage to be taken away from his family.

It also put Princess Rafia, the Corporate Princess, out of consideration. He didn't think a corporate shill would do anything that would benefit his family.

He was less certain about the rest, but he didn't think he could gain much by supporting Prince Randal either. A militaristic man was probably pro-increased defense spending, maybe even for more aggressive and domineering hawkish foreign policy.

"Princess Ranea doesn't seem bad..." Rui shrugged.

The coastal and sea sectors of the nation were very important. On top of that, she had a good chance of winning with just how important they were. Not only were they economically vital to the nation, but they were strategically important because litoral gold, the gold that was used to create the Kandrian Gold coin currency, was found in the parts of the Nam Ocean close to the Kandrian Empire's coast.

Being supported by the sector that controlled the supply of this strategically important resource meant that she had a lot of power. Her stance and policies were also probably going to be slanted toward this sector.

If that was the case, then she didn't really impact his family in any way by ascending the throne, most likely.

Chapter 1556: Pacifying Role

1556 Pacifying Role

While she was a possibility, one prince who wasn't a possibility was Prince Rajak, the Underworld Prince.

Rui had an extremely bad opinion of them, worse than even Princess Raemina. The Underworld had already hurt his family. He couldn't imagine how bad it would be if this prince ascended the throne.

Yet this prince was the one he was least willing to antagonize. The Underworld was not constrained by things like maintaining reputation and credibility. They were far more unscrupulous and uncaring. Antagonizing this prince could genuinely put him and his family in danger.

Still, he didn't think he would be approached by this prince at all.

"Prince Raijun is also highly undesirable," Rui heaved a sigh.

He did not want to live in a nation where Martial Artists ruled over non-Martial Artists and had no limits or ramifications to the use of their power. He did not want to live in a world where ordinary people were essentially enslaved to Martial Artists in fear of their power.

However, the Martial Supremacist doctrine believed that Martial Artists should be the absolute rulers of society.

Such a world was not good for the Quarrier Orphanage.

The economic wealth of corporations, the authority of the government and the Royal Family kept the Martial Union in check and vice versa. However, if the Martial Artists gained absolute authority over the state, there would be nothing keeping them in check.

Ordinary people were bound to suffer, there was no doubt about that.

Although such a world highly benefited a Martial Senior like himself, he didn't even consider supporting the Martial Supremacist doctrine for even a millisecond. It was patently unacceptable.

That left one candidate, the one that appealed to Rui the most.

Prince Raul was easily far and away the most compelling prince out of everyone in the race as far as his political ideology went. His political ideology, as he described it, was 'people first.'

He believed that the needs and interests of the people in this nation that formed the very basis and bedrock of the nation were the most important parts of the nation. He also believed that fulfilling the needs and requirements of the people would enrich the working class, empowering the nation as a result.

However, there were shortcomings in him as well. According to the Martial Union report, his political acumen was the least out of all the princes and princesses. He wasn't incompetent by any means, but he had spent most of his life living as a commoner after his mother fell out of favor with the emperor, leaving the Royal palace.

It was only after he had formed the Kandrian Ruffians as an adolescent that he learned of his identity, and decided to leverage it to expand his little non-profit organization.

He also had accrued the least amount of monetary, political, and Martial capital. While he was not entirely lacking in this area, he was certainly behind.

However, he was extraordinarily popular amongst citizens across the entire nation. He had visited every inch and corner of the nation, using his princely identity to gather more people who were willing to join his non-profit. Everywhere he went, he earned a lot of supporters.

In the past eight years, the man had essentially become the sweetheart of the common person. He was said to be extremely charismatic and charming, with a fierce determination will, and drive that inspired others to voluntarily leave their lives and join him in his quest to change the country.

Just the sheer fact that citizens of the nation wholeheartedly supported him meant that he had the largest support base in the entire nation. This gave him power that was vastly different from that of the other princes or princesses. The sheer amount of support he had meant that him being crowned ruler would make the executive government's job a hundred times easier.

The nation would willingly support him in basically any and all endeavors smoothly, within reason of course. This allowed Prince Raul to execute things that were previously considered impossible or unfeasible.

None of the other princes or princesses could offer this. Out of all the candidates, what he offered appealed to the authorities' professional sense the most.

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh. "Tough..."

He was inclined to go for Prince Raul, but only if the man truly had a shot of winning the Kandrian Throne War.

