

Martial Unity 1561

Chapter 1561: Clashes

1561 Clashes

Suddenly, Kane's world changed. His physical body speed seemed to accelerate to the point where he found it hard for his mind to keep up with his own body, forcing him to go slower.

He glanced at Rui with a shocked realization, yet Rui didn't appear to want to cut him any slack.

BAM!

Rui managed to land a powerful blow on Kane's guard flinging him away, creating an ugly bruise on the man's guard. Yet he wasn't finished.

WHOOSH!

He rushed forward at top speed, looking to get another blow on Kane.

WHOOSH!

CRACKLE!

Rui's eyes widened with shock as Kane disappeared in the face of his attack.

WHOOSH!

Rui leaped away from a twin dagger attack that almost cleaved him in half.

SPLAT

Kane had managed to leave a cut on his abdomen, getting back at Rui for his earlier attack.

'Fulminata Godspeed,' Rui realized, smiling inwardly.

Fulminata was a technique that amplified reflexes with lightning. Reflexes were a phenomenon that were not dependent on the mind's perception of time, allowing Kane to resist the effects of Temporal Disharmony with the technique.

On top of that, it allowed him to use Godspeed without restraint.

"Fuuuu...!" Kane exhaled heavily as he activated Godspeed, rushing forward towards Rui with extraordinary speed.

Yet, not even that was enough to reach Rui.

"FUUUU!" Rui exhaled forcefully, activating Neo Godspeed, evading Kane's attack.

The two young men blurred into streaks of green and black as they maneuvered around the battlefield exchanging attacks after attacks.

Rui rushed forth aggressively right into Kane's dagger attack.

WHOOSH!

The blade crashed into an empty image.

A feint.

Rui's fist emerged from the other direction and a Flowing Canon with tremendous momentum blasted into Kane.

WHOOSH!

...Yet another feint.

Both the young men had mastered Phantom Step, abusing it to create openings in their opponent's style. However, Kane had an edge in that battle, for Phantom Step was a maneuvering technique, a field where he was overwhelmingly superior to Rui.

Yet Temporal Disharmony was such a deep sabotage that it put them on even playing fields.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

The battlefield grew increasingly infested with afterimages and illusions that the two boys had created.

Had any ordinary person witnessed that battle, they would have merely seen an army of Ruis and Kanes fighting against each other across the entire battlefield!

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

For now, the two sides were even.

Yet Kane gritted his teeth.

He knew that Rui had yet to use his strongest trump card.

He was rather surprised that Rui hadn't used it already.

He stared into Rui's eyes.

The darkness of an endless void.

That was all he could see.

That was all there was to see.

Four words escaped Rui's mouth.

"Don't worry, it's coming."

A chill crawled up his spine at those words.

BAM!

A powerful kick from Rui flung him away as Rui saw through his feints, landing a clean blow on him.

Kane was unable to evade the blow even though he was still moving substantially faster than Rui.

There was only one thing that this meant.

'He's ready,' Kane gritted his teeth as he prepared his daggers, rushing forward.

Both daggers had been aimed at Rui's neck.

WHOOSH!

Both of them missed.

Kane's eyes widened as Rui casually evaded his attacks with a single gentle step.

"Rgh!" Kane gritted his teeth as he unleashed a storm of blades. It was as though a domain had formed around him. One that would shred anything that entered it.

Not Rui, though.

CLASP

Rui caught both his arms as his foot surged forward at top speed into Kane's gut.

BOOM!

"Rgh!" Kane grimaced.

BAM!

Rui flung him overhead into the ground.

BOOM!

A powerful kick flung him away, launching him in the distance.

Rui's offensive power while using Neo Godspeed was limited, but it was still enough against Kane, who had poor defense and durability.

Kane coughed a bout of blood as he did his best to ready himself.

Yet Rui had already arrived.

POW POW POW!

Kane grimaced, incurring more damage as Rui peppered him with blows. He launched a powerful blow at Kane's head, threatening to knock him out.

WHOOSH!

Kane evaded the blow.

Yet, he didn't.

A kick had already arrived at his new location before he himself had.

BAM!

"Argh!" Kane grimaced as he put some distance between them. 'Dammit, he's so strong!'

He marveled at Rui's power. The man had grown so strong that even without the Martial Heart he was a menace to face.

At this rate, killing Rui was a joke. He would not be able to leave even a cut on his body.

'No choice...' Kane narrowed his eyes a glint of bloodlust reflected in his pupils. 'I'll have to use that.'

Suddenly, his stance changed.

Rui paused, not recognizing it, before rushing forward anyway.

A deep intensity flashed in his eyes as he used a Mind Mask to increase the pressure he mounted on Kane.

It worked.

Shivers went up his spine as he beheld Rui's haunting figure. Within his pitch black eyes was a seemingly endless void.

A void that threatened to consume.

Kane refused.

He rejected the fate of being consumed by the void.

No matter what.

'No matter what!' Kane's eyes sharpened as Rui had arrived to throw a powerful blow at him.

WHOOSH!

Kane evaded the attack, yet even as he sidestepped the attack, a second attack had already reached him.

But not even that touched, not this time.

WHOOSH!

Kane swung his daggers in a strange manner.

He disappeared.

Rui's eyes widened as he failed to keep up with Kane for a moment.

His instincts flared warning as he leaped away.

SPLAT!

His eyes widened as a light gash appeared on his chest.

"Tsk," Kane tutted at the shallow depth of the wound, before rushing in again.

The pressure his mind was experiencing was immense, it was like fighting against a fully powered Senior.

Yet he pushed forward nonetheless.

Deep within his body, his heart beat strong.

BADUMP!

Chapter 1562: Beyond

1562 Beyond

Rui found himself on the defensive.

Kane had evaded his counter, disappearing at an astonishing speed while also simultaneously almost killing him.

Rui knew that he had swung with the intent to kill. If Rui hadn't leaped away, he would have died.

The realization melted away every ounce of restraint that Rui had. Kane had reached a level of power that was second only to Rui and Ieyasu before they broke through. Since he wasn't using his Martial Senior at the moment, he was effectively a Martial Squire at the moment barring his senses.

He had already told Kane to attack with the intent to kill. Kane could not afford to hold back. Kane had conditioned himself mentally to be prepared just for that. He was not going to hold back at this juncture.

Kane swung his daggers in strange manners as his speed continuously increased reaching levels that Rui didn't think was possible within the Squire Realm.

