

Martial Unity 1571

Chapter 1571: Remuneration

Those words intrigued Rui even after he departed from the lecture hall, bidding all the Martial Masters farewell.

He glanced up at Master Zentra, the Surgeon. The tall man had an appearance that seemed extraordinarily well-groomed. Rui's senses as a Martial Senior allowed him to peer into microscopic depths.

At that depth, most people were shabby and ungroomed, although that was certainly an unreasonable standard to hold anybody to.

Yet this Martial Master seemed to be extremely well-groomed even on a microscopic level.

This was a level of care that would most OCD patients to shame.

Rui wondered what relation it could possibly have to his Martial Art and Martial Path since they were almost certainly connected.

"Is it possible for me to create a Martial Sect, Master Zentra?" Rui asked the man.

"Theoretically, anybody can create a Martial Sect," the man replied. "It's just a semi-informal group centered around a field of Martial Art with the common interests of developing or spreading said field of Martial Art. In the context of the Kandrian Empire, Martial Sects also aim to secure as much support and capital for development from the Martial Union's fiscal budget allocation. So in order to qualify as a Martial Sect within the Kandrian Empire, you would need to have a seat in the Martial Union's annual budget allocation meeting."

"I see..." Rui mused. "So theoretically I could lobby for the Martial Union to invest more in, say, my Martial Path?"

The man glanced at Rui with a hint of amusement. "Generally, only Martial Artists of the Upper Realms are allowed into the meeting, though there are ways in which Martial Artists of the Lower Realms can partake in it, the circumstances leading to such an event are highly extenuating. You need to get the votes of more than fifty percent of all Martial Masters to be allowed into the budget allocation meeting."

"..." Rui had to admit that was indeed extraordinarily difficult.

"Still, I am personally of the opinion that you are worthy of partaking in the meeting as a voting constituent, I would be willing to raise the motion if you wish," The Martial Master informed Rui.

"...That is rather generous of you," Rui remarked.

He stopped before a guarded door, opening it and ushering Rui in. "It isn't. I believe that we need to invest in the future, rather than the past. You, young man, are the most promising element of the future that I see at the moment. It would be foolish for the Martial Union to hold back with you, regardless of whether you're an internal member or external."

Inside was a rather bland office with a set of documents on the table, one that did not befit a Martial Master of his renown.

"You flatter me," Rui remarked.

"That is incorrect," He remarked. "Regardless, we are not here to speak about that. Come, sit."

They took their seats. "The reason I was assigned this case was because it was relevant to my Martial Path; Maximized Physiological Control."

That was an interesting Martial Path, one that piqued Rui's curiosity.

"It is quite literal. I have an enormous amount of control over my body's metabolism, processes, and tissue, I also have informed myself on human anatomy and physiology, though nowhere near as much as

yourself," He remarked with appreciative expression. "I was also tasked with deciphering your Hungry Pain technique, a task that I failed."

Rui wasn't sure what to say to that. Anything he could say only sounded like gloating to his ears.

"This document contains both our evaluation and your remuneration for the contribution that you have made," He remarked. "Headmaster Aronian informed me that he already went over the evaluation of the technique's value, thus I will limit myself merely to your remuneration. It is multi-faceted, so I will go over them one by one. Firstly and most straightforwardly, the monetary reward."

He put a sheet of paper on the table, pushing it towards Rui. It was an itemized list that added up a bunch of numbers to the total reward that Rui would get.

His eyes widened when he read the number.

"Six hundred and thirty million Martial Credits...?" He murmured. "That's..."

That was far more than he could earn through missions within a reasonable timeframe. He was earning hundreds and thousands of Martial Credits as a Martial Squire, even if he earned a hundred times more as a Martial Senior, this would still require many, many years worth of completing missions to ever hope of reaching.

It was enough to buy a small country!

"It's the bare minimum," Master Zentra calmly informed him. "However, the value of Martial Credits decreases at the upper echelons of the organization. There are some Martial Masters who withdraw from the matters of the Martial Union and don't care about it. Martial Sages certainly don't care. At most, you can earn their time through the Martial Union, but they are unmoved if you try to leverage Martial Credits in any personal interaction. However, it is extremely useful everywhere else on the continent. The Kandrian Martial Union is a highly accredited powerful organization."

"...I see, still, this is quite substantial," Rui murmured. "I can do a lot with this, actually."

He already had a plan for what to do with the money he earned.

"Let us move on to benefits that may appeal more to your Martial Artist identity," The man remarked. "We can offer strategically valuable resources, such as high-grade potions that will enhance your Body and Heart by a significant percent. These resources are usually reserved for Martial Masters like myself, to ensure that our Bodies do not fall behind the newer and superior Martial Bodies of the younger generations that benefit from techniques like the Hungry Pain. These are usually created from extremely rare and powerful esoteric resources and would never be available for transaction under ordinary circumstances, but we have seen fit to give you this opportunity."

Rui's eyes flashed with interest. A weak Body and Heart had been his biggest shortcoming, one that he was simply powerless to fix, but he had already run into a solution.

Chapter 1572: Ambassador

He had experienced the difference in power in nearly every fight that he had in the Senior Realm and most fights he had in the Squire Realm. His raw physicality was holding him back since he hadn't cultivated his raw power over extended periods of time.

He was definitely open to getting some treat to amplify his raw power.

He also learned why the difference in Martial Body didn't seem to exist between Martial Artists of vastly differing generations.

It was because they employed expensive solutions to close the gap, according to the revelation of Master Zentra. It made sense that he had never heard of this before. Especially if they were highly rare and valued.

While the Martial Body was the most ubiquitous and mass-producible means of empowerment, it was not the only one.

However, only those who were worthy of these resources would gain access to them. The Martial Union was interested in maintaining the strength of Martial Art, that meant wisely allocating limited and

strategic resources. Ensuring that older and more accomplished Martial Artists didn't fall behind the younger generations as far as their Martial Body went.

"I will most certainly be partaking in these resources," Rui remarked as he read through the details of what they offered. "It is much appreciated."