'I'd need to meet him,' Rui first concluded. He was not going to support someone without getting a good personal impression of them first.

It wasn't long before Julian came back home from the Ministry of Research and Development, Rui immediately secluded himself with the man.

"So?" Julian asked as he relaxed in his chair. "What is it you wanted to speak to me about?"

"It was regarding the Kandrian Throne War," Rui replied with a serious tone.

Julian heaved a tired sigh. "It doesn't appear that you brought this up for a mentally stimulating conversation. I don't have too much of an interest in this topic. Unlike you, I don't possess the power to affect it."

"If you didn't, then you would not have been approached by the Raemina Administration," Rui pointed out.

"I was approached because Her Highness is aggressively recruiting support across the government," He replied. "As the Minister of Finance, she is looking at other ministries for support, and the Ministry of Research and Development just fell under that approach. It's not me in particular that she wants. While I

am a valued high-level researcher, I don't possess any real political weight myself. It's just a little better if she can get a whole ministry cleanly than just the ministers."

"In that case, I want you to accept her offer," Rui replied, throwing a pointed look. "Because I don't intend to."

Julian raised an eyebrow, able to immediately understand what Rui conveying. "You want me to act as a protective guarantee for the orphanage from any reproach from her."

Rui nodded. "Out of all the princes and princesses, she and Prince Rajak are the most dangerous to reject. It's possible that just rejecting will mark us as her enemy. In her case, it would be better if you accept so that she will not do anything if I reject."

Chapter 1557: Uninvited Guest

1557 Uninvited Guest

According to the intelligence reports of the Martial Union and the Beggar's Sect, Princess Raemina was not the most rational person. She possessed a violent temper that made those around her often quite fearful of her.

Rui was concerned about any potential backlash if Julian rejected her invitation after the many donations that she had made. That might have grown even worse if he rejected her as well.

Regardless, he didn't want to mess around with a crazy princess.

"...Alright," Julian agreed. "Your reasoning is sound. If it's for the sake of the orphanage, I don't mind joining her faction. It also benefits me since she has promised even greater funding and sponsorships if I did join her faction."

It was a win-win.

"Who do you intend to join, if not Her Highness?" Julian asked with a curious expression.

"Not too sure but...Prince Raul appeals to me the most," Rui replied.

"...I'm not surprised," Julian remarked. "I met him once, you know?"

"You did?" Rui asked, surprised. "Did he invite you to join his faction too?"

"No, this was many years ago," Julian shook his head. "He had come to the outer and poorer districts of the Town of Hajin to aid with the Noremin narcotic epidemic several years ago. He had personally visited the various settlements outside the town like ours to offer aid to those who may have grown addicted to the drug. Back then, Farion's condition was...quite bad, to say the least, though I should let him tell you that story himself."

He sipped his tea, returning to the story. "I had personally thanked him. He was remarkably grounded. I didn't sense even the slightest hint of an ego. His attire was not extravagant. He didn't command his people, rather it seemed that they were desperate to be commanded by him, to be of use to him. It's rare to see a man evoke such raw loyalty from the people around him."

"...I see," Rui murmured. "He does sound like a great leader, that I will say."

Julian nodded. "I have heard some interesting rumors. They say that the treasury of the Kandrian Ruffians is filled with endless copper and silver coins, but not a single gold coin."

"...Meaning he only gets donations from people who are not rich enough to have a gold coin?" Rui mused. "That's surely an exaggeration of the truth."

"It probably is, but it is quite remarkable nonetheless," Julian remarked. "He only helps those who need it. It's like something out of a fairy tale. It would be quite fascinating to see him become emperor. I imagine life for us here in the orphanage will grow easier."

Rui nodded. "Though the two of us will probably have it less easy."

Neither of them were of the lowest economic class. Julian was at least part of the upper middle class while Rui was easily in the wealthy upper echelons.

Neither of them minded being inconvenienced. Rui cared for wealth even less than he did in his previous life.

A few days passed as Rui gave the matter some more thought, optimizing his game plan. Naturally, given that his ability to impact the war was quite limited, he didn't take it too seriously, but he was a high-grade Martial Senior, which meant that he mattered even in the eyes of the princes and princesses.

He realized that this was more than he had expected when Headmaster Aronian's warning began panning out

Outside, a majestic carriage carrying the emblem of the royal family had arrived at the orphanage, drawing everybody's attention.