He grew faster and faster.

His agility had skyrocketed.

The speed gap between them increased continuously, so much so that Rui didn't even feel like he was using Neo Godspeed.

Despite suffering from Temporal Disharmony that hampered his own perception of time, he still relied on the reflexes that he gained from Fulminata to flub up his own techniques. The grade-ten technique was able to edge out the grade-nine hypnotic technique narrowly, allowing Kane to keep up with his own movements.

WHOOSH!

Kane's dagger slashed at Rui in a strange manner almost lopping his head off. The dagger also created a gust of vacuum on one side of Kane, while directing air currents on the other end. The massive pressure differential propelled Kane forward at the astonishing speeds that he was displaying.

Rui's eyes widened as he understood the mechanism of the technique. Kane had developed a technique centered around his daggers, one that allowed him to generate a pressure differential from one side to the other, to thrust to him reach higher speeds than he alone would ever reach.

The most impressive part was that he only needed to attack as he normally did while relying on the movements of the attacking daggers to generate the pressure differential allowing him to maneuver at extremely high speeds.

It was free speed!

It was a powerful technique that integrated the daggers deeper into his Martial Art, truly making it a part of his Dancing Shadow Style. The individuality of the technique had elevated the individuality of his Martial Path past a critical threshold.

Kane launched a flurry of dagger blows at Rui, who promptly evaded them, leaping away.

WHOOSH!

Kane was already at his side, launching an onslaught of blade swings at him.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui evaded each and every single one of them, yet Kane never let up a single time. His eyes were fixed on Rui as he rushed forward.

His blades turned into circles of cleaving pressure, threatening to hack away at Rui, generating pressure differentials that turned Kane into blurs even in Rui's eyes.

He had become a fleeting shadow of death.

And yet, not even that reached Rui.

POW!

Rui's fist crashed his jaw. Kane grimaced, leaping away as he beheld Rui with wide eyes.

The void had arrived.

He had temporarily managed to gain an upper hand as Rui acclimatized to his new technique. But it wasn't too long before he had adapted even to this new powerful technique.

It was novel, but decoding it had been easy once Rui realized the mechanics of the technique.

He just needed to find the patterns in the causal relationship between Kane's dagger movements and the resulting pressure differentials that propelled him. Once he found the patterns between the cause and effect, he was able to predict the effect from the cause with remarkable accuracy.

Rui donned the strongest Mind Mask that he could muster without a Martial Heart. A mountain of murderous pressure pressed down on Kane's shoulders.

A deep sense of desperation overcame as his instincts and emotions took control. He forgot that this was a merely an exercise to trigger his Martial Heart.

Rui didn't allow him to remember.

He needed to push Kane to the absolute limit.

The threat to his life needed to be, and was, palpable.

The critical phase had arrived.

WHOOSH!

Kane gritted his teeth with sharpened eyes as he rushed forward as his dagger chased after Rui's throat.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui evaded each and every single blow with ease.

BAM!

Kane blocked his heavy blow as surged forward, moving even faster. His blades disappeared, flashing at Rui with blinding speeds.

WHOOSH WHOOSH WHOOSH!

Rui cleanly evaded them as his fist flew forward, exploiting a blindspot.

WHOOSH!

Kane barely managed to evade the well-timed attack, leaping to the side.

And despite that-

BAM!

A swift blow had already arrived, slamming into him. Kane grimaced, yet he persevered, as he pushed himself to the absolute limit.

His skin tore.

His muscle burned.

His joints creaked.

He pushed himself to the absolute limit reaching speeds he had never reached before.

And yet, it was for naught.

WHOOSH!

Rui evaded his attack as his foot found its target, a powerful kick crashing into Kane's guard.

Their eyes met mid-clash.

Time seemed to slow down in his eyes despite Temporal Disharmony.

He gazed into Rui's eyes.

The endless void gazed back into him

It had arrived.

It hungered.

It threatened to consume the very path that Kane stood on.

One that he had tread for most of his life.

Despair seemed to slowly creep up from within his heart. A part of him wanted to allow it to consume him.

A part of him wanted to cease his effort.

Why did he fight anyway?

'Why do I fight...?' The question echoed in his mind.

He beheld Rui before him.

'Ah...'

A small smile cracked at the edge of his mouth.

His eyes surged with determination as he faced Rui head-on, pushing himself to the absolute limit...and beyond.

BADUMP!

Chapter 1563: Outcome

Rui's eyes lit up with delight as he felt a surge of power emerging deep within Kane. His aura spiked, ascending from the Squire Realm to the Senior Realm in a single moment. Glowing red streaks emerged from his heart spreading across his entire Martial Body, enriching it with the power of a higher Realm.

One moment, Kane was a Martial Squire.

The very next, he had become a Martial Senior.

BADUMP!

BADUMP!

BADUMP!

A rush of energy nourished his entire body. His muscles brimmed with energy as his flesh temporarily grew tougher as the accelerated metabolism from the Martial Heart resulted in thicker and denser cell walls. His bones grew harder and denser as the osteoblast cells in them temporarily increased density.

His Body soared to new heights while Kane gained a deep awareness of his surroundings, seeing things that he didn't know even existed.

BADUMP!

Rui activated his Martial Heart with a smile while Kane's acclimatized to the ocean of power that his body had begun tapping into.

His eyes were still focused on Rui, he almost hadn't realized what had happened.

"Come on," Rui smirked. "Let's kick off your debut in the Senior Realm."

Kane pressed into the ground with as much force he could muster, propelling himself at speeds that approached lightning itself!

RUMBLE!!!

The very land beneath them shook under the sheer force that he applied to it.

WHOOSH!

Rui evaded his attack with ease and stepped away lightly with Temporal Disharmony, a predictive model of Kane's bizarre dagger-maneuvering technique, and Neo Godspeed, who was too strong.

POW POW POW!

He pummeled Kane with blow after blow mercilessly, tracking him down while he refused to go as easy on him as he had before.

They were in the same Realm now, after all. Kane didn't need Rui to hold back, not much at all, anyway.

Much to Kane's disappointment, the battle had grown more one-sided now that Rui truly grew serious. The full power of his Martial Art was beyond Kane was handling when he was fully.

BAM!

A powerful kick landed on his jaw, rocking his head. The accumulated blunt force trauma exceeded the critical threshold causing his consciousness to shut down as he fell down, knocked out.