"There were some who opposed giving you this reward, citing its scarcity. Despite there being only one hundred and fifty three Martial Masters in the Kandrian Empire, we do not have the resources available to ensure that their Martial Body would not fall behind the times," Master Zentra noted. "...Are you saying I was chosen at a Martial Master's expense?" Rui's eyes widened. "To a certain extent, yes," Master Zentra confirmed. "Consider it to be a token of our appreciation if you. While your Martial power as a Senior greatly pales in comparison to even the weakest Martial Master in this empire, in our experience, your endless potential is worth investing in. We would be just as aggrieved at losing you as we would one of our Martial Masters."

"You flatter me..." Rui shook his head before returning to the list of potions and pills with greedy eyes. "I will be sure to put these to good use."

Master Zentra nodded. "You may take your time going through everything we have offered in your time and inform the Martial Union of your decision, it will be handled smoothly. Moving on to some of your next rewards."

He placed a card on the table, pushing it towards Rui. [Senior Martial Ambassador]

Rui's eyebrows rose. "This..."

"The Martial Union has a Martial heirarchy of authority and rank that is parallel to the administrative and executive heirarchy," Master Zentra informed him. "These usually entail the same authority with none of the duties and responsibilities. We usually do this to ensure that there is always some Martial Artist oversight in all departments and levels."

Rui nodded, recalling Master Ceeran being in a similar role back when he was a Martial Senior.

"In this case, we have decided to bestow you with position of Senior Martial Ambassador despite your status as an external member," Master Zentra informed him. "This is a great honor, and shows the trust and credibility that you have cultivated, as well as your competence as a diplomat."

Rui's expression didn't so much in shift, but inwardly he was already scorning. "...What are the benefits to being a Senior Martial Ambassador? So far it sounds like a lot of complications without anything to be gained for me."

Thus far, it only sounded like the Martial Union was using it to try and rope Rui into their circle. In fact, he was certain that that was one of the goals with trying to give him this fancy position.

His value was too high to be left to any other faction or bloc in the Kandrian Empire. The Martial Union had grown dissatisfied with his refusal to enter their ranks. Naturally, they couldn't force him. A Martial Senior partner being intimidated and forced into their ranks by the Martial Union would be a scandal that would ruin their reputation and credibility.

Especially when so many people had their eyes on Rui.

Making him a senior ambassador was a good way to pull him into their circle without actually doing it.

"I was getting to that. We have learned about some of your...exploits during your time away through our internal investigation," Master Zentra informed him. "That with the gains you made during your time as a diplomat on Vilun Island and the G'ak'arkan Tribe have led us to believe that you are a Martial Artist who grows from environmental stimulation, is that correct?"

Rui couldn't deny it. He made much more progress traveling from place to place, being exposed to new and fresh environments than he did sitting in one place, especially if he ran into hurdles and challenges amidst his pursuits.

"Then I believe you will find this to be quite useful," Master Zentra pushed the card towards Rui. "This allows you to access the confidential data of our outreach program and partnerships. You may think that the situation with the G'ak'arkan Tribe was unique. But this is a situation that the Martial Union is quite familiar with. There are many more isolated groups, sects, and societies centered around Martial Art with unique philosophies and different paradigms. They have their own specialties and Martial cultures

that are quite different from the continental standard. This world is far too large for there to be widespread uniformity."

He glanced at the Senior Ambassador card. "What we are offering is a way for you to easily gain access to them and visit them as a visiting ambassador of the Martial Union. You won't be expected to carry out any duties, and you may rely on the name of the Martial Union to sort any issues that occur. There, you can train and learn in their ways if you so please."

Rui's eyes lit up with interest at this offer.

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Chapter 1573: Invitation

Master Zentra wasn't done. "We usually reach out to these groups, sects, communities, and societies to conduct Martial Art exchanges with them, similar to what you did with the G'ak'arkan Tribe. However, is very unusual that we are able to obtain all of their secrets, heritages, and ethnic Martial Art. Meaning, it is quite possible for you to gain Martial Art techniques from them that you wouldn't find anywhere else in the world."

This definitely caught his attention. "I see...That does sound interesting."

He had learned some useful techniques from the G'ak'arkan Tribe that went on to become the basis of grade-ten techniques that he created. There was no denying the value of techniques of a field from a group who had dedicated their entirety to said field, along with their ancestors.

"And just to be clear," Rui glanced up at the Martial Master warily. "There are no duties or responsibilities that come with this, correct?"

"Correct," The man nodded. "So you won't take it away if I don't do anything?"

"We won't," Master Zentra confirmed. "The only way we would take it back is if you become hostile to the Martial Union."

"I see..." Rui considered the matter, before nodding. "Alright then. I'll accept this."

He didn't think he was going to use it any time soon, of course. He had just returned to the Martial Union and had already gotten involved with the matters of the nation to a small extent. This was an important phase that he didn't want to be away from for the time being.

Rui glanced at Master Zentra expectantly for his next reward, who simply stared at Rui.

"...We have also decided to present you with this," Master Zentra said.

He pushed forward a small device with a small screen on it that read '100:00:00'

"One hundred hours of the time of Martial Masters," Master Zentra explained to him. "Martial Masters in the Martial Union sometimes sell their time to the Martial Union in exchange for certain exclusive and elite high-level services and resources. You can purchase a total of hundred hours of the time of Martial Masters of the Martial Union."

This was a rather surprising revelation. Though it shouldn't have been, in hindsight. Still, it certainly wasn't something that Rui had expected the Martial union would just give him as a part of the rewards for the Hungry Pain technique.

"I see..." Rui murmured. "So I can purchase the one hundred hours of the time of any Martial Master?"

"That's not how it works," Master Zentra shook his head. "You can purchase a total of hundreds hours from the hours that Martial Masters have sold to the Martial Union. Some have sold only one, while others have sold hundreds. You can purchase only a hundred in total from a list that you can access any time."

"Interesting," Rui smiled, amused. "For the record, any Martial Artist can do that," Master Zentra informed him. "You already had a reputation for being a great trainer even as a Martial Squire. As the youngest Senior, there are those who would be willing to pay a lot to purchase your time."