The doors opened as a woman stepped out, accompanied by two Martial Seniors. She had dark brown hair that was neatly tied in a bun. Slender spectacles sat before brown eyes that eyed the Quarrier Orphanage.

Her attire screamed businesswoman, she even carried a thin briefcase by her side.

Her demeanor gave off a hint of elitist pride with a raised chin and eyes that looked down on everything around her.

Rui recognized the crest on her outer coat, narrowing his eyes.

The Raemina administration.

"That's her..." Julian told Rui with a stiff tone. "The one I was telling you about. A head executive of the Raemina Administration."

Rui turned to the adults standing beside him, staring through the window. "Get the kids to the other side of the orphanage. Mayra, could you please prepare some tea for our guest?"

They all immediately nodded vigorously, scattering off with anxious hearts. They decided to trust Rui with this matter since it was clear that it was probably related to him.

"...Be careful," Xanarn told him softly as she ushered the kids to the other side of the orphanage.

Rui smiled, turning back as he headed to the door, opening it as she arrived, displaying a perfect perfunctory smile. "Miss Vilmentine, welcome to the Quarrier Orphanage. I must confess, I didn't expect to see you here today."

Her demeanor lightened a bit as she stood before Rui while the Martial Seniors behind her grew more alert. "Senior Quarrier, it is truly a pleasure to meet you. I do apologize for not informing you of my visit in advance. Today, I come here as a representative of Her Highness Minister Raemina, the eighth princess of the Kandrian Empire."

"Please come in," Rui gestured, smiling.

The two of them, along with Julian, sat in the living room of the orphanage, exchanging basic pleasantries.

"Your return to the Kandrian Empire has been quite the hot topic in many circles," She smiled. "You had already gained quite a lot of fame as the man behind the Voider who dominated the spectacle of the Shionel Dungeon Raid close to a decade ago now. Her Highness was quite pleased to see the economic contributions you made through your Esosale Suppliers. Thanks to you, our GDP has increased and our economy has been enriched by many billions, increasing by a substantial fraction of a whole percent. The Minister of Finance appreciates your positive impact on our empire."

"I am honored and flattered that Her Highness appreciates my work, I have always strived to be an impact for good on our great nation," Rui smiled.

"That is quite pleasant to hear," Marin Vilmentine smiled back as she opened her briefcase. "I'm sure Her Highness would be happy to hear that from you at the reception she's holding in a few days."

She placed two envelopes on the table, pushing them to the two men.

Chapter 1558: Invitation

1558 Invitation

She certainly didn't waste too much time getting the point. That was to be expected, Rui supposed. She was a chief executive in the Raemina Administration, she probably had an endless list of agendas to be tackled for the day.

"It is a modest event that Her Highness has decided to hold for patrons and sponsors, as well as potential allies that may be interested in Her Highness' campaign," Miss Vilmentine explained. "We would be delighted to see the two of you there."

"...I appreciate the invitation," Rui smiled. "We look forward to the occasion and meeting Her Highness."

"Her Highness does look forward to meeting you," Miss Vilmentine directed a pointed look at Rui in particular. "Not only have you made great contributions to our economy, but you have made our country proud by being the youngest Martial Senior in history. Her Highness has also heard rumors about your significant contributions to Martial Art and the Martial Union, it is a shame that the Martial Union has been extremely secretive about the nature of this contribution."

She brought up the Hungry Pain contribution to the Martial Union that Rui made, revealing her ignorance about it. She was clearly trying to probe Rui's reactions to see if she could grasp any more information about it.

Much to her surprise, Rui didn't so much as twitch. His demeanor was unchanged, as though he was sitting in silence and nothing had happened. He exhibited a level of control over his nonverbal communication that she rarely saw among Martial Artists in the Lower Realms.

"Her Highness is well-informed," Rui smiled, limiting himself to that much.

"...I see the rumors about your diplomatic performance in the Martial Union's ventures were not unfounded," She remarked carefully as she studied him deeply. "It is not hard to see why the Martial Union is so fond of you. However, the Martial Union is ultimately an organization that puts distance between itself and those who haven't committed to it. There are limits to its goodwill unless one joins its inner corps and becomes an inner member. That usually means a degree of subordination until one breaks through to the Upper Realms."

Rui knew what she was trying to do. She was throwing shit at the wall, seeing what stuck. A low-effort and potentially high-

reward effort to put enough of a wedge between him and the Martial Union.