Rui heaved a sigh as he sat on the ground beside Kane, consuming a potion. The exercise had gone well, considering the best possible outcome had happened. Rui had been afraid for a moment that Kane would succumb to the VOID, but he held strong, managing to push past his limits by the end.

"Alright, I need to get this done as soon as possible," Rui murmured.

He pulled out a set of particularly potent high-grade potions that were capable of rejuvenating even Martial Seniors rapidly after the initial breakthrough after which they would normally be unconscious for days.

These potions could cut the timeframe entirely. The Floating Sect did not have access to resources or esoteric potion-

crafting technology, but the Martial Union did.

He carefully ensured that Kane inhaled the potions, before finally relaxing, thinking about the fight.

There were several things that popped into his mind.

Rui noticed that Kane's Martial Heart was weaker than his own. It appeared that age was not the only factor in determining the power of the Martial Heart, but successive uses of the Martial Heart strengthened it a bit more than last time. If that were the case, it could be treated like any other part of the body. Progressive overload and exercising it to failure would improve it over time as well.

It would also explain why elder Seniors like Senior Zenshin was that physically superior to Rui as well. Not only was he more than ten times as old as Rui, but he had also exercised his Martial Heart across all those years.

It wasn't that problematic, the gap between Kane's Martial Heart and his own wasn't too large.

Yet the gap between their combat power was definitely significant. Rui could handily defeat him with confidence. He suspected that Kane was probably a mid-grade Martial Senior, perhaps on the lower end.

With that in mind, Rui probably started on the upper end of the middle grade, jumping to high grade in a single leap after mastering the powerful Hypnomatrix.

It also reflected the gap between their power without the Martial Hearts. He was a notch or two above Kane with just the Hypnomatrix and Metabody System, with the VOID algorithm, his victory became decisive and even dominant.

Still, Kane probably started off far higher than pretty much any other Martial Senior barring Ieyasu and himself. Certainly far higher than Senior Frinjschia who was at the very bottom of the barrel.

'Speaking of which, her Martial Heart wasn't overwhelmingly powerful,' Rui realized. 'Thus prior to breaking through, physicality determines the power of the Martial Heart more than anything else.'

As Rui pondered over such matters, Kane slowly woke up.

"Ngg..." He groaned as his eyes opened.

It took him a few moments to recall where he was and what happened. But eventually, it came flooding back.

"...Am I Martial Senior?" Kane murmured with disbelief.

"Indeed, Senior Kane," Rui chuckled.

"I can't believe it..." He laughed weakly as he got up, staring at his own hands. "All that time... And you managed to solve it so easily..."

His emotion was palpable, his voice was even choked with emotion, breaking through to the Senior Realm was an overwhelming experience for anybody.

"Well, it wasn't easy, especially for you," Rui noted. "Certainly was not entirely safe."

"Better than any of the alternatives," He turned to Rui. "...Thank you, Rui. I'm forever indebted to you."

Endless gratitude and appreciation filled his eyes.

Rui waved him off. "Don't worry about it, you'd do the same. It's nothing."

He didn't want Kane feeling too burdened to repay Rui, he wasn't interested in being around a friend who stuck around him to repay a debt.

"Wait..." Kane's eyes widened. "I can't activate my Martial Heart!"

Rui smiled wryly, recalling the first time he experienced the same shock. "Your Martial Heart empowers your Martial Art through your Body. It cannot be drawn by the Body alone. The Martial Path bridges you to it, connecting you to it, while the Martial Art is the key to unlocking it. Use a general augmentation breathing technique."

Chapter 1564: Split

Kane nodded, activating a breathing technique. His Martial Heart bloomed into full blaze, empowering his entire body.

"Woah..." Kane murmured as he glanced at his entire body with amazement. "This is incredible!"

Rui smiled at his excited reaction. "Ah, just some heads up, there's some things that you should know."

Rui proceeded to tell him everything that Senior Sarak told him when he first broke through to the Senior Realm. These were important cautions and warnings that every Martial Senior needed to know.

"Wait, I die faster when I use the Martial Heart?" Kane gaped.

"Yep," Rui nodded. "Theoretically if you used the Martial Heart all the time, you'd live a fraction of what you would otherwise live; which is to say a normal human lifespan. But pretty much no Martial Senior needs to."

"No one told me this!" Kane complained.

"If you don't like it, don't use it," Rui shrugged. "Martial Squires live a long time, not to mention there are longevity potions that you could get your hands on. If this were disclosed to Martial Squires, far fewer Martial Squires would break through to the Senior Realm, which is why the upper echelons of Martial Art do not disclose this information. The Panamic Martial Federation gets really pissed, apparently. Remember that."

Kane heaved a sigh. "Fair enough. It isn't that big a deal, even if it is a bummer. By the way, any clues about what it takes to get to the Master Realm?"

Rui considered the question for a moment. He recalled what Master Reina had told him about the disclosure of the Master Realm, there weren't any strict norms, and each Martial Master was to use their judgment for whether a Martial Senior was ready.

Rui had no idea on whether Kane was 'ready' or not. Maybe they judged it based on how close to their limits Martial Seniors were without relying on the Martial Senior.

Perhaps telling them too early would lead them to neglect their Martial Body and Heart, resulting in weaker Martial Artists in the long run.

He wasn't entirely sure.

"I can tell you, but I don't know if it's the right thing to do," Rui informed him. "If you still want me to, then I don't mind telling you right here and now. I'll leave the choice to you. But the Martial Union will undoubtedly inform you if you are ready and you do request for it."

The Martial Union had a highly vested interest in seeing one of its native prodigies and youngest Martial Seniors reach the Upper Realms, so they would almost certainly tell him if it was optimal.

Kane considered his words for a moment, before making a choice. "...If that's the case, then it's fine. I've just ascended into the Senior Realm, I know if you tell me now, I'd probably fixate on that too much. I'd rather acclimatize myself for some time and get used to this powerfully. It'll probably take me weeks before I feel fully comfortable fighting with it. Care to be a sparring partner during that time?"

"I'd love, but I'm quite busy," Rui heaved a sigh. "Several important matters have come up."

"No worries," Kane was unperturbed. "I'll just commission someone from the Martial Union."

"I'm afraid not so soon," Rui shook his head. "You're not going anywhere near the Kandrian Empire any time soon."

"Why not...?" Kane frowned.