"I'll have to decline from going that route," Rui shook his head. "My time is far too precious for any number of Martial Credits, honestly."

"As you wish," Master Zentra nodded. "That brings us to an end to your remuneration."

Rui's expression fell. "Is that it?"

Master Zentra heaved a sigh. "Yes."

"Shame," Rui murmured. "Well then, I appreciate the generous rewards. I am glad to see that the Martial Union truly does value my contribution. Since our business has concluded, I shall be on my way."

"Before you go. I would like to offer you an invitation." Master Zentra remarked, taking out an envelope from a locked drawer.

"Invitation?" Rui turned around. "If it's about whatever Martial Sect you're a part of then I'll have to decline."

Rui paused when he saw the crest of the royal family on the seal of the envelope. "You may decline it if you want, but I would not recommend that," Master Zentra informed Rui with a more serious tone. "His Highness Prince Raijun wishes to speak to you."

Rui glanced back between the letter and the Martial Master. He was taken aback, but this revelation wasn't too surprising considering that Prince Raijun had gained a solid chunk of the support from the Martial Union.

That meant that the probability that he run into a Martial Master who was a part of his faction was actually quite high. "I presume that means you are a Martial Supremacist?" Rui inquired.

Master Zentra shook his head. "You don't need to be a Martial Supremacist to support His Highness. You just need to be a Martial Artist. Out of all the seven prime candidates for ruler, only one of them is fighting for the interests of Martial Artists. It is common sense for Martial Artists to support the Martial Prince, it is unfortunate that too many do not realize that."

Rui did not entirely agree with that sentiment, but he was not interested in having a philosophical or political debate with the Martial Master. "His Highness is quite impressed and appreciative of you," Master Zentra revealed. "He is willing to make offers that he would not make to any other Martial Senior, I promise you. He was quite amazed by your presentation and the fact that you were able to come up with such an incredible technique that has greatly aided the Martial Union. Along with your other colorful feats and accomplishments, he was willing to give you a position in the faction that is normally reserved only for Martial Masters. More than anything, he wishes to speak to you."

"I see..." Rui remarked. "Well, I suppose I can at least offer to hear His Highness out. When can I meet with the prince?"

"Today, of course," Master Zentra replied. "His Highness had prepared some time for you today looking forward to speaking to you after your presentation was done, there is a Royal carriage waiting to take you to meet His Highness. We have also prepared a grooming team to ensure that you are fit to be in the presence of a member of the Royal Family in Royal Palace of South Mantia."

Chapter 1574: Arrival

"I am certainly not prepared for such a meeting," Rui replied with a troubled expression.

"His Highness does not intend to pressure you. His Highness is merely eager to meet you and make your acquaintance, rest assured that you make take your time for any decision regarding your allegiance or support," Master Zentra reassured him. "While it looks like we're in the same camp, the Martial Union will not allow the Royal Family to unduly pressure our partners and members."

Rui wasn't so worried about being pressured, if the man had any sense, he would not do that and squander any chance of getting the support of the most prodigious Martial Senior in history.

It was just a little abrupt, he hadn't gotten a chance to prepare himself mentally for an important event like this. He was also a little tired after the presentation that he had just given.

"We have prepared high-grade physical and mental rejuvenation potions if you require them," Master Zentra remarked. "

"Huff..." Rui heaved a sigh. "I'll take them."

And he did. They nourished his body and mind thoroughly, making him feel like he had gotten a good night's sleep and massage the next morning.

He wished he could get a regular supply of them, but alas.

What ensued next was a blur. A group of men and women who were assigned to grooming stripped him down and then scrubbed and washed him in a tub of herbal and flowery water that was allegedly meant to help with washing away Martial Artist grime.

Admittedly, by the time they were done, he felt more fresh than he had in his entire life. However, he also felt more violated than in his entire life.

They donned him with formal Martial Art attire, the type that was impractical in combat with an absurd amount of folds and cloth that just got in the way.

"This feels unnecessary," Rui complained.

"It would be rather insulting to His Highness if you were to meet him in regular Martial Art attire that is sweaty after exerting yourself in that presentation," Master Zentra remarked. "Please come this way. The carriage awaits you."

In the dispatch facility of the Martial Union stood a glowing carriage of gold and silver, drawing attention from everybody across the entire facility. Naturally, that attention shifted to him as Rui entered the carriage. At that moment, he looked closer to a noble than a Martial Artist, but his features were too well-known for people to mistake him for that.

"Hey look..."

"It's Rui Quarrier!"

"I heard he's our age, but is already a renowned Martial Senior!"

He pointedly ignored all those comments.

"Senior Quarrier, I am a butler of His Highness," A dignified butler in a custom-tailored tuxedo with a bow tie, bowed to Rui. "I am here to accompany you to the East Mantian Royal Manor. Please make yourself comfortable inside."

Rui heaved a sigh as he got into the exorbitantly luxurious carriage. It different from the ones that the Martial Union used, which focused more on utility than image.

The Royal Family, however, could not afford to. Their image was the image of the nation, after all.

The carriage immediately set off, accelerating increasingly before it took off into the air.

"Woah," Rui murmured, surprised. "A flying carriage?"

"It is a rare luxury that very few can afford, sir," The butler remarked, standing still despite the carriage escalating to the skies. "His Highness reserved the best for you, to ensure that your travel time is minimized."

It appeared that Prince Raijun did appear to think a little highly of Rui. Rui wasn't even sure what the Martial Prince had to say to Rui. After all, there was little to no way in which he could possibly convince Rui to join his faction with pure benefits. Rui didn't care for wealth for the most part, so dumping endless gold on to him was not going to make him budge.

This was especially when the interests of his family were involved in this matter, making his choice much more certain.

However, he wasn't surprised that he was meeting the Martial Prince the first out of any other prince or princess. If there was any overlapping interest that he had with any of the princes and princesses, then it was certainly the Martial Prince.