'She's worried that I'll naturally lean towards the Martial Prince because he's earned the highest amount of support from Martial Artists among the seven princes and princesses,' Rui mused. 'However, she's hoping the fact that I have abstained from joining the Martial Union all this time is a sign that I am not attracted by the Martial Union.'

"I am aware of that," Rui replied. "I have weighed the pros and cons of joining the Martial Union and made my choice regarding the matter. I am satisfied with my current relationship with the organization."

This was the truth. However, he didn't clarify whether he was or wasn't going to support the Martial Prince. He left that lingering in the air.

He didn't want to inform the executive that he had no intention of supporting the Martial Prince. He didn't want to make himself a more alluring target for poaching.

"While the Martial Union is limited in how far it is willing to go for Martial Artists who have merely signed out a royalty contract with the Martial Union, the same is not necessarily true for joining the Raemina Faction," She outright said. "We do not require absolute commitment from our patrons or supporters. We will offer benefits and remuneration that are proportional to the contributions that our patrons are willing to make. Rest assured that while Princess Raemina aims to become the dictatorship of a communist nation, we do not intend to treat Martial Artists and plebeians alike."

Both of them sensed Julian stiffening ever so slightly at her statement. He didn't have the perfect control over his body language that the other two had. Miss Vilmentine instantly understood that she was treading into sensitive territory for her two hosts.

"Martial Artists can secure property rights and tax cuts for not only themselves but also their family," She replied. "This is especially true for highly-valued Martial Seniors like yourself. We can even offer many more benefits for you and your kin exclusive to all of you."

Rui sipped his tea, considering her words. "That is not unalluring, however, I am a man who prefers that my right to freedom and liberty are not dependent on my utility."

"That is to be expected. However, Her Highness' economic doctrine is also one that benefits the lowest class of society the most," She pointed out. "We believe in true equality and fairness. The current paradigms favor those in power over the lowest class of society. Limitless private ownership has allowed many powerful individuals who own an absurd amount of wealth and capital despite certainly not contributing anything worth everything they own. They mooch off hard-working laborers not unlike the caretakers of this orphanage, profiting from their hard work simply through ownership of appreciating assets and stakes in publicly traded companies. Her Highness aims to ensure that such a thing will never be possible under her regime. People will be given what they have genuinely earned and what they genuinely need."

There were elements of communism that were alluring on paper. It was why it had support, even if not widespread. Still, Rui hated the intervention of the state in his personal life under such a system. On top of that, history on Earth had demonstrated the many deep socioeconomic shortcomings and evils that could be born under such a system.

"I do not wish to engage in a debate about politics or economics. Let's just say that I have very fundamental qualms about the nature of Her Highness' political and economic doctrines," Rui replied. "Nonetheless, I do look forward to meeting her at least once and hearing what she has to say."

Miss Vilmentine smiled perfunctorily. "That is all we ask."

Chapter 1559: Plans

1559 Plans

It wasn't long before Miss Vilmentine took her leave from the orphanage. While she had clearly expressed and conveyed the high interest that the Raemina Faction had in winning over Rui, she didn't go too far by dogging Rui about joining her faction.

An overly-persistent approach was unpleasant to most people, it showed a lack of respect for boundaries.

Furthermore, today was just a basic low-effort preliminary attempt to earn his support.

"Huff..." Julian heaved a tired sigh as he watched the royal carriage accelerate away from the orphanage. "It seems she is quite intent on bringing you over to the Raemina Faction."

"It would seem that way," Rui nodded, concurring with the man. "I'm not really surprised."

Rui had an impressive history during his time in the Kandrian Empire.

He had reached the finals of the Martial Contest held during the Martial Festival when he was an Apprentice, earning his first hint of fame through the Kandrian Empire. He had then gone on to perform several incredible feats as a Martial Apprentice.

He had managed to kill a Martial Squire as a Martial Apprentice. While there was context and nuance that made his feat not nearly as absurd and bonkers as it seemed on the surface, the details had been lost in the wind as the rumors spread across the entire nation.

On top of that, he had essentially won the Kandrian Empire the war of the Serevian Dungeon, singlehandedly decimating the armies of all of the three powerhouses of East Panama.

He became a Martial Squire, quickly developing a handful of grade-ten techniques, one of which he submitted to the Martial Union to earn a lot of appreciation and praise. He then went on to serve as an ambassador of the Martial Union to Vilun Island, successfully forming a cooperative exchange with the G'ak'arkan Tribe.