"Because the risk factor is too high. If people tie your breakthrough to me, I'm screwed. I took a risk just telling you and helping you break through, but returning a Martial Senior while you left a Martial Squire just some time prior? With me walking by your side? Hell no."

The Kandrian Border Patrol Force definitely had at least one Martial Master at each transit port. They would definitely pick up on Squire Kane returning as Senior Kane. Given how prolific intelligence networks from various organizations were, that news would spread.

Instantly, Rui would be hounded by everybody and their mother.

"Right," Kane realized the gravity of the situation.

"I foresaw this, and I have made some preparations," Rui activated his Martial Heart leaping a great distance to where they had buried their bags, Kane followed suit.

"Here," Rui pushed a little notebook and a map to Kane. "This is where you're going."

"...The Laniakea Caves?" Kane frowned, reading the title.

"It's one of the most dangerous Squire-level danger zones on the outskirts of the Beast Domain. It was part of the information I got from Bradt before we left," Rui informed him. "There is a pocket town in that part of the Beast Domain, protected by a powerful Martial Senior. There are no Martial Masters, so your status as a Martial Senior won't be found out. Go there, spend some time training, at least a month, pretend to break through to the Senior Realm, and come back after."

Kane skimmed through the notebook nodding slowly. "...

Gotcha."

"Appreciate it," Rui smiled, relieved.

"It's the bare minimum," Kane shook his head. "I would be pretty pissed at myself if I ruined your life carelessly after you took such a big risk."

Rui smiled, handing him some of the food pills, potions, and money that he had on him. "Don't sweat it. Have fun. I hear there are some pretty exotic sights."

Kane nodded, turning to Rui. "Thanks again. You're truly the best thing that ever happened to me."

Rui smiled back. "Seems like I'm doing a fine job as a best friend then."

The two bid farewell, heading their own ways. Rui returned to the Kandrian Empire while Kane went his own way, heading towards the Beast Domain.

Although Rui didn't like the idea of splitting up with Kane after returning home so quickly, it was a necessary precaution, he would sleep well knowing no one trace his breakthrough back to Rui.

After witnessing the ramifications of it in the Virodhabhasa Theocracy having severely underestimated the insight of Martial Masters, he was keen to ensure that it wouldn't happen again.

With this matter out of the way, his thoughts quickly returned to some of the important matters that he needed to focus on.

The upcoming presentation on the Hungry Pain technique.

The reception was held by the Raemina Foundation.

In addition to his own ventures regarding the Kandrian Throne War and the general outreach that he would receive from those interested in him.

Chapter 1565: Reunion

A few days passed as Rui completed the final preparations for his presentation. For one, he didn't intend to give an extremely elaborate lecture about the Hungry Pain technique, nor did he need to.

It was understood that Martial Artists were not the best at conveying their understanding of a technique in a way that appeased the scientific method.

Still, the Hungry Pain technique was too significant for them to accept anything that didn't at least give them a good understanding of the mechanics and principles of the techniques. That was the bare minimum.

On top of that, Rui had cultivated a reputation as a highly intelligent intellectual Martial Artist with a remarkably high cognition a shocking ability to process information, and a scientific foundation that didn't even compute with his known history.

They did expect more from him than what the average Martial Artist would scrap up. Rui was also extremely clear that he himself too was part of the agenda, and not just his technique, even if Headmaster Aronian did not outright say it out loud.

Regardless, Rui only wanted to get the business over with so he could be remunerated for this technique. He had planned for this day nearly a decade ago when he gave his friends the Hungry Pain technique, they were to serve as the proof of his claims so that he could smoothly receive his dues without any complications.

Eventually, the day arrived.

Rui arrived at the Hajin branch of the Martial Union, smoothly passing through the security check-in with his new license. There was even a panel of staff members awaiting him in the lobby, immediately approaching.

"We are here to aid you in any manner necessary, sir," They bowed their heads.

"Lead me to the presentation venue," Rui instructed them.

It wasn't long before he found himself in a large lecture hall that could comfortably host hundreds of people.

There were teams of assistants and clerks led by managers who completed their logistical duties ensuring everything was in order for the presentation.

"You're here rather early," A voice called out to him.

A man accompanied by two Martial Squires walked into the lecture hall.

He was lavishly garbed with an expensive custom-tailored suit with immaculately groomed hair and beard. A badge attached to the chest area of the left side of his tuxedo identified his position and name.

[Director Saren Muliouen]

"Considering that I'm leading the show, I'd say I'm just on time," Rui calmly replied.

The man smiled as he briskly walked up to Rui. "Director Saren; head of the Hajin regional branch of the Martial Union. It truly is an honor to meet the prodigious Martial Senior of the Kandrian Empire."

Considering that the man didn't defer to Rui with an honorific showed that he was considerably highly ranked within the hierarchy of the executive department. There weren't too many human officials within the Martial Union who could address Rui as an equal, this was part of the norms of the Martial Union. It was a way of saying that Martial power trumped non-Martial authority.

"I'm pleased that you're here early, gives me a chance to speak to you before the event unfolds. His Mastery, the Surgeon, personally ordered me to oversee the event while the Her Mastery the Truth Seeker personally oversaw the vetting process," The man remarked. "That is a good indication of the magnitude of the seriousness with which the Chamber of Masters is taking whatever it is that you're presenting."

Rui grew surprised at his words.

The Surgeon and the Truth Seeker were two renowned Martial Masters of the Martial Union. While Rui didn't know their Martial Paths or their Martial Art, it was safe to say that the security of the event was highly secure.

Headmaster Aronian was not lying when he said that the Martial Union was extremely serious about ensuring that not a single ounce of information about his Hungry Pain technique was leaked.

"I'm glad that I can disseminate my presentation without any worries," Rui replied, glancing over at a figure that had entered the lecture hall, instantly drawing his attention with their aura.

Yet it was their identity that surprised him.

It was Senior Ceeran.

No, that wasn't quite right.

"Master...Ceeran?" Rui murmured, shocked.

Yet there was no doubt about it when he verified it with his senses. The Martial Senior that he knew had gone and become a Martial Master in the decade that they had been apart.

"Senior Quarrier. Rui..." He smiled warmly. The man's voice had gained a calmness and composure that it didn't have before. It had gained a knowing tone, one that every Martial Master seemed to have. "I knew from the very first moment I rested my eyes on you that you would not be shackled to the Squire Realm forever, yet not even I could have foreseen your ascension to Senior Realm would be the youngest this world has ever seen. You are truly special, a gem that this nation and our union have been blessed with."