In that sense, it was not surprising that the Martial Prince took the initiative to be the first to speak with Rui in person. Perhaps he was confident that he could bag Rui as a supporter because Rui was a Martial Senior and a young Martial Senior at that. He was probably under the impression that Rui would be much more gung-ho about it.

If so, he was gravely mistaken.

Eventually, they arrived at their location sometime later, crossing the Mantian Region at rapid speeds.

The carriage gently landed near an enormous sparkling palace-

like mansion that extended over a huge estate. This was the Mantian Royal Manor, one of the properties owned by the Royal Family, allowing them to reside in a Royal Palace if any of the members happened to be in the region on some business.

"Senior Quarrier, our journey had come to an end, allow me to guide you to His Highness' abode.

Rui nodded, exiting the carriage as he beheld the giant palace. It was magnificent and truly beautiful.

It didn't leave a good taste in his mouth, however. This palace was constructed from taxpayer gold taken from hardworking citizens of the nation. While he understood that the image of the head of state needed to be maintained in order to maintain international respect and esteem, it just didn't sit right with him.

Hopefully, the Martial Prince was not a pompous asshole who expected Rui to kneel to him and kiss his feet, because Rui certainly wasn't going to be doing that.

After a long walk through the winding corridors of the manor, they had finally arrived at the place where he would have an audience with the Martial Prince.

Chapter 1575: Piercing Question

The doors before him were laden with gold and silver, just like most things were. They had put a lot of resources into establishing the anti-espionage security measures to secure the privacy of the Royal Family.

The doors opened slowly, allowing Rui's senses to rush inside.

Two Martial Masters stood by the seated man.

His body was well-chiseled. He possessed an imperious air about him, like everything and everyone around him was subject to his command. His posture was erect and stiff with a raised chin that made it easier to look down on everybody.

He had sharp red hair, the kind that drew eyes, that was groomed and combed impeccably. His attire was both Martial and extravagant, which ironically made it less Martial since Martial attire was intended to be practical and able to survive the rigors of high-level combat.

Yet much to Rui's surprise, his demeanor softened when he beheld Rui, his eyes lit up with a hint of excitement.

Rui entered the room walking before the seated prince, yet before he could observe the mandatory gesture of bowing before the Royal Family, the prince shot up, putting his hands on Rui's shoulders.

"By my word, abstain from such a humbling gesture, Senior Quarrier," The Martial Prince remarked with a surprisingly modest tone. "I did not bring you here to have you bow your head. I have great respect for the man who has brought the Kandrian Empire honor and glory many times in the past, with latest being by simply being the youngest Martial Senior in history. I have much to speak to you about, come, let us sit."

Rui was taken aback by his grace. He did appreciate the respect that the prince was giving him. Although he did not have a particularly big ego, he did not appreciate being forced to bow his head to someone who hadn't yet earned his respect.

This was different from when he bowed to Martial Artists of higher Realms, they had earned his respect and admiration simply by virtue of existing.

"Your honor me with you grace, Your Highness," Rui smiled as he sat down, following the prince. "It is a pleasure to meet the Martial Prince that has managed to capture the support of a hefty chunk of the Martial Union."

Rui conveyed a subtle message with the word 'pleasure' instead of 'honor', giving the prince a brief but good idea of Rui's perspective on him without being rude. The Martial prince caught on immediately as well, giving Rui a knowing look.

The dynamics of the conversation were established.

It was the Martial Prince that had invited Rui.

It was the Martial Prince who wanted to earn Rui's support.

Rui did not possess any particularly high respect for the Martial Apprentice of royal blood. Although breaking through to the Apprentice Realm alone was something that could not be said to be easy, it was still the lowest on a totem pole that the people around him had already climbed many steps.

The Martial Masters that served as his bodyguard were of the Upper Realms, having broken through four times. Rui had broke through three times and did it in record time. As far as their Martial accomplishments went, the prince was sorely falling behind. He would certainly going to have to give Rui a reason to follow him.

"You can imagine my fascination when word of your return a week ago spread through the Kandrian Empire like wildfire. It's not everyday, or ever, that a Martial Squire disappears for several years and then returns a Martial Senior eight years younger than the prior record," He smiled, being remarkably approachable.

Yet Rui knew that this was an active effort to make himself amenable towards Rui. He had already caught a glimpse of his true character the second the doors opened.

Not that Rui cared, but it was a sign that the prince was remarkably aware. That was a good sign, a pompous fool who let his ego get in the way of his goals was not someone Rui cared to follow.

"Yes, it appears that many people have heard, and many people aren't content with just that," Rui heaved a sigh. "It's been flattering and tiring."

The prince laughed at Rui's words lightly as he drank some water that the servants promptly poured for him. "As someone who contributed to that, you have my apologies. It was not my intention. I wished to speak to you both as a Martial Artist and as well as a prince contending for the throne. I grew up fascinated with Martial Art, you see. Yet I wasn't content with merely admiring. I also wanted to understand and feel that power for myself. It took some time but I managed to break through to the Apprentice Realm, and recently have been training for the Squire Realm, which has been more difficult than I expected."

He put his glass aside, leaning forward. "Yet the more I learned about Martial Art in my own journey as a Martial Artist as well as a member of the Royal Family, the more I felt as though the state of Martial Art was...wrong."

That was a bold thing to say. Yet Rui waited for him to continue

"Not so much as the state of Martial Art itself, but its place in this world," Prince Raijun explained. "The stronger I got, the more I came in touch with powerful Martial Artists like yourself and the two esteemed Masters here who I've been blessed to have protect me, the more I felt strange. The strangeness of these incredible figures with all this power but no authority. The strangeness of a mortal man commanding demigods. The strangeness of a nation where those who can cleave nations in half with their godly power bow down to man and woman who couldn't snap a club of wood if their life depended on it."

His eyes grew serious. "Historically, the strongest force has always wound up calling the shots. Yet in the Kandrian Empire and many places around the world, it's the Royal Emperor and his appointed Prime Minister who call the shots."

His eyes bored into Rui's as he asked him a single question.

"Tell me, how does it feel to helplessly lower your head to a family with no intrinsic power of their own, simply by virtue of their blood, status, and authority?"