And it had long come to light amongst the upper echelons of society that he was the infamous Voider that singlehandedly dominated the Shionel Dungeon raids against an alliance led by a merchant tycoon comprising of local and international powers.

He also happened to return during a time that was close to the death of said merchant tycoon, which raised questions for many people.

It was not enough to raise an investigation, especially when Martial Artists in the Kandrian Empire had impunity to the law to certain extents, thanks to a clause in the Kandrian Martial Covenant signed between the founding emperor and the Martial Union.

But more importantly, he returned as the youngest Martial Senior in history and was already a high-grade Martial Senior at a young age.

'I should be happy that my achievements during my eight-year hiatus are not known yet,' Rui heaved a relieved sigh.

The uproar would magnify if they learned of the sheer power that he had attained as a Martial Squire, having survived and shaken off an attack from a Martial Senior while he was still a Martial Squire.

Becoming the seventy-second Virodhabhasa Champion. The political capital he gained from the religion would not be enough to singlehandedly turn the favor towards a prince or princess, but it was still extremely significant.

Rui shook his head and turned back glancing at the two envelopes on the table. He could sense the gold-laden cards within the envelopes; invitations that he would need to present to enter the reception hall.

He was curious to hear what Princess Raemina had to say to him. Who knew? Perhaps she had something up her sleeve that could attract Rui's interest.

He was willing to give her one chance. He also wanted to get a good gauge of what kind of person she was. Intelligence reports from credible organizations like the Beggar's Sect and the Martial Union were all fine and dandy, but he trusted his own evaluations even more.

BZZZT!

Rui's attention flew to his communication device that buzzed with a message.

A message from the Martial Union.

The date for his presentation on the Hungry Pain technique had been finalized. Thankfully, they gave him enough time to prepare in a week, as he had requested.

Another headache that he needed to tend to. But he needed the massive funds that he would get once the Martial Union estimated the value of his contribution as he enlightened them on the mechanics of the technique.

Frankly, there were no concerns about whether they would buy it. There were physiological experiments that would lend credence to his claims, the same ones that had led to the discovery of the phenomenon of autophagy back on Earth.

The issue was how he could justify knowing it as a Martial Senior who was home-schooled by his mother and elder brother.

Fortunately, he had already come up with the perfect way to ward off the problem.

"I'm going to need your help with something, Julian," Rui smiled with a hint of mischief.

"I already don't like the sound of this," Julian heaved a sigh. "Let me conjecture based on history, you need help with some big mess that you've got yourself into, requiring my position as a researcher and deputy director within the ministry."

"That's actually exactly right. Quite sharp of you to catch on." Rui mused, impressed. "You are able to start research and development projects at your own discretion with your current discretion, aren't you?"

Julian raised an eyebrow. "...Yes. Why?"

"Here's what I need you to do," Rui scribbled down a list of topics. "Can you conduct some preliminary research experiments into these topics?"

Julian read through the list frowning. "These are topics that don't even pertain to Martial Art. Why do you want me to conduct open research projects into cellular biology?"

"Hehe, just do me a favor," Rui mused.

Julian raised an eyebrow as his sharp mind immediately began dissecting Rui's request, analyzing to gauge Rui's intent.

"You're either interested in the outcome of the experiment or..." Julian pondered aloud. "You gain something from me endeavoring into these topics at all, regardless of the outcome of the research. It's curious why you wanted me to conduct these experiments officially specifically, rather than off the books. The only reason you would want for there to be a record of it is for other people to find it. In which case..."

Julian narrowed his eyes as he stumbled upon the answer.

"You're too clever for your own good, Julian," Rui heaved an exasperated sigh though there was a hint of pride in his tone. He was not accustomed to people keeping up with his thoughts, yet Julian was one of the few who could.

Chapter 1560: Commence

1560 Commence

With two important events coming up, Rui quickly got to work, forming the presentation rapidly. The mode of the presentation was going to be an analog slide show where he would need to draw out each slide and it would be upscaled onto larger paper on a bigger board for the actual day of the presentation.

It appeared that digital technology in this world had not reached a stage where he could actively work on a screen and create a digital slide show. But that was fine as far as Rui was concerned.

A few days passed when Rui finally got a message from Kane stating that he had made his mind up, and wanted to meet.

Rui decided to oblige him.

"Kane," Rui addressed him as he sky-walked down.

"Rui..." He murmured.

Rui had immediately noticed a change in his temperament.

His eyes were sharp. Sharper than he had ever seen them.