Rui simply stared at his, speechless, earning a chuckle from the good-natured Martial Master who turned to the man beside them with a nod. "Director."

"Pleasure to meet you again, sir," The man bowed his head lightly.

"I have many things to tell and even more to ask," Master Ceeran smiled at Rui. "But we will have to postpone that for now, I'm afraid. Formally, I'm here as a Martial Director from the long-range division of our research and development department. Informally, I am here as a part of the Ranging Sect. We are truly intrigued by the topic of your presentation today. We have even brought over renowned

researchers and scholars from our division, ones that have been thoroughly vetted by the Truth Seeker, of course."

He gestured to a middle-aged man and woman who bowed deeply to Rui. Yet Rui could see a hint of skepticism in their eyes, he could clearly sense that they didn't expect much of a presentation coming from a twenty-eight-year-old Martial Senior without any formal education.

Chapter 1566: Acquainting Session

Of course, Rui didn't mind. Frankly, he would have been skeptical in their shoes as well. It was unrealistic to expect much from a presentation from a Martial Senior.

His attention turned back to Master Ceeran. He was still having trouble parsing the fact that Master Ceeran had broken through to the Master Realm, becoming Martial Master.

"I do look forward to speaking with you later, Master Ceeran," Rui reiterated, breaking out of his reverie.

"Indeed, we will have the opportunity to do just that later." Ceeran smiled warmly at Rui's words. "But for now, it would do you good to not get distracted, Rui. We will be taking our seats for now. I'm sure there are others who would like to have a word with you."

He was right.

Another Martial Master had just entered the lecture hall, one that Rui didn't recognize. She too was accompanied by two scholars, walking over to Rui.

The first thing about her that drew his attention was that she didn't generate any sound. Neither her footsteps nor the shuffling of her clothes generated even the slightest hint of sound or seismic radiation.

'Stealth?' He narrowed his eyes. 'No...'

"Senior Quarrier," She called out to him with a blank tone. "I am Milan of the Tree Sect. It is a pleasure to meet the youngest Martial Senior in history. I have heard much about your exploits even from your Apprentice days. I am particularly looking forward to the topic of your presentation today. It raised a bit of an uproar in our sect when we learned about its effects."

Rui smiled, bowing his head lightly. "Pleasure to meet you as well, Master Milan. I hope my presentation will be of satisfaction to you."

She nodded before leaving and taking her seat.

By then, groups had gathered. Each consisted of a Martial Master as well as two additional scholars. The latter was there to ensure that the Martial Masters didn't need to worry about not understanding any technical parts of the discussion.

It was quite surreal for Rui to see so many Martial Masters in one room. It showed not only how much his technique was valued, but also the number of Martial Masters within the Kandrian Empire.

"It's an honor to meet you Senior Quarrier," Another man approached him with a smile, bowing his head lightly. "I am Doctor Garnen, one of the head scholars over at the evolution breakthrough division in the R&D department. I've heard many a tale about you, Senior. It truly is wonder that you were able to break through to the Senior at such a young age."

Rui considered the man for a moment. The fact that he was from the evolution breakthrough division meant that Rui's work probably affect the man's work more than anybody else in the room. They were probably dying to know how a Martial Senior like Rui could produce such a breakthrough in the development of powerful Martial Bodies while they struggled to make steady incremental gains that were quite slow.

"You flatter me, doctor," Rui smiled perfunctorily.

"I'm not, actually," The doctor grew more serious. "It is rather shocking, even to this day, to know that a Martial Senior greater contribution to the research agenda that I lead, but also did it in a manner that I am unable to decipher."

Rui knew that he must have been leading the group that tried to understand the underlying biochemical mechanics of the Hungry Pain technique.

"Well, I'm sure you're pleased that this day has finally arrived then," Rui lightly replied. "The presentation will begin soon."

After that, he was approached by several more groups from different sects and factions.

"I have heard much about you boy!" One Martial Master from the Fire Sect grinned, slapping his shoulder over and over. "The Fire Sect will welcome a prodigious Martial Senior like you and your many boons with open arms!"

"It is a pleasure to finally meet the Volder," One Martial Master stated. "The Poison Sect has benefited from the surplus of certain esoteric substances that we require for some poisons. We also look forward to your presentation. We hope you will assuage some of our concerns."

"We of the Flickering Sect would love to have a man of your talents," Another Martial Master told him. "As a Martial Artist with a dynamic all-rounder Martial Art, you would be a better fit for our sect than any of the others."

"Hah!" Another Martial Master chirped in. "That's a load of bullshit! Have you gone blind? He is clearly best suited for our Mind Sect with that extraordinarily bright mind of his!"

Friction between the groups that tried to approach Rui inevitably ensued as Director Saren helplessly tried intervening.

"Your Masteries, the presentation is soon to begin, please take your seats!" He cried.

Thankfully, the Martial Masters were not too stubborn, doing as he said as they took their seats.

Soon enough, most of the seats were filled.

The door opened as two more Martial Masters entered the lecture hall. The hall grew quiet as the two radiated a pressure that reminded him of Master Reina and Master Zeamer.

The air was wrung under the silent pressure they exerted upon everybody.

The Surgeon and the Truth Seeker.

"Senior Quarrier," The Surgeon addressed him. "I apologize for the delayed introduction. I am Zentra. A team assigned to me and myself will be overseeing the final evaluation of the value of your contribution."

In other words, Rui needed to hope that he didn't say anything that displeased this man.

"I am Carly Fiera, of the Eye Sect," The Truth Seeker informed him calmly. "I have personally overseen the vetting of every member in this hall with my mental sensory techniques. Rest assured that everybody in this room is verified to not have any duplicitous or malicious intent."

These were the measures that the Martial Union was taking to ensure that the other four powerhouses of East Panama and other intelligence organizations would not learn about what was to unfold today.

Rui glanced around the lecture hall. Everybody was seated and ready for him to begin.

"Very well then," Rui nodded. "Let us begin without any further ado."

Chapter 1567: Declarations

He gestured to the assistants that had been assigned to him to roll over the board with his little slide show prepared for him, before glancing back at the audience.