Chapter 1576: Victims of War

Time slowed down to a halt in Rui's perspective as scrutinized the frozen prince. He glanced at the two Martial Masters beside the man. While they looked forward, he could feel their attention and alertness. If he made so much as the wrong move, he would die before he realized it.

He glanced back at the Martial Prince, evaluating him. 'He's rhetorically effective with his Martial supremacy, I'll give him that.'

The answer to his question was obviously in favor of his rhetoric, but it also tied back to their first exchange where he stopped Rui from bowing down to him.

It was a good compelling way to try and gain Rui's approval.

Yet Rui also knew that he was putting on an act, to a certain extent. He had sensed the aristocratic and Royal bearing in the man's demeanor and body language. It was an interesting nuance.

'Together...they most likely serve as the basis for why he thinks he is more fit than the other princes and princesses for the throne; the fact that he's a Martial Artist who, by his Martial supremacist philosophy, ought to be part of the ruling class.' Rui realized, deep in thought. 'But I wonder if he's willing to apply that to himself with stronger Martial Artists.'

"...It is quite unpleasant as a Martial Artist," Rui replied, answering his question. "Part of the reason I seek power is to ensure that I don't need to bow down to those who seek to control me."

"I began feeling this way as well as a mere Martial Apprentice, I cannot imagine how you as a Martial Senior feel being forced to humble yourself," Prince Raijun smiled. "My goal is to ensure that that never happens again as emperor."

"Then allow me to ask you this, Your Highness," Rui remarked. "You are a Martial Apprentice, would be willing to abandon your authority as Emperor and elevate Martial Artists to the head of state and government?"

The Martial Prince faced Rui head-on. "I would."

Rui's eyebrow rose in surprise as his senses evaluated the Martial Prince as well as they could.

They could see only one thing.

Sincere honesty.

It appeared that the Prince was dead serious about creating a nation where Martial Artists became the ruling class, replacing the Royal Family.

'Interesting,' Rui mused to himself. 'I had expected that he would have refused to do that. But no Apprentice-level technique can fool me, so he's definitely being serious.'

"The biggest issue I face is not reconciling my Royal Family side with my Martial Art side. I have chosen the latter, although I have been raised a man who bears the name of Kandria from birth. The biggest issue is making it possible in the first place. The Royal Emperor is not limitless in his authority and power, he cannot just do anything he pleases. The Founding Emperor Ra created the Bill of Royal Axioms, a set of rules that are absolute and binding even to the Royal Emperor that limits my power when I do ascend the throne," Prince Raijun explained. "Changing the political system of the nation from its very roots is something that is going to be extraordinarily difficult even as Emperor. However, once I ascend the throne, it's merely a matter of time before this happens. Naturally, there will be enormous resistance, perhaps even a civil war, but it will happen with my power as the Emperor and the Martial Union."

"And who will suffer the most under a civil war, Your Highness?" Rui's eyes narrowed. "Is it the Martial Artists whose innate power always ensures that they're the least affected by any disaster? Is it the upper class of society that has so much wealth and resources that nothing short of an apocalypse can reach them? Is it the other various power blocs of the upper echelons of the socioeconomic landscape of this nation each with vast wealth, resources, assets, Martial power, and authority that will suffer the most?"

He paused for a moment, before continuing. "...No. While they may expend much pursuing their own agendas and goals, none of them are going to be the most affected by any war. The most vulnerable class of society that will suffer the most are the people of Kandria."

Prince Raijun remained silent but did not seem too surprised. His intelligence network had doubtlessly informed him of Rui's attachment to his family. The same intelligence network had informed him that Rui had refused the deal to become a member of the Martial Union's internal corps in exchange for protection for his family, instead choosing to expend billions of his then newly-earned wealth to do so.

That had told the Martial Prince many things. Firstly, of the three interests; wealth, freedom, and his family, Rui Quarrier cared for money the least. He cared for his freedom and family the most.

Prince Raijun's strategy for winning over Rui to his philosophy had been to capitalize on the former of the two interests. By tapping into Rui's displeasure at helplessly serving forces that were unworthy of commanding him.

He hadn't accounted for the latter of the two getting in the middle of an ideal execution of his lobbying attempt. Regardless, this was far from insurmountable.

"Philosophically, a single war is a lesser evil than a century of rule without Martial Artists as the ruling class," Prince Raijun replied. "This is true because ruling the country is easier for Martial Artists than any other class of society. No set of politicians, class of intellectuals, fields of skill, or labor can rule a country as well as those in the field of Martial Art. I'm sure you know why with your proven political acumen, Senior Quarrier."

Rui couldn't deny it. "Martial Artists impede all ruling parties since they are walking weapons of mass destruction with their own drives, interests and agendas, desires and displeasures. Managing them is extremely difficult and impedes the ability to rule a nation successfully. The only way to get rid of this impediment is to make Martial Artists the ruling force of the nation so that they are no longer an impediment to the rulers, but the rulers themselves."

Chapter 1577: Offers and Interests

"I couldn't have said it better myself," Prince Raijun smiled. "This is the core argument of the Martial Supremacist faction. A nation run by Martial Artists is superior. Hierarchies are maintained. Order is

maintained. The efficiency and effectiveness of any such group are elevated. All nations where Martial Artists are not the ruling class have much greater civil unrest and internal political tensions."

Those words made Rui recall the G'ak'arkan Tribe. A Martial Tribe that was, naturally, led by Martial Artists. It was true that there were absolutely no leadership problems, it was also true that this had emerged very naturally. There were no forces on Vilun Island that could oppose a Martial Senior. No potion users, no siege weapons that could erase mountains. As a result, Martial Seniors naturally took the lead of the tribe with very little effort.

In a way, it could be said that this was the natural order of things.

However, Rui didn't care about that. What he did care about was his family.

"It is true that Martial Artists ruling a nation would lead to less internal division for obvious reasons, but it is also true that such nations would be more martial and warmongering in nature," Rui replied.