His normally easy-going demeanor and body language were gone. Yet he wasn't stiff, there was only one thing that radiated from him at the moment.

Conviction.

Rui sensed the resolve in his eyes.

"Good, I see that you're well-prepared. I wouldn't have allowed you to go through with this if you had half-baked determination," Rui remarked.

The two of them had been communicating remotely over the past few days as Rui informed Kane more of what was necessary.

It appeared that Kane had truly taken Rui's words to heart.

"I won't be holding back," Kane's voice had a chilling undertone. "If we go through with this, I'm going to give it my absolute best...to kill you."

It hurt him to even utter those words, but Rui had insisted that it was the bare minimum.

Breaking through to the Senior Realm required being pushed past your limits, something that couldn't happen unless one was giving it their very best to eliminate their opponent. Not even aiming to incapacitate or restrain was enough since avoiding dealing lethal blows required some amount of holding back.

It was why Rui and Ieyasu had seriously aimed to kill each other in their fight, they wouldn't be Martial Seniors if not for that.

"Alright, let's get going," Rui stated. "There's no way we're doing this in the Kandrian Empire. I've told my family that I'd be away for a few days, that's how long this will take. I trust you've made all the preparations I've told you to make."

Kane nodded seriously. "I'm ready, Rui. Thank y-"

"You can thank me or curse me depending on the outcome," Rui cut him off. "I've told you. You're risking a fate worse than death for us Martial Artists."

His expression grew sharper as he clenched his fist silently.

Rui had prepared a few supplies, purchasing some potions and a food pills for their journey away. He was only going to get started after he was certain that he wouldn't be discovered by the Kandrian Empire.

The two of them departed the Kandrian Empire as they set out far and wide, heading west of the nation. Neither of them exchanged many words through their travels. Rui wasn't even interested in the journey

itself. He had just returned to the Kandrian Empire and his homesickness was still too fresh for him to be pleased about leaving the empire.

Nonetheless, he was willing to do it for his friend.

The two of them reached a deserted wasteland that was far west of the continent, devoid of any life.

Rui had specifically aimed for this place because of this feature. He couldn't detect the presence of even the slightest hint of fauna and flora anywhere within a hundred-kilometer radius.

"We're here, let's get prepped," Rui said, burying his bag away.

It wasn't too long before the two of them stood opposite each other.

Kane drew his knives, taking his stance.

Rui stretched a bit longer, loosening his body after a long journey, hopping lightly on his feet.

"This is your last chance to pull out, Kane," Rui told him.

"I'm willing to see this through," Kane declared with determination.

"Is that so...?" Rui murmured. "Well, I hope that's true. As I said, that was your last chance."

An avalanche of bloodlust erupted from Rui.

The very air curdled under the peril that he emanated.

The atmosphere seemed to have been wrung taut from the sheer pressure that he radiated.

Kane's eyes narrowed.

"From this point on, even if you beg me to stop, I won't," Rui calmly declared.

This was a lie.

But it was fine because he had managed to sell the act. What mattered the most was whether Kane believed it or not, and it was clear that the sheer intensity that he managed to put out convinced Kane that he was absolutely serious.

The fight commenced immediately.

A quiet bloodlust burned in the depths of Kane's eyes as he rushed forward toward Rui at a speed that beggared the mind.

WHOOSH!

Rui narrowly evaded the pair of daggers swinging at him with fearsome speed, leaping away.

THWOOM THWOOM THWOOM!

He fired three Mighty Roar Flash Blasts at Kane, which the latter promptly evaded, weaving through them effortlessly.

WHOOSH!

He moved with a speed and agility the likes of which Rui hadn't seen within the Squire Realm.

'He's truly grown stronger in the past four years,' Rui mused inwardly, before deciding to get serious.

Kane rushed forward at blinding speeds. His daggers became arcs of pure destruction threatening to cleave any and everything that came their way. The sheer friction from the speed at which he moved set the air ablaze making his visage match that of a comet that weaved around the battlefield at incredibly high speeds.

Yet Rui had already decided that he couldn't afford to hold back against Kane's current level of power.

In his mind, a hypnotic spiral appeared in the distance on the battlefield. His body language conveyed that to Kane, subconsciously misdirecting his attention, and leaving his subconscious mind unguarded.

'Temporal Disharmony,' Rui activated the technique as he manipulated Kane's perception of time, speeding it up relative to his body speed, causing the two to go out of phase.