"I must inform all of you of several things before we get started," Rui remarked. "The first is that the complete and whole explanation right down to every detail, is frankly, extremely complicated too much for non-scholars. Thus I will divide my segment into two sections. One where I offer an elementary

breakdown and the other where I go more in-depth into the nitty gritty for the various scholars in the room. I don't know if I'll be able to satisfy their questions and doubts, but I will do my best."

He paused for a moment, before continuing. "If there are any questions and doubts, please save for the specific intervals for questions that I will continuously have. It is best that the lecture is over as soon as possible."

He didn't want to be continuously interrupted by skeptical scholars. "Another thing," Rui informed them. "I will come out and directly inform all of you that I am unable to provide you with empirical data that would serve as proof for the explanations that I am about to provide. I will take this opportunity to remind all of you that I am most definitively not a researcher. I am a Martial Artist. If your doubt or comment pertains to the lack of evidence or proof of any statement I make during this little lecture, then it will probably be for everyone's best that you don't bring it up."

He paused for a moment, letting them mull over it. "Now then, let us begin with a simple overview. The Hungry Pain technique. It is a technique based on the modification technique of mental conditioning technique associates a physical trigger with a mental state. I modified it to make the trigger pain, and the mental state; the mental processes associated with overwhelming hunger. The resultant outcome is a surplus of stamina and energy that is far beyond what is normally possible. When this is combined with the Martial Body, the evolution of stamina during the breakthrough process can be minimized, allowing for those resources to be used to evolve other parts of the body. Ultimately resulting in a significantly stronger Martial Body, by about fifty percent on average."

This was common knowledge to everyone.

"The core principle of this technique is what I like to call autophagy," Rui informed them straightforwardly.

The word sounded foreign to everybody, alien even. It certainly did not trace its etymology to other words of the Kandrian dialect.

His audience appeared to be intrigued at where he was going with this.

"When the body undergoes extreme starvation, there are many measures it takes to prolong its survival," Rui informed them. "Chief among them is autophagy. What is autophagy?' is a question I'm sure you're all wondering. The answer is quite simple."

He turned to the board, activating a breathing technique to flip the first slide page over, revealing different sections each featuring a lattice of a dozen cells.

These were different phases of the autophagy process, showing just how cells were consumed dying or dead cells, and converted them into amino acids, among other organic compounds.

"Autophagy, simply put, is the body's ability to consume itself," Rui declared.

This provoked a reaction among many of the members of the audience. "This is an oversimplification, of course," Rui continued. "But it is true. The body, when faced with starvation and deprivation of nutrition, engages in a systematic breakdown of cells and cell components into useful sources of nutrition and energy for the body. It generally targets damaged, dying, and dead cells. It is constantly undergoing, but under normal circumstances, it is extremely minimal and slow. It accelerates significantly when the body is faced with starvation."

He paused for a moment, allowing his audience to digest his news. "The Hungry Pain technique, which triggers the mental processes associated with hunger, inadvertently triggers the extreme acceleration of the body, supplying the body with a surplus of organic compounds while also decreasing the required nutritional and energy load."

Turning back to the board before him. "It is thanks to autophagy that the human body survives incredible amounts of time without any food. If not for this process, the human body would collapse after a fraction of the time it takes to finally die of starvation. It goes to show just how powerful of an emergency supplier of nutrition and energy the human body is. This is even more true for the Martial Body that is evolved to have much higher survivability than the human body."

He turned back to his audience. "One can imagine how powerful it would be if harnessed in combat. It is the equivalent of consuming physical rejuvenation potions across the entire battle. It is almost like having a physical rejuvenation potion factory inside your own body. That is why the Hungry Pain technique is so potent. It breaks the known paradigms of stamina, energy reserves, and energy consumption that all Martial Artists have adhered to."

He eyed each member carefully. His words clearly had an impact. While none of the audience members did something as undignified as making awed sounds, there was a slight ripple of energy across the small crowd. Martial Masters grew deep in thought at the words he espoused.

It was true, that while there were some rare and truly strange techniques that could siphon energy, there was almost no way to supply nutrition to the body in the middle of combat. No competent Martial Artist would allow their opponent to get away with something as time-consuming and vulnerable as consuming a potion in the middle of combat.

Any fool who dared to do that would either die to a lethal attack or would be severely injured at the bare minimum.

Yet the Hungry Pain technique was different, the Martial Union had already confirmed without any shred of a doubt that it could magically empower stamina. It was fascinating for everyone to learn about the principle of the technique.

Chapter 1568: Concerns and Doubts

Once Rui explained the basic mechanism and principle of the technique, the main purpose of the lecture had already been fulfilled, as far as he was concerned. Not it was just a matter of appeasing the questions, doubts, and personal concerns of the Martial Artists of various sects.

And also the more technical questions of the scholars that had been brought with them.

"...and that is more or less about the benefits and limitations of ordinary autophagy in normal humans," Rui concluded the first phase of the lecture after going over all the general and broader information about autophagy that he had to offer, just to give everybody a good idea of how the process worked outside of the technique."

He turned to the audience. "Now then. Let us go for a round of questions. Again, I have yet to go into the depth of the details of exactly how the process actually works on a sub-cellular level, thus I ask you to please abstain from asking questions that probe into the depths of the sub-cellular mechanics."

A few hands went down, most of them from scholars who undoubtedly wanted to get into the nitty-gritty of what Rui was saying.

Rui skimmed through the Martial Masters present, finding Ceeran having raised his arm too.

"Master Ceeran, please," He nodded at the man with a smile.

"I appreciate the opportunity, Senior Quarrier," Ceeran smiled warmly. "Now then, my question was whether there were any limitations to the distribution of the surplus stamina supplied by the autophagy process of the Hungry Pain technique. Is it easier for certain parts or muscles of the body to access this power better than other parts of the body?"

Rui shook his head. "Not at all, it occurs across the entire body at an evenly distributed rate per cell per capita. Some of the nutrition and energy is absorbed while certain other kinds are released into the bloodstream which does not discriminate between any body part or Martial Art technique."

He knew that this was the concern for most of the Martial Sects. They were worried that the Hungry Pain technique could rapidly shift the balance of power between certain fields and techniques with how impactful it was.

Rui quickly quelled those concerns to a certain degree for the time being.

He skimmed across the crowd, spotting another Martial Master with a raised hand, reading the name tag on the table. "Master Sera."