"Martial Artists are driven for power for various desires, objectives, and agendas. Being driven for combat is no different from being driven for conflict and war. Battle and combat supply the necessary experience to refine your individuality, which in turn is necessary for progressing as a Martial Artist. Battle, war, and combat are also directly necessary to reaching higher Realms. A world ruled by Martial Artists is a world of endless war."

"Martial Artists will fight regardless of whether they are rulers or peasants, Senior Quarrier," Prince Rajun shook his head. "It is an inevitability. War has existed long before the Age of Martial Art."

"It may be an inevitability, but that doesn't mean it can't be minimized. This is no different from saying people should stop consuming medicine, for death is inevitable," Rui replied.

"Neither medicine nor pacifism is going to save you when these changes inevitably happen in other places in the world and have happened in other places in the world," Prince Ruijan informed him. "More than seventy-six percent of nations have already conceded some authority to Martial Artists, and increasingly do so every decade. Our Kandrian Empire fell under that category when the founding Emperor Ra signed the Kandrian Martial Pact and ratified the Kandrian Martial Covenant that essentially documents the concessions of the Royal Emperor. This just creates more political tensions between the two power blocs, causing more political unrest. Other nations will become stronger Martial Artists start usurping more power and will become more war-mongering as that happens. Falling behind will make us weaker and more passive if the time for a war ever occurs."

"That 'if' will become 'when' if Martial Artists rule the nation," Rui heaved a sigh. "You insist that it's necessary to become a stronger nation, I may not even disagree with the core sentiment, my issue is that it harms people. Unless you can guarantee that such a conflict will be resolved peacefully and harmlessly, I'm afraid I cannot align with the philosophy of your policies and plan."

Prince Raijun stared at Rui knowingly.

Such a thing could obviously not be guaranteed. There were many powerful forces that believed in the supremacy of the Royal Family. This was the effect of centuries of loyalty development.

"It's a shame that we are unable to find common ground on ideology and philosophy," Prince Raijun remarked with a hint of disappointment and regret. "However, I don't think that matters very much. Did you know that nearly fifty percent of my faction are not Martial Supremacists?"

Rui was not too surprised. Even if people did not agree with the core philosophy of a ruler, there was still much that could be gained by their policies and even in exchange for their support and patronage. The Martial Prince must have worked hard to lobby over as many Martial Artists who were not receptive to an aggressive Martial supremacist philosophy. Just representing their interests and promising better policies was enough to earn the support of many of them.

"What do you propose?" Rui asked.

The Martial Prince flashed a confident smile. "Join me, and I'll extend the current protection you have commissioned over your family from the Martial Union indefinitely."

Rui stirred mildly. This kind of offer had not been beyond his prediction. Still, that did not make it any less alluring. It was expensive to hire dozens of Martial Seniors for Senior-level protection for each member of the orphanage without their awareness. Billions of Kandrian gold coins had been sucked away for a decade of protection.

"That is alluring...But each of the seven princes and princesses has the power to guarantee that, do they not?"

"Yes, except for maybe that peasant Raul, but yes," Prince Raijun replied. nonchalantly. "But you don't want your family in the grip of the Underworld and my fellow Apprentice mafia brother, trust me. There's a reason why he has been only half as successful as me with dragging in Martial Artists to his cause. The others will also make more demands of you than I will. I am the Martial Prince, I fight for Martial Artists as a whole. They, on the other hand, won't represent your interests."

He paused for a moment. "My corporate sister Rafia aims for corporations to gain as much leverage over Martial Artists as they do normal people. That ocean-loving sister of mine is neutral over Martial Art, at best. My mafia brother is for total freedom for Martial Artists, but not necessarily authority. My communist sister wants to basically enslave Martial Artists, even if she denies it. My military brother wants them to become indistinguishable soldiers of an army. My peasant-humping brother wants Martial Artists to be as accountable to the nation as plebeians are."

Prince Raijun shrugged, staring deeply at Rui. "Almost none of them give a damn about your interests as a Martial Artist. Think about that."

Chapter 1578: Tutelage

It was hard to deny that the Martial Prince would certainly be the most useful to Rui's personal interests as a Martial Artist.

In fact, if not for his family, Rui would probably enter into a cooperative relationship with Prince Raijun. While he still would not like the idea of a society run by Martial Artists, he would have no personal stake in being disaffected by such a thing coming to light.

But in consideration of the orphanage, he definitely did not want the Kandrian Empire to take a warmongering inclination. During his travels, he had seen what unstable nations did to their citizens, they always bore the brunt of any conflict that resulted in a lot of chaos and loss of life.

He did not want the Quarrier Orphanage to be disaffected by the otherwise stable nation of Kandria gearing up for war.

"Your offer is alluring, but I can't join your faction," Rui replied, shaking his head. "I apologize for the firmness, but it is my final decision, all the protection in the world doesn't mean much if the very fabric

of the lives of the people I care about changes for the worse. There are things that not even Martial power can fix."

Prince Raijun stared at him before closing his eyes and heaving a soft sigh. "I see. This pains me more than you'd think. I was truly excited to have the most prodigious Martial Senior to have ever existed join my faction. However, it appears that I have underestimated the depth of your love for your family."

He couldn't have expected that Rui would be willing to not only go as far as to secure his family's safety at any cost but also ensure that their lives are not disrupted at any cost.

Frankly, Rui too was a little surprised at how firmly he rejected the man's offer. Ever since he returned, he had been much more unwilling to allow anything to disaffect his family.

He identified the source of this determination.

'I suppose I am still guilty for the anguish I caused them in the past eight years ago,' Rui heaved a sigh. 'It's only been a little over a week since I returned.'

Perhaps if the Kandrian War had occurred years later, he would be more receptive to Prince Raijun's offers.

"Shame, but it is what it is," Prince Raijun smiled courteously. "However, I can still offer your family the protection you want for them even if you don't join my faction."

Rui's expression grew quizzical. "But why?"

"I didn't say it would be for free," Prince Raijun's smile gained a hint of mischief. "You're a Martial Artist, aren't you? Then I'll commission you, your payment will be the protection of your family."

Rui stared at him, unimpressed. "This is hardly any different from joining your faction in practice, is it not? Had I joined your faction, you would have me complete missions and operations that would help you gain more favor across the Kandrian government, in exchange for protection for my family, correct?"

"True, but in this case it's not going to be things that will help me gain more political capital," Prince Raijun replied. "What I want is for you to train me as a Martial Artist."

Rui was slightly taken aback. He didn't expect that Prince Raijun would request for something that personal as opposed to the general services that Rui could offer.

"I'm sure you have many qualified Martial Masters allies, they would be better as trainers than I am," Rui replied, not even believing his own words.

"I'd actually disagree," Prince Raijun smiled knowingly. "I have extensively looked into your tutoring record from your Apprentice and Squire days. You have glowing recommendations. All of the Martial Families and other wealthy families that commissioned you have reported genuine and significant improvements after your tutelage. Colonel Geringan informed me that your Martial Art is actively useful for training, which makes you a better choice than Martial Masters in my opinion. Of course, growing stronger as a Martial Apprentice does not bring you closer to the Squire Realm, so you needn't be worried that you're increasing the probability of my victory."

Rui stared at him, processing his offer.

Unfortunately, his arguments were valid. Training him was not going to aid his campaign in any way. He would need to maximize his potential through individuality in his Martial Art if he wanted to be qualified for the Squire evolution breakthrough.

"I was not aware that you were still in pursuit of more Martial power," Rui remarked.

"I always was but not everyone can speedrun the Lower Realms like, Senior Quarrier," The man heaved a sigh. "It hasn't been easy developing my Martial Art amidst all this endless work, but I have resolved to not abandon it to the best of my ability. I will continue to work on it after the Kandrian Throne War ends, one way or another."

Rui considered the matter. It was true that Rui training the Martial Prince was something that couldn't possibly affect the Kandrian Throne War, while Rui could aid with the breakthrough to the Apprentice Realm and the Senior Realm, he could do nothing about the breakthrough to the Squire Realm.

"You may hold a high opinion of my tutelage, but it's a bit excessive to remunerate me with maintaining the security that my family has currently," Rui remarked.

"On the contrary, it's just enough. After all, training and aiding the growth of a royal prince of Kandria is just that valued. Especially if you make significant progress and succeed at training me," The Martial Prince replied. "It would reflect poorly on the family if such teachers and trainers were not extravagantly remunerated. Organizations like the Martial Union are given a pass from being judged in such a manner, but I personally am not."

Rui considered the matter. He still had two years to go on his remaining protection, the Kandrian Throne War was unlikely to end within such a timeframe since Emperor Rael was still alive.

While there were no active threats to his family, he was still worried of being caught into some danger that would put his family at risk, this security would be a good measure until the war finally and truly ended.

Rui nodded after a while. "Alright, I'll train you."

Chapter 1579: Spreading Martial Art

He hadn't expected that the prince would consult Senior Colonel Geringar when searching for a tutor. The latter had undoubtedly told the prince how his daughter Crea broke through shortly after his training.

In that case, it was no wonder that the prince was interested in being trained by him. While Rui was not a Martial Master, the gap between him and the prince was so large that it frankly did not matter.

"I'm glad to hear that!" Prince Raijun grinned. "Hehe, I may not have been able to get you into my faction, but I did manage to bag you as my trainer. That is still a win in my book."

Rui smiled with amusement. Thus far, the prince had been remarkably down-to-earth given the fact that he was a royal prince of the Kandrian Empire. Rui appreciated the gesture, at least.

"You truly as remarkable as they say," Prince Raijun remarked. "From the dawn of your career to now, your accomplishments are almost unheard of. I, personally, have never heard or seen of any Martial Artist who has accomplished so much in so little time. Many Martial Sects are determined to have you, or at least do their best to ensure nobody else gets you. They will invite you to join them, perhaps you should consider accepting their offer."

Rui shook his head lightly. "Most Martial Sects are not suited for my Martial Art. That's why I'm not particularly thrilled at the prospect of joining them. Even if I did join them, I am not too fond of the implicit responsibilities that I would have to such a Martial Sect."

"They aren't too shackling, I assure you," The Martial Prince replied. "At most, you would be expected to make contributions when you develop something relevant to the Martial Sect, but that isn't mandatory either."

"In the first place, I highly doubt that there is any Martial Sect that is worth joining simply due to the fact that my Martial Art is too esoteric." Rui heaved a sigh. "My Martial Art requires a balance of various fields, so I cannot join sects that focus on one of the fundamental aspects of combat. While there are sects that are focused on fields that are decidedly neutral, they are still diverged from my Martial Art," Rui replied.

"Hmmm, in that case, you might want to spread elements of your Martial Art to others, and create your own Martial Sect that closely matches your own Martial Art," Prince Ruijan mentioned.

"I have no reason to go through something that tedious, Your Highness," Rui heaved a sigh of exasperation. "I have not hit any sort of bottleneck where I'd have to resort to such measures in order to make progress anymore."

"Not yet," Prince Raijun corrected. "Eventually, you will. It's almost impossible to keep running without coming to a stop. Everything comes to an end, and that includes the progress that you're able to make by yourself. Why do you think these sects came to be in the first place? It's because the first generation of Martial Masters was unable to grow stronger, thus they relied on creating lobby groups to rally for the Martial Union to dump more research and funding into their particular fields in hopes for that to result in something they can use to grow stronger. It also spreads their field around, creating more Martial Artists using it. Eventually, one of them might discover or create something that they can use."

"I'll think about it if the need ever arises," Rui replied. "For now, I am more than content with relying on myself."

"It would also help the world of Martial Art," Prince Ruijan remarked. "Your Martial Path is as powerful as it is esoteric. It is probably the most powerful Martial Path that I have ever seen. The world of Martial Art would benefit if you spread seeds of it as far and wide, allowing as many Martial Artists to break through with something similar."

"Spreading a Martial Path is extremely difficult since I would essentially need to condition and brainwash children from birth," Rui replied. "I don't care to engage in something this distasteful."