"As a representative of the Poison Sect, I wish to ask you about any potential clashes between the poisons of our sect and this Hungry Pain technique of yours. Is it possible that the field poison itself is not compatible with this technique?" She asked, sounding as neutral as possible.

"No, that's not possible," Rui shook his head. "In the first place, the field of poison techniques works by having the Martial Artist grow immune to the effects of the poison through repeated exposure and conditioning. Once the user reaches a state where their cells are not affected by the poison anymore, then it can be said with certainty that autophagy too won't be negatively affected. But until then, yes, it will likely interfere with the process to a certain extent during training."

"I see..." She replied thoughtfully. "I appreciate your valuable insights on this topic."

What followed were sequences of questions from each Martial Sect that essentially inquired into how the Hungry Pain technique would affect their particular given field of Martial Art.

Rui could sense that Martial Artists of the smaller and weaker Martial Sects were hoping that the Hungry Pain technique would disproportionately benefit their field of Martial Art, while the Martial Artists of the larger sects were hoping that the status quo would be maintained, at the very least, if not tilted even more in their favor than it already was.

Of course, there was one Martial Sect that benefited the most from the Hungry Pain. The Stamina Sect, also known as the Tree Sect. Why did they call themselves the Tree Sect? Rui didn't know, or care to know.

But it was undeniable that if the Hungry Pain technique benefited anybody, then it was the stamina-oriented Martial Artists.

"By what factor what you say stamina is increased thanks to the Hungry Pain technique?" Master Milan of the Tree Sect asked him.

"Hmmm...I'd say about a factor of two," Rui replied. "Though there is plenty of variation depending on several other variables."

"I see," She replied. "That is quite the remarkable boost considering the ease of mastery, barring the fortitude, and universality of such a technique."

Eventually, he managed to get around to more or less every Martial Master before it was finally time for the next part of his lecture.

"Now that I have answered the first set of questions, I will move on to the next half of my lecture where I will break down the precise sub-cellular mechanics of the autophagy process. Those who don't have a taste for the details may consider leaving the lecture at this point, I cannot promise that the next half won't bore some of the...less academically-inclined members of the audience to death."

None of the members left the lecture hall, awaiting the remaining part of his lecture.

Rui heaved a small sigh. "Very well then. Let us begin with diving into the three types of autophagy; microautophagy, macroautophagy, and chaperone-mediated autophagy. As well as the four steps of autophagy; Sequestration, lysosome transportation, degradation, and consumption. Please refer to the chart for the definitions of the various terms. Now then..."

It turned out that the Martial Masters had underestimated just how detailed the lecture would get. As he explained the detailed biochemistry of autophagy, he could have sworn he saw smoke coming from the ears of some of the Martial Masters who were the least 'academically inclined' out of everybody in the crowd.

Thankfully, this was why the scholars were brought, while the Martial Masters were lost in the sea of explanations that Rui offered, the scholars grew more immersed in his lecture.

Chapter 1569: Crucial Inquisition

The lecture regarding the technical details went on for quite some time as Rui exposed the knowledge he recalled. His enhanced mind increased his ability to recall old memories, being able to tap into the knowledge of Earth much more smoothly than he would otherwise have been able to.

He avoided going into organic chemistry because that would open a whole can of worms that he wasn't interested in revealing. The chemistry of carbon was the basis of life, but going there would reveal knowledge that did not exist within this world.

The Martial Masters sat there, dumbfounded, completely out of their depth. When Rui had said that the lecture would get technical, they had taken those words with a grain of salt.

After all, he was just a Martial Senior, a young Martial Senior at that. What could he have gone through and known that would completely escape their ability to fathom?

Only the Ranging Sect had a good idea that this would happen. Master Ceeran gave Rui a knowing smile as he experienced a sense of déjà vu, recalling a similar memory when Rui explained the mechanics of

the ODA System of the Pathfinder technique all those years ago when they were each a Realm below their current Realm.

Master Ceeran glanced around the room with an amused smile, laughing inwardly at the various Martial Masters who arrogantly thought that they would be able to digest anything that Rui could throw their way. While each of them could see that Rui's mind was exceptionally bright and powerful with a single glance, as those who had created and realized the Martial Mind, they didn't think that they could be out-thought, or rather out-knowledged by a young Martial Senior.

They were wrong.

Even the Surgeon, who had been specially assigned by Sage Nulimain to preside over the evaluation of the technique due to compatibility with his Martial Art and the technique, seemed lost, unable to keep up.

By the time Rui had concluded the explanation and opened the floor to questions, only the scholars had anything to ask.

"You have demonstrated a deep understanding of the human body," One of them said when given the chance to ask a question. "That certainly increases your credibility. However, the knowledge that you have presented is not founded upon any empirical research discovery from anywhere in the Kandrian or international science community that I am aware of. Unfortunately, our understanding of the human body at the cellular unit and past it is highly undeveloped, but you have presented concepts, frameworks, and theories that pertain to the body at that scale. What basis could there possibly be for any of this?"

"I'm afraid you have forgotten one of the three statements I made when I began the lecture," Rui shook his head. "I made that statement precisely for those like you who would ask that question. I said that I don't have any empirical data and that any question that seeks to understand the basis of my claims is not worth asking. Besides, I have made a large number of claims in this lecture. The scientific method is defined by falsifiability and predictability. If my explanations are wrong, then they should be easily falsifiable given how bold they are. If they're wrong, then the predicted outcomes by the framework I have provided should not match reality. On the contrary, if it continuously predicts the right outcome, then it will serve as evidence for the hypothesis, elevating it to a scientific theory."

Rui got them back with the nature of science.

The scholars were rather surprised by how confidently Rui dismissed the question, and how confident he was in his claims. He was certainly the most scientifically educated Martial Artist that they had ever met.

"I'd like to ask a question." A voice from the crowd announced.

All eyes turned to the man who asked the question.

"Doctor Garnen...Please do," Rui replied.

This man was the head researcher over at the evolution breakthrough process division. The Hungry Pain technique had made a greater contribution to creating a more powerful Martial Body than any individual in the division had made. Many wondered what he was going to ask.

"It is true that you have already waved off questions pertaining to the basis of your explanations of the mechanics of the Hungry Pain technique. Since that is the case, I wanted to inquire where you gained this knowledge from," Doctor Garnen asked. "Let us say everything you said thus far is true, then it begs the question of where this knowledge came from. I, for one, have never seen nor heard of many of the things that you have conveyed."

Rui stared at the man for a few moments. He knew that many people were curious about this question.

Thankfully, he had foreseen this question and had already prepared for this exact scenario.

"For one, I would like to inform you that I actually have a journeyman scholar degree in the sciences," Rui began. "I got it almost five years ago, undertaking the exam after some preparation."

"That is quite the achievement for a Martial Artist, no doubt," Doctor Garnen remarked, intrigued. "But every scholar here also has a journeyman scholar degree in the sciences and more. That degree could not have possibly given you what you needed to know."

"The source of my knowledge is a person who is very dear to me, one who isn't willing to go public with this research data yet," Rui shook his head. "I cannot divulge their identity, I'm afraid. As a scientist, I'm sure you understand the importance of this privacy."

"...I see," Doctor Garnen remarked. "That truly is a shame, I would have loved to meet this person and have a long talk with them."

"Perhaps someday in the future," Rui replied. "If there are any other questions, I'm willing to answer them all now, if not, this lecture session will soon come to an end."

Immediately, a dozen hands flew up.

Chapter 1570: Conclusion

Rui spent a lot of time answering a lot of technical questions from the scholars. They certainly did not make it easy. While their knowledge of biochemistry was lacking, Rui was not an expert either. He had learned much about it in the later years of his career as his research into combat sports grew more sophisticated and required a deeper understanding of the anatomy and physiology of the human body, but that was it.

Still, it was enough to quell the doubts of the various scholars who had much skepticism about his questions. They didn't directly question the basis of the knowledge that he displayed since he had already clarified many times that he wouldn't be getting into that topic at all.

Still, they could still test the rigor of the biochemical framework of the autophagy process as he provided it to them.

And test they did.

"The so-called lysosome-assimilation mechanism that you espoused, would the framework not imply that the net nutritional extraction limit is a function of cell volume and cell count?"

"Based on the information you presented, it can be said that the body is essentially self-harming itself to a certain degree to produce more stamina, is that safe?"

"Is it not plausible that the Martial Squire can be put in danger if this phenomenon were ever suppressed using a poison technique?"

While some of these were well-intended questions, the others were a little barbed.

Nonetheless, Rui navigated them unerringly.

Yet that only seemed to egg them on. As senior and even master scholars, it was rather humiliating to be rhetorically outdone by a Martial Senior in a topic within their field of expertise. Even if said Senior was an extraordinarily bright journeyman scholar.

"Enough," Rui declared after a while. "These questions have already strayed well away from the core topic of the Hungry Pain technique. I believe that is an indication that the core purpose of this presentation has been fulfilled. With that, I bring this presentation to an end. I hope you found this informative."

Master Ceeran began clapping with a smile, sparking a boisterous applause that culminated the entire event.

Rui heaved a sigh, drinking some water, hoping to catch a break. Yet he didn't get the chance.

"I didn't think I would ever run into a nerd Martial Senior HAHAHA!" Master Iskan of the Fire Sect laughed boisterously, slapping Rui on the shoulder.

The man had a gargantuan body, overflowing with muscles. He had a crude edge to his appearance, one that revealed he didn't care for social norms.

His pats hurt, though.

"I'm glad- that you- like it-" Rui squeezed out in between the heavy hits from the Martial Master.

"Still, a technique where the body eats itself eh...?" The man scratched his scruffy beard. "Interesting, to say the least. Not my cup of tea personally. But who knows, perhaps I'll give it a try. On another note..."

He faced Rui head-on. "Join the Fire Sect, Rui Quarrier."

"I'll have to decline," Rui straightforwardly refused.

"...Decisive. I like that!" The Master nodded approvingly. "Then, young man, accept my friendship. May we be friends from this day forth!"

Rui stared at him, mentally noting that the diversity of character and personality amongst Martial Masters was not low. "...I would be honored to be your friend."

"Then so be it!" He laughed, slapping Rui on the shoulder over and over again. "My friend, Senior Quarrier!"

A wave of pressure washed over him. He sharply turned around, eying the source. "You picking a fight, Revona?"

She didn't back down. Despite being of a much more diminutive stature than Master Iskan, Master Revona calmly stared him down with sharp eyes. With a long singular garb covering her entire body and a pointy hat on her head, she gave him the impression of a witch rather than a Martial Artist.

"Unhand the young man, oaf," She icily ordered him. "A mind as bright as him is most fit for the Mind Sect. A mindless caveman like yourself having him is like a street mongrel playing with a gem, unaware of its true value."

"What use is a bright mind when even the dumbest beast can tear you apart?" Master Iskan smirked condescendingly. "Maybe I should take this opportunity to remind everybody why the Fire Sect is one of the strongest."

Master Devona snorted. "You think you can best me?"

"Why don't we find out?"

"Why don't we?"

The air grew taut as the two Masters faced off against each other. The other Martial Masters watched with vague intrigue and amusement while the humans in the room shivered with fear. If not for the protective influence of their own Martial Masters, they would have long collapsed.

Rui on the other hand, heaved a sigh, trying to interject.

Yet Master Ceeran did so in his stead.

"Tear each other apart all you like, Iskan, Devona. But I already have an engagement with Senior Quarrier there. It's first come, first served," Master Ceeran as he smirked.

He had come early precisely for this. He knew that a lot of Martial Masters would be interested in speaking with Rui, and he certainly needed to get there first.

Yet things didn't unfold the way he hoped

"I'm afraid that I'm going to have to disappoint all of you," A strong voice resounded through the lecture hall. "Senior Rui Quarrier will need to come with me on official business with the Martial Union."

The Surgeon cut through the tension in a manner that lived up to his name. No one retorted to him, he was easily the strongest Martial Master there.

"Senior Quarrier," The tall man addressed Rui with a composed tone. "My team and I have completed our evaluations. You may indulge in personal engagements at a later time, it is vital that we complete this matter."

Rui grew serious nodding. This was the whole reason that he had gone through the trouble of this whole matter.

"Esteemed Masters of the Martial Union," Rui bowed to all of them, taking a few steps back. "I am honored and flattered by your invitations and appreciation. I look forward to speaking with you on an individual basis at a later occasion. While I'm not inclined to join any Martial Sect due to a lack of fit with my Martial Art, I am willing to indulge your offer."

"Haha! No need to be so polite to us old foggies! If no Martial Sect does you justice, then you can just create your own!" Master Iskan laughed.