"Many of the Martial Families in the Kandrian Empire engage in some degree of child conditioning and brainwashing. While they don't go too far, they do normally ensure that the Martial Path of their children fall within their general field. There are some exceptions, but it is quite convenient to most of them," Prince Raijun explained.

It was interesting to Rui that Kane didn't fall into that category, it showed just how much he disliked his family.

"Still, it's a very long-term investment and it's not something I'm in a position to do. Simply put, I'm not interested in going down this route unless it's absolutely necessary," Rui replied. "I'm only almost twenty-nine, I have far more productive things to do by putting my youth to good use and making sure that I make the best out of this period to maintain my momentum and squeeze the absolute most out of my potential. My progress will most likely inevitably slow down after I'm past youth, so I don't want to let it go to waste."

Rui had already experienced the transition of exiting his prime in his previous life. Only someone who experienced this understood the value of youth. It was absolutely priceless. He could not afford to waste time doing things that were better saved for when he had no choice but to do them.

"I understand that quite well," Prince Raijun nodded. "Be that as it may, I do hope you eventually do spread the seed of your Martial Path. Many of the popular fields that are used across Martial Art were once a single Martial Artist's Martial Path and Art. It was only because they decided to spread it that we have fields such as breathing techniques, poison techniques, and other non-elementary techniques. We have all benefited from the world of Martial Art, and it is important to repay our debt."

Chapter 1580: Choices

Rui found that point of view to be quite interesting. It was not how he normally thought of Martial Art.

Every Martial Artist knew that Martial Art was a solitary path. No one else could walk one's path for another. The further Martial Artists walked down their paths, the more their paths diverged from each other. They grew increasingly different and distanced.

Furthermore, to progress, conflict between them was necessary. Sparring was not good enough, genuine life-or-death conflict was what was necessary to yield the fruits of experience that would refine one's Martial Art.

Thus, not only was Martial Art a solitary path, but it was even an antagonistic path.

However, Prince Raijun brought up an interesting point in regard to it. It was true that Rui had benefited from the contribution of countless Martial Artists before him, contributing things that would go on to become highly ubiquitous and almost necessary fields of Martial Art.

Of course, Rui knew that he had already contributed to Martial Art with the Hungry Pain technique and his other grade-ten techniques. He wasn't exactly drowned in debt considering the sheer impact that he had already made and was bound to make in the future.

The two of them spoke more before their conversation eventually concluded.

"You're an incredible, Rui Quarrier," Prince Raijun shook his hand. "I look forward to gaining your tutelage and training. I'll have the paperwork sent to you as soon as possible."

Rui nodded, smiling. "I look forward to offering my services."

"Well then, I have already kept you for enough time after having you dragged away, until next time. Farewell, Senior Quarrier."

Rui heaved a sigh after he found himself back in his carriage, having departed from the Royal Manor after bidding the Martial Prince farewell.

The discussion with the Martial Prince did not deviate too much from his expectations. Although the grace that the prince decided to shower him with along with the training commission was out of his expectation.

Yet he was received and treated in a manner that was probably reserved for Martial Artists of the Upper Realms. Only they had enough personal capital to hold their head high even in the presence of the Royal Family, barring the Emperor.

He had come away with a better impression of the prince.

He immediately shed his royal and aristocratic bearing to better facilitate a smoother interaction.

'He most likely took my lower-class background into account and decided to adjust his attitude and expression,' Rui mused. 'It was a good calculated decision. On top of that, he had effective rhetoric and understood what my personal interests were when he made the offer to prolong the protection that the orphanage had.'

On top of that, he was clearly quite powerful and had accrued a lot of wealth in addition to Martial capital. He readily accepted prolonging protection that was going to cost hundreds of millions of gold annually, which was enough wealth to buy a low-class nation.

'He's trying to create an association between himself and me, to send out a message,' Rui mused.

He did not strictly mind. The protection was too powerful an incentive for him to possibly ignore for such a light reason. He had earned at least that much with his extravagant measures.

Of course, Rui doubted that this would stop the other princes or princesses from making their own attempts to gain his support and favor.

All in all, his final evaluation of Prince Raijun was that he was a level-headed and intelligent man who had demonstrated a good understanding of the state of Kandria and the nature of the Kandrian Thone War. Rui did not think he would be an incompetent ruler as long as he had a qualified staff and administration.

The only misgiving was his political ideology, placed far too much power in the hands of Martial Artists as far as he was concerned. He was hoping that one of the other princes or princesses had a stance that would be in favor of the common citizen.

But asides from that, he didn't have any compunction with the Martial Prince.

He was much more driven to ensure that certain princes or princesses didn't get crowned as the ruler, than to support any one particular prince or princess was elected.

The Communist Princess and the Corporate Princess were each highly distateful to him purely based on their stances and the power blocs supporting them.

The Military Prince had some extreme policies regarding war, he probably the type who believed in a mandatory draft for the citizens. Just the idea of people from Quarrier Orphanage being deployed to war was a nightmare to him.

There was no need to even talk about the Underworld Prince. Rui had already seen the depths to which the Carnil Mafia was willing to go to lobby support.

Those four princes and princesses were highly disagreeable to him. The Martial Prince, the Seafare Princess, and the People's Prince were the only three he didn't strongly dislike. He had already disqualified the former due to a policy that disenfranchised and hurt the average citizen a little too much for Rui's taste, but the Martial Prince did extremely well in appealing to Rui personally, to his Martial Artist identity.

In fact, if not for Rui's determination to ensure that the orphanage did not suffer even the slightest disruption to their lives, he would have gone with the Martial Prince.

He heaved a sigh, shaking his head. He just hoped that the candidates he was most hopeful for would pan out and be just perfect for his needs.

Though he was hopeful for that, he maintained grounded expectations.

Politics was an icky muck, there was almost never an ideal choice and many a times people were forced to choose the lesser of two evils. Although Rui had seven candidates in front of him, most of them were so poisoned that it wasn't even funny.

"I'll just have to impact this cold war in a direction favorable to me as best as I can."

Fortunately, he had some ideas in regards to how he could go about